

## Deviance & Diaspora:

### That Divergence from Social Convention Necessitates Violence

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**Abstract**—The paper aims to explore and establish the unique and pernicious way in which violence operates against deviant and diasporic individuals in the postcolonial context. Through selective analysis of scenes and character development in two German films from the New German Cinema, the paper links the deterioration of deviant and diasporic characters to the particular ways in which those characters interact with and against their broader social, cultural and physical environments. Drawing on the problematics of normativity, subject-object social identification, critiques of modern capitalistic culture, and the paradoxical nature of life's dual aims (life and death) as discursive tools, the paper suggests that social normativity in postcolonial environments performs a very physical and destructive violence on deviant and diasporic individuals who eschew conformity either by choice or inherent station. (*Abstract*)

**Keywords**—postcolonial; film; diaspora; violence; german; arab; berber (*key words*)

#### I. INTRODUCTION

In thinking about postcolonialism<sup>1</sup>, numerous subtle and explicit flashpoints<sup>2</sup> emerge. At base, these flashpoints are rooted in encounters facilitated by the global migrations of peoples, goods and ideas that intensified during the colonial period. Violence<sup>3</sup>, oftentimes the consequential tool in the intensification of cross-cultural encounters, operates not only within structurally decolonized societies but also within the formerly colonialist West<sup>4</sup> itself, especially in the social relations between postcolonial diasporic and native Western populations.

In particular, the Arab-Berber diaspora in Germany, as depicted in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film *Angst Essen Seele auf*<sup>5</sup> (1974), presents an apt example through which the operation of violence between postcolonial diasporic and Western native can be explored [1]. Additionally, Werner Herzog's *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle*<sup>6</sup> (1974) provides a helpful, parallel example in the situation of postcolonial violence within the modern proliferation of normative<sup>7</sup> and absolute<sup>8</sup> categorizations of thinkable ways of being<sup>9</sup>.

Deviant<sup>10</sup>, which includes diasporic, individuals in constrained societies undergo impossible pressures that demand formation and situation of identity within normative categorizations in order to gain social legitimacy. Though such pressures negatively affect all deviant individuals, the postcolonial diasporic<sup>11</sup> suffers from particularly acute and violent forms of pressure that lead to psychological distress and resultant physical<sup>12</sup> repercussions. In other words, failure to conform to the normative results in the physicalization<sup>13</sup> of violence, particularly postcolonial violence.

As an apparent soothing of relations between the odd couple – Ali and Emmi – and their most immediate social contacts takes place towards the end of *Angst Essen Seele auf*, the demands of commercial society mutate into a disingenuous other-orientedness instantiated under a veneer of social calm and tolerance. He who was objectified under the old, colonial system does not gain full subjecthood – instead, he gains subjectivity but remains an object, not a

<sup>5</sup> *English Title*: Ali: Fear Eats the Soul.

<sup>6</sup> *English Title*: The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser

<sup>7</sup> *Normative*: defined as in alignment with accepted social convention.

<sup>8</sup> *Absolute*: defined as inflexible, fixed and unwilling to diverge from social convention.

<sup>9</sup> What makes the categorizations problematic rests on their being both normative and absolute; the dual combination sets up strong oppositional strictures against those falling outside of social convention. The categorizations are especially limiting by denying a space within which members of society can contest which specifics will comprise a manifestation of the normative.

<sup>10</sup> *Deviance*: defined as diverging from the normative. The diasporic individual invariably falls under this label, though the deviant need not fall under the diasporic label.

<sup>11</sup> *Diasporic*: equals= diasporic individual.

<sup>12</sup> *Physical*: defined as “of or relating to the body as distinguished from the mind or spirit” [8].

<sup>13</sup> *Physicalize*: defined as “to express with the body,” or “to describe or interpret in physical terms” [8]. Both definitions apply here.

<sup>1</sup> *Postcolonialism* comprises a set of discourses and practices that have influenced intellectual and cultural production in modern times, especially in thinking about culture, politics and economics in decolonized societies. ‘Modern’ indicates from post-World War II to contemporary times. Detached from some of its more theoretical meanings, my use of ‘postcolonialism’ refers only to its temporality.

<sup>2</sup> *Flashpoint*: defined as a particular location or instance of violence.

<sup>3</sup> *Violence*: defined as “abusive or unjust exercise of power” [8]. An exercise of power need not be physical.

<sup>4</sup> *West* refers to (a) former colonial powers, whose ‘home’ states contain diasporic populations native to their former colonies. Prominent examples include Britain and France. *West* also refers to (b) countries typically identified as comprising Western Europe as well as the United States, Canada and other culturally Western-identified states. These latter countries, though not necessarily former colonial powers, tend to contain significant diasporic populations from postcolonial states.

full person<sup>14</sup>. The tension between subjectivity and objectivity will be explored later, paying close attention to Kaspar Hauser, the main character of Herzog's film.

As a result of seeming social calm, the apparent, physical violence of colonialism against those of ethno-racial<sup>15</sup> difference, and of normative society against difference itself, becomes hidden and internalized in its strikes against diasporic Ali and deviant Emmi. As recipients of a violence that no longer has a readily identifiable agency – the Stare<sup>16</sup> – Ali and Emmi possess little means to combat it. Firmly rooted in postcolonialism, what presents as mere passive prejudice in the film actually constitutes violence – a violence that leads to psychological distress and its physical repercussions.

In proceeding, I will center the analysis of *Angst Essen Seele auf* on the Stare that Germans and Arab-Berbers, alike, use quite scathingly throughout the film. During this analysis, we shall explore (a) how a significant or total disconnection from one's immediate social environment mirrors an inhuman disconnection to sociality itself, as represented most profoundly by Kaspar Hauser. We shall shed light (b) on the impossible 'bringing-into-society'<sup>17</sup> that takes place in both films and contributes to the *angst* articulated in Fassbinder's title. As our acquaintance with Ali and Emmi develops, we shall begin to uncover (c) how violence is internalized, resulting in shame and self-hatred. And, we shall take stock of a number of important insights (d) through examination of the dislocation, grounded in xenophobia and racism, expressed by Ali and Emmi.

In conclusion, I will contextualize both films within the New German Cinema of which they are a part, and consider their employment of themes evocative of German cinema in the late 1960s and 1970s.

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<sup>14</sup> The defining traits for subject and object are active agent and passive recipient of action, respectively. The cognates of these words (including subjectivity and objectivity) throughout the essay refer back only to these traits. Implicit in these traits are greater and lesser degrees of humanization because having agency (i.e. the means or mode of acting) is fundamental to being human. Agency does not simply refer to physical activity but can imply mental activity, such as 'doing philosophy'. Objectification implies physical and/or mental limiting and oppression of agency.

<sup>15</sup> Ethnic and racial identities are subsumed into the category 'ethno-racial' identity. The term 'race', already convoluted, has come to mean various things in different spaces, and proves problematic on its own. Likewise, the term 'ethnicity' would be unwieldy to deconstruct in the confines of this paper. Subsumed together, the new term affords a broader flexibility.

<sup>16</sup> *Stare*: the physical process of looking at someone, especially when accompanied by unmoving limbs and trunk, and a facial expression that suggests surprise, suspicion, disgust, disapproval and condescension. The Stare constitutes violence as it operates within an implicit power dynamic – those who employ it exercise a power over those who are its object. He who 'gets' to employ the stare in any given situation is one who is normative as regards the characteristic of consequence. Employment of the Stare does qualify as an action, but simply one that is hard to combat.

<sup>17</sup> *Bringing-into-society*: The series of actions, processes, and strictures used to push social outliers into the mainstream. Oftentimes this series has an underlying racial, ethnic and/or cultural current that makes its success virtually impossible in the case of racial and ethnic minorities, as it concerns unchangeable biological traits. In the case of cultural minorities (ex. in the diaspora), the series exacts a high cost – it requires a complete repudiation of one's native cultural affiliation (i.e. deviance) in favor of the normative.

## II. ANALYSIS

In the opening scene of *Angst Essen Seele auf*, Emmi Kurowski, supposedly seeking refuge from a rainstorm, enters an Arab-Berber bar. Having escaped from the natural elements, Emmi finds herself confronted by hostile stares<sup>18</sup> and unmoving bodies. The camera focuses on her at the door, and empty tables occupy the foreground. Only when the camera faces the other direction does the viewer become cognizant of the Arab-Berber patrons clustered at the other end of the establishment. The visual gulf emphasized by the filmmaker is indicative of the gulf between Germans and Arab-Berbers in German society. As if her taking a few more steps would prove too provocative, Emmi sits at the nearest table to the door neglecting, even, to remove her coat. When the barwoman approaches, Emmi feels the need to explain as though her presence indicates something amiss. The implicit assumption that non-normative individuals' presence in certain spaces is unthinkable (thus, illegitimate) reflects the notion of a *parallelgesellschaft* or 'parallel society' whereby certain social groups live distinct lives with limited cross-group interaction. With such antipathy characterizing the initial interactions between strangers of the respective social groups, one is forced to question the possibility of biases inherent in each group being overcome even after greater cross-group familiarity.

Later, one discovers that what makes hostile minoritization so destructive for Ali (as an Arab-Berber) stems from his occupation of an environment (Germany) in which marginalization affects his occupation of most spaces. Whereas Emmi has the privilege (and, indeed, courage) to step outside of her ethno-racial comfort zone, Ali lacks such a choice; instead, he must seek avenues to achieve comfort out of the pervading discomfort he feels in the broader environment. Whilst dancing with Emmi, Ali sighs, "Don't know other places," an utterance that indicates his severely limited knowledge of Munich<sup>19</sup>, let alone Germany. "Germans with Arabs not good," he continues. Emmi's asking, "Why?" and Ali's response of, "Don't know," affirms the tacit acceptance of social division between the two ethno-racial communities. One of the men at the bar watching the odd couple dance leans backwards uncomfortably due, perhaps, to their closeness contrasted with their ethnic and age distance<sup>20</sup>.

After dancing, Ali joins Emmi at her table while she proceeds to pay the barwoman for her drink. Upon receiving the money, the barwoman walks a few paces, pauses, leans on one leg and turns to face the camera (and couple) with a curious, troubled stare. In examining the screen, one notices that, in addition to the barwoman, the other Arab-Berber patrons are situated in a visual line such that a staring face occupies every part of the frame. The viewer senses a total disapproval of Emmi by the Arab-Berber bar patrons, and of her closeness with Ali. After the camera follows Emmi and

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<sup>18</sup> Capitalized or not, the word 'stare' (and its derivatives) all refer back to the given definition.

<sup>19</sup> The setting for *Angst Essen Seele Auf*.

<sup>20</sup> Emmi Kurowski is at least a generation older than Ali, as her grown children approximate his age.

Ali to the door and their exit, it pans back to the bar interior where the barwoman remains in the same position, still staring. She casts her eyes down before turning her head to the side, and we continue to see two blurry faces in the background stare menacingly at the door.

From the behavior of the Arab-Berbers in the bar, one senses that the cold treatment of a native German guest might stem from the latter's rare patronage of such an establishment or, perhaps, from the fact that status quo separation of the two ethno-racial groups has gained widespread acceptability. Written in the suspicious, hostile faces of the Arab-Berbers in the bar seems to be a foreboding knowledge of the troubles that will arise from Emmi and Ali's leaving the bar together.

When, back in the forecourt of Emmi's flat building, Ali asks of her profession, Emmi looks away and says, "I don't like to say," followed by, "people always give a funny look." The shame that Emmi feels for her occupation as a cleaning lady is strongly associated with how others view the work, hence her reference to the stare she often receives on providing details of her employment. This shame finds a parallel in the *Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, where Katy, a housekeeper, remarks of her lowly profession with the same downcast look – "I'm just a housekeeper," she sighs. Katy's countenance and comportment mirror Emmi's exactly. The similarity is heightened even further because the same German actress, Brigitte Mira, plays the parts of both Emmi and Katy in Fassbinder and Herzog's films, respectively [1][2]. This shame, induced by societal perceptions and judgments about low-class employment, translates into a self-hatred that approximates violence. Here, we witness an example of the way external violence has become internalized in the individual.

Both the external violence of society on the individual (facilitated through the stare) coupled with a resultant internalized shame contribute to Emmi's isolation – "I'm alone most of the time. All the time, really," she remarks to Ali in the same scene. We are forced to contrast the previous discussion of isolation with the sociality of gossip. On going upstairs, Emmi's nosy neighbor, Mrs. Karges, hostilely regards Ali – facilitated through an unwelcoming stare – and runs to tell a neighbor:

<b>Karges:</b>	Mrs. Kurowski's got a foreigner up there. A black man.
<b>Neighbor:</b>	Real black?
<b>Karges:</b>	Well, not that black, but pretty dark.
<b>Neighbor:</b>	She's not really German herself. With a name like Kurowski!

Here, as in the *Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, oppression works through sociality whilst the recipients of that oppression find themselves isolated.

Upstairs in Emmi's flat, Ali, unable to sleep due to "much thinking in head" engages Emmi in conversation, remarking that he too spends "much [time] alone...always working, drinking, nothing else." Ali continues, "Maybe

German right, Arab not human." His inability to sleep – at its root, a physical symptom of postcolonial violence – commingles with an intense ethno-racial self-doubt bordering on self-hatred. His self-hatred eventually escalates into an explicitly physical act when, towards the end of the film, Ali proceeds to slap himself in the face repeatedly in the bar bathroom.

Kaspar, of Herzog's film, partakes of a similar kind of isolation that Emmi, and particularly Ali, face. In the case of Kaspar, his lack of being able to express himself stems directly from his lack of sociality in his formative, childhood years. Because he has now entered society, he, ironically, becomes isolated within it. In witnessing his angst, one senses that his former, unrealized, total isolation (removed from the psychological damage incurred by ostracism in society) was better than a realized and felt isolation complete with its negative social trappings. Scholar Kaja Silverman echoes the same sentiment by explaining this shift as "the transition from meaningless satisfaction to meaningful dissatisfaction" [6]. Hauser's shift from an ignorant to known isolation parallels Ali's bringing-into-society, where the latter's most active deterioration occurs after his marriage to Emmi and further socialization in the German ethno-racial cultural space.

As Emmi and Ali part ways the morning after their first night together, they regard each other in a look that is ennobling, even loving. But, as the camera pans upward from the section of city block that now separates the two, lo and behold, we find Mrs. Karges leaning out of her window staring at them both. The stare, present even in times of pleasantness, seems an inescapable violence acted upon Emmi and Ali's unsanctioned relationship. Like that of the townspeople who regard Hauser from their windows at his initial, mysterious appearance on the Nuremberg<sup>21</sup> town square, the stare Karges employs suggests both curiosity and hostility. Or, more sharply, the curious *becomes* hostilely regarded in its inherent strangeness.

During her lunch break, Emmi's coworkers espouse all the negative stereotypes – Arab-Berbers as pigs, unemployed, lazy, violent and sex addicts – that contribute to undue violence against the diasporic. When the coworkers summarily condemn the prospect of a German woman having a close relationship with an Arab-Berber, Emmi pauses post-conversation to reflect. Though she says nothing, we can almost read her thoughts in her facial expression: *I was alone before, but to be marked deviant surpasses the pain of isolation because it includes my actively being shunned and ridiculed by others. Who will accept me?*

As though to answer the question one can glean from her troubled face, the next scene takes us to her daughter's home where she confesses her new love. The confession to her daughter, Emmi attributes to maternal duty. Seemingly, Emmi half-expects blood kin to understand her affections in a more accepting light. On the contrary, her daughter considers Emmi's confession a joke, whilst her son-in-law expresses the conventional, German opinion of foreigners as swine.

<sup>21</sup> The setting for the *Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*.

Later, in her presenting new husband Ali to her children, the camera pans slowly across the faces of sons, daughter, and son-in-law in which we find a mixture of puzzlement, disgust and anger – i.e. the stare in all its abusive variety. Son Bruno rotates his chair, stands and kicks the television set until it shatters. He marches out without a word, with Emmi's daughter following. Referencing the marriage, her eldest son remarks:

You shouldn't have done that mother. Not that. It's a disgrace. You can forget you have children. I want nothing to do with a whore.

He, too, storms out, whilst the daughter refers to the home as a pigsty and calls her husband to leave. After their exits, Emmi collapses on a couch in a fit of body-wracking tears. The psychological distress caused by her children's disownment translates into a physical breakdown. Thus, the actions of her children, facilitated through the stare and hurtful words, had a psychological, then physical, effect.

After Emmi and Ali's marriage, they travel to an Italian restaurant where Adolf Hitler purportedly enjoyed eating in the early 1930s. Her nonchalant attitude towards Hitler (expressed here and at other points) despite her late husband having been Polish, and her most recent an Arab-Berber from North Africa, deserves serious problematization. It is clear that Emmi has not holistically considered (and thus lacks the means to effectively combat) negative ethno-racial identifications in the context of Germany's history and present – her failure in this vein contributes to her own unintentional alienation of Ali as their relationship continues.

In the restaurant, the waiter, eyes cold, stares at them from a measurable distance. The restaurant appears empty apart from them – this might either be indicative of tough economic times, an odd hour, or the waiter's intentionally putting them in an unpopulated area of the establishment. Throughout the film, despite its setting in a city (Munich), we encounter relatively few other people, even in terms of background pedestrians and extras. The scarcity of other individuals causes us to focus on the couple's isolation vis-à-vis the characters we do see, and stresses that one's social linkages truly can be enumerated only in regards to those an individual actually interacts with, not simply the number surrounding.

Kaspar Hauser bemoans his distance from others around him – “I am so far way from everything.” His distance (i.e. lack of sociality) with those in his immediate social environment approximates a lack of sociality itself. Since he cannot engage those around him in ennobling ways, he regards his entrance into society as futile and not worthwhile. Reminiscent of Ali's escape to the barwoman's bedroom at times of emotional stress, Hauser also takes refuge in the solace and comfort of a bed. Mr Daumer, Hauser's adolescent instructor and pseudo-father charges:

Kaspar, it just can't be true when you say that your bed is the only place in the world you're really happy in.

When Kaspar responds, “Well, it seems to me that my coming into this world was a terrible fall,” one begins to understand that the socialization and assimilation asserted to be a benefit to him actually constitutes a regression, that his loneliness perhaps has roots more in the faults of the world's conventions, than in his unconventional, natural self. Fassbinder echoes a similar sentiment in an interview conducted in 1978:

The important thing for me are the refuges, the places people go to hide. They tell me more...about the elements of fear and danger lurking in external life, than the real external world [3].

The lack of sensuality, of feeling and of humanity in the external world pushes both Ali and Kaspar to retreat into themselves, into places where either their bodies are recognized (in the case of Ali, by the barwoman) or hidden (in the case of Kaspar) from the erroneous recognitions that the body undergoes in the external, social world.

### III. ON SUBJECTIVITY & OBJECTIVITY

At this point, let us consider, briefly, the tension between subjectivity and objectivity mentioned in the introductory paragraphs. The initial claim was that he who was objectified under the old, colonial system does not gain full subjecthood in the postcolonial period – instead, he gains subjectivity but remains an object, not a full person. As Kaspar learns to express himself in the German language, we come to hear that his words increasingly are negative, and reveal a profound sense of dislocation, nostalgia for his cave, and a disdain for the way others treat him as an animal to be humanized. In his entrance into society, Kaspar gains subjectivity whilst remaining an object – others do not view him as a full human being, and yet recognize in him all the characteristics that make for his potential molding into a human. In other words, Kaspar Hauser remains objectified (in his being treated as less than human, as animate object) though he has been granted a human potential.

Regarded as a foundling by the nobleman from Britain and as a profitable exhibit by the circus master, Kaspar finds himself in an inherently inferior position – in everyone else's seeking his humanization, they inevitably deny humanization to his current state. Hauser becomes neither human (he is not humanized) nor animal (he has the potential for humanization). The individuals that comprise his social environment grant his occupation of a space in between the human and animal, as a subject treated objectively; but, these same individuals do so only with Kaspar's current state being understood within a push towards his instantiating certain rigid, socially-constructed qualifications that they themselves require for the marker ‘human’ to be claimed.

Having all of a sudden gained access to the active realm, but without having been granted anything to do within the prevailing framework of its power relations, Kaspar does not gain access to the benefits that activity offers. Such a move parallels a shift from colonialism to postcolonialism, from

not being able to do (in having one's agency limited) to being granted the ability to do (in having one's agency freed). But, in the latter, the framework of the postcolonial society restricts exercise of the newly acquired agency. Though one has gained subjectivity, he still remains an object in his inability to exercise it.

In clarifying the tension between subjectivity and objectivity in the postcolonial deviant, let us take this epic simile as a more concretized example: As a tiger born legless who, stifled by immobility, sustained by family, abused by peers, desperate for full tigrity<sup>22</sup>, solicits a remedy from a sorceress, a sorceress who by art grows him four legs; as that very same tiger, blissful in his new agency, wobbly on his new legs, inadvertently locks himself into a poacher's tiny, long-abandoned, tiger-sized cage deep in the forest, in which its misfortunate occupant's agency has no outlet; such a most miserable, misfortunate tiger parallels the man who, having once lacked and subsequently gained subjectivity, finds himself still object in his inability to exercise that agency. The cage (i.e. environment) becomes the limiting and oppressive force.

#### IV. ANALYSIS (CONTINUED)

In one of the most profound scenes of *Angst Essen Seele auf*, a coworker comes to Emmi's home in order to ask her help completing tasks while the coworker is on leave. Upon being introduced to Ali, the coworker cries, "My God," accompanied by a stare of stomach-churning revulsion. As though having seen the devil itself, she appears both afraid and disgusted to the marrow. After her leaving, Ali aptly comments that the woman had death in her eyes. Given his mortal comments, Ali would doubtless agree with Hauser's assessment – "the people are like wolves to me" – that questions who truly approaches the animal in the deviant-normative encounter. Upon running out of a church service, Hauser explains to Mr. Daumer:

The singing of the congregation sounds to me like awful howling...And when the singing stops the pastor starts to howl.

Hauser has turned the normative paradigm, which would label him as less than human, on its head. He considers those seemingly 'civilized' practices of his social environment to be animalistic while regarding those practices that he prefers as closer, if not to Man<sup>23</sup>, then to himself as man, not animal<sup>24</sup>. Emmi, seemingly oblivious to the predatory stare of her co-worker, retorts that Ali is just imagining. We see that Ali bears the burden of prejudicial ethno-racial comments in a way that Emmi cannot truly understand.

<sup>22</sup> *Tigrity*: defined as the qualities of being a tiger.

<sup>23</sup> *Man* as signifying the human race, and its inherent characteristics such as reason, perfectability, moral sensibility, and others.

<sup>24</sup> Hauser, having lived an antisocial existence for much of his life, does not necessarily engage or perceive the world in a way akin to a normal, socialized human. But, he still regards his own abnormal engagement and perception of the world to be legitimately human even if it does approximate closer to what most normal humans might regard as more animal than human.

Whilst Emmi battles solely the taboo<sup>25</sup> of their relationship, Ali fights on two fronts – the taboo of the relationship, *and* the taboo regarding his mere presence and place in German society. "Germans no good," Ali concludes in the wake of Emmi's coworker's rudeness. "Germans no good."

After Ali brings his Arab-Berber buddies to the flat for some music, gambling and good company, the camera cuts to Mrs. Karges and a neighbor speaking with police on the stairwell about the 'ruckus' occurring upstairs. But, when the women go beyond complaining of disturbance to assert savagery as part of Arab-Berbers' nature, the policemen check the neighbors' comments by positing that not all Arab-Berbers exhibit such negative traits. After politely entreating Emmi to lower the music volume, the policemen exit. Despite the reasonable police actions, their very presence has a profound psychological effect on Emmi. That the people intended to protect her constitute part of the oppressive force (or tools used in its agency) increases both Emmi and Ali's sense of vulnerability.

Echoes of the juridical way deviant individuals, especially those viewed as incomprehensible by normative individuals, are treated occurs when officers in Nuremberg suggest that Hauser be taken into custody despite his having neither done anything to offend anyone nor broken any laws. Those unable to speak or express themselves in a way that puts normative society at ease are feared and criminalized, oft for no justifiable reason. As regards Hauser, an officer even recommends, "it is best we keep him in this tower for criminals and vagabonds." Kaspar's physical appearance and comportment – indeed one officer later condescendingly remarks that his 'rustic' features rule out the possibility of his being a lost member of the Baden dynasty – both mark him out for ostracism and feelings of dislocation and self-loathing.

One of the most visually beautiful scenes in *Angst Essen Seele auf* occurs at a marked emotional climax, when Ali and Emmi are seated at a table, with eyes locked, and hands intertwined in the midst of an otherwise deserted outdoor cafe. The camera circles their position as though to replicate their own feelings of being surrounded. Emmi has reached boiling point, and can no longer stoically internalize her feelings. Ali, who most likely shares in these feelings, somehow keeps his composure through much of the scene, probably holding to his earlier mantra: "Better not think too much. Think much cry much." Emmi screams at a cluster of individuals, located at the fringes next to a building, who simply stand and stare – she wants to escape to a place where they will not be known and no one will stare, she says. The intense catharsis and sadness that distinguish the scene contrasts with the bright yellow of the tables and chairs, and the surrounding verdant green of trees and bushes. Contrasted with natural beauty is conventional ugliness.

<sup>25</sup> The two taboos of their relationship: (1) Sizeable age difference, with the woman being older than the man. (2) Ethno-racial difference, in particular regarding a German woman with a foreign man.

After a relaxing retreat away from Munich<sup>26</sup>, Emmi and Ali return to a strange state of affairs. Having endured ostracism and outright hatred regarding their relationship, a perceptible change occurs in how a number of key individuals regard them. As mentioned in the introductory paragraphs, the demands of commercial society (i.e. the requirement of utilizing and depending on others for sustenance) mutate into a disingenuous other-orientedness instantiated under a veneer of social calm and tolerance.

Three notable characters – the local storekeeper, neighbor Mrs. Ellis, and son Bruno – change their outward dispositions towards Emmi and Ali, but all do so because of their needing the couple's help. On prodding from his wife, the storekeeper, who had earlier terminated service to Ali and Emmi, reflects that Emmi had been a good customer and her patronage an asset to his bottom line. As though to leave no questions concerning his superficial shift, he quips, "In business, you have to hide your aversions." His tolerance of Emmi and Ali on the basis of utility rather than actual respect reflects a tendency endemic to modern, industrial society, a tendency that turns social interaction into business transaction. Aversions and prejudices no longer receive honest problematization in the public space for utility's sake. Mrs. Ellis, now smiling and greeting the couple with pleasantries, alters her behavior because she needs additional storage space in the basement of the flat building. Bruno, in need of a babysitter for his child, makes amends with his mother. Scholar Judith Mayne aptly notes, "the pattern of exclusion and pseudo-reacceptance...reflects the prevalence of crass economic concerns" [5]. Here, Fassbinder succeeds in lending nuance even to those relationships that seem ennobling for the deviant and diasporic, as they might seem so only for utility's sake.

Emmi falls into the trap of thinking that the superficial improvement of her social relationships represents a true shift in the social climate, a misconception which works to the detriment of Ali and contributes to the violence acted upon him as a diasporic. In speaking with Bruno, Emmi remarks that "time heals all wounds"; later, we learn of Ali's incurable physical ailment. Emmi's belief that she (and her relationship) has become normalized decreases her consideration for the unique way Ali suffers as a diasporic and ethno-racial minority. When Ali asks for couscous, she sharply remarks, "People in Germany don't eat couscous," despite the fact that Ali and other couscous-eating folk *are* very much *in* Germany. In response, Ali stands with his head leaning on arm leaning on wall in the hall; he is getting physically dogged from all the psychological blows. Emmi swings the bludgeon once more: "I don't like couscous," she says matter-of-factly. Ali lifts his head up and stares at her before walking out of the apartment. What initially appeared as a supra-prejudicial regard for each other has shed its trappings, and exposed the

insidious stare that pervades each of their respective ethno-racial communities. As both Emmi and Ali share in the discourses surrounding how each one's ethno-racial community regards and is regarded, we are forced to consider both the possibilities and limitations of the mixed relationship in such a caustic social environment. Emmi, too, participates in violence against Ali through the stare.

Having nowhere else to go, Ali heads to the Arab-Berber bar only to find it closed. Examining his physical bewilderment upon reading the closed notice, we perceive a palpable sense of his confinement. This same restrictedness occurs when Kaspar, trying to escape a rooster maliciously released into his prison cell, tries to escape through an impossibly narrow window. As the hecklers who released the rooster gape and laugh at his antics, one can reflect that their evilness is indicative of the way the normative actively ridicules deviance instead of allowing it to subsist. Striking throughout the film is virtually everyone's refusal simply to let Kaspar be his natural self – most of his interactions are tinged with the undercurrent that he must change for goodness sake. When this implicit moralizing seems absent, those interacting with him are actually enjoying the spectacle and novelty of Kaspar, not truly engaging him.

Violence also operates through limiting and killing possible options. In being forced into (i.e. only having access to) certain spaces, Ali is a victim of violence. Without the option of entering the bar (it is closed), he heads upstairs to the barwoman's flat where he commits adultery. Though he initially asks her for couscous, he counterintuitively situates himself at her bed in a position waiting to be undressed. Couscous is representative of something broader than the food, of something Arab-Berber, of something familiar. When he returns home drunk and barely able to stand or talk, the physical repercussions of violence become more explicit, here instantiated by his abuse of alcohol.

Emmi escalates the abuse of Ali when her coworkers visit her home. One says, "he is a nice one, clean, thought they didn't wash," and Emmi responds, "he even takes a shower every day." Emmi then invites the women to feel his muscles as though he is an animal at a petting zoo. When he marches out of the room in response, she explains, "He has his moods. It is his foreign mentality," as if to suggest that a normal, Germanized Arab-Berber ought to have no problem being treated as less than human, as object. Before Ali leaves, the couple pauses to stare at each other in the hallway – the physical and visual gulf between them harkens back to the opening scene in the Arab-Berber bar. Despite their having been married for a significant time (perhaps one year or more), vestiges of the distance that characterized their first meeting still remain intact. Upon Ali's exit, we sense Emmi's shame as she turns back to her coworkers. She recognizes her elevation of desire for social acceptance over that of Ali's psychological well being. Moreover, she realizes that her treatment of Ali no longer significantly differs from those other Germans who espouse deeply prejudicial views throughout the film.

Ali, again, goes to the barwoman's flat for recuperation. But, since she is heading out, Ali spends the

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<sup>26</sup> Note: We do not travel with the couple during their escape; we have the sense that they even need a respite from our watching them. By choice of camera perspective, Fassbinder confuses the viewer's sense of identification. We identify with the odd couple at times, with those that stare at them at other times.

whole day alone lying on her couch recuperating, we can infer, from all of his ‘wounds’. The next day, one of Ali’s coworkers taunts Emmi as she queries Ali of his whereabouts the previous night: “Who’s that? Grandmother from Morocco?” the co-worker says. All individuals laugh at her, including Ali. He, too, commits a kind of violence towards Emmi as all those laughing (relatively young men) ridicule her advanced age. As Emmi and Ali lock eyes, we sense Ali sees his error as he no longer appears humored. Thus, both Ali and Emmi have displayed some of the most negative traits of their respective ethno-racial groups towards the other despite their suffering greatly from being the very victims of derision.

Later that evening in the bar, Ali enters the restroom where, whilst looking in the mirror, slaps himself repeatedly and with increasing force and rapidity. He has begun to hate himself to the point of perpetrating violence on his own person. Further, what Ali has come to regard as his self (i.e. his identity) is very much contingent on the types of personal self-conceptions he has been able to create in the hostile, German social environment. His personal narrative has aligned with the societal narrative that situates him as something less than human. In other words, he has begun to believe, or at the very least intensely be affected by, the story other people tell about him.

In the waning scenes of the film, we see Ali and Emmi, having reconfirmed their mutual affection, dancing together in the Arab-Berber bar. “Together we are strong,” Emmi says to Ali. Immediately after this utterance, Ali collapses to the floor with loud moans. Emmi seems to have underestimated the way in which their relationship is harmful to each other, especially diasporic Ali, and the extent to which psychological distress has deteriorated Ali’s body.

In the last scene, the doctor explains that Ali’s condition – a perforated stomach ulcer – afflicts many foreign workers due to the stress, and that it will re-occur indefinitely in cycles.

**Doctor:** He’ll recover, but be back in six months.

**Emmi:** No he won’t. I’ll do everything in my power...*(breaking down)*.

**Doctor:** *(recognizing her angst)* Well, best of luck anyway.

The film ends with Emmi sitting on the side of the hospital bed holding Ali’s hand, though he appears asleep or unconscious. She turns her head to look out of the window; we are, again, left questioning her thoughts. Perhaps she wonders why so much affliction has come to Ali, and to what extent she herself has contributed to it. In her silence, we sense exasperation reminiscent of the dream that Kaspar Hauser elucidates whilst recovering from having been attacked by a mysterious man. He describes his dream as follows:

I saw the ocean, and I saw a mountain – and there were many, many people climbing up the

mountain. It was like a procession. There was a lot of fog. I couldn’t see it very clearly, but – at the very top was Death.

Man expends much energy in life (i.e. climbing the mountain) only to die at the end; in other words, man lives to die. The paradoxical nature of life – its dual aims of both living and, inevitably, aiming towards death – also finds its expression in the particular interactions of man as filtered through particular individual perspectives. In loving a person, for example, one inevitably feels that love through a personal perspective, and combines that affection with a hate of the imperfections either in the recipient or in the source (i.e. the self) of the love. Imperfections in the recipient lead to questions of that individual’s deservedness of love or the quality of the love itself. Imperfections in the source lead to questions of the quality of the love itself, and the possibility that the source might not elicit reciprocal feelings of love in the recipient. Human imperfections, in how they are marked linguistically and culturally, stem from biases inherent in one’s social environment, ethno-racial identity, religion or other limiting conception constructed by man – in a word, from social convention<sup>27</sup>. And yet, the same social convention that produces imperfections and limits also has facilitated the creation of institutions, conditions and human cooperation that has provided individuals with the possibility of constructing more perfect and limitless lives. Further, the ability to construct a social life would seem if not inherent then deeply important for human fulfillment of psychological well being.

Ali and Emmi’s lack of conformity to their social environment prevents the odd couple from a truly nonviolent and psychologically stable relationship. As a result, they can neither fully trust the intentions of others, each other nor themselves. While suffering from the imperfections and limits imposed by social convention, Ali and Emmi reap few of sociality’s benefits. The mistrust and violence that pervades their relationship, and the bifurcation that comes from identification both with hate-filled convention and love-filled deviance, has its roots not simply in postcolonial violence but in the paradoxical nature of life itself. The contestation between their dual identifications culminates in the psychological and physical deterioration of Emmi and Ali. With his unique identity as diasporic and ethno-racial minority, Ali experiences a more acute, more damaging psychological distress which results in a more serious (and in this case chronic) physical impression.

## V. CONCLUSION

Judith Mayne contends, “the individual and total effect of these looks [the Stare] conveys a reduction of human beings to the status of spectacle, objects existing solely for the viewer” [5]. In concluding our discussion of Fassbinder

<sup>27</sup> Many of those traits that we might consider imperfections – take loudness, uncouthness, promiscuity, and laziness – stem from a certain idea of the good rooted in social convention. Absent sociality, one’s being lazy, loud, uncouth or promiscuous would be of no consequence to anyone but the individual himself and, perhaps, God(s).

and Herzog's films, it seems apt to consider the audience in relation to film, and to contextualize the films within a broader social context. Indeed, scholar Paul Thomas asserts, "Fassbinder, instead of *having* a message, is concerned to *pitch* a message, to generate responses among his audience" [7]. Interesting to consider is whether film spectators partake in the crime of reducing human beings to the status of spectacle through the consumption of cinematic productions.

Scholar Sabine Hake, in her discussion of the New German Cinema, charges that an exclusive focus on film as text "prevent[s] more historical studies, consideration of economic and political factors, [and] references to other cultural traditions" [4]. The diverse ways in which film strikes the senses and converses with human reality charges spectators to analyze and problematize their own personal relationship to film as medium, as text and as cultural production. Films part of the New German Cinema, broadly, encourage spectators to perform these nuanced dialectics by situation in a decidedly historical, post-World War II context and in the contesting of important questions of identity and social cohesion crucial in real-world Germany at the time. Fassbinder notes:

I think Germany's well on its way to being a nation where people become more and more alike...people who react a little differently to reality have to ask themselves whether they can still afford to have opinions. Whether it's worth it [3].

Both *Angst Essen Seele auf* and *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* treat seriously issues of inclusion and exclusion, and the struggle between self and other. The main characters of both films ask the question Fassbinder posits concerning the worth and very possibility of defying the normative in a modern, postcolonial, capitalistic society.

Though scholar Paul Thomas argues that Fassbinder's "work has remarkably little overlap with that of his contemporary countrymen (notably Werner Herzog...)," on the contrary, one quite clearly sees the stark similarities between Fassbinder and Herzog's work through the similar struggles endured by Kaspar, Emmi and Ali throughout my analysis in this paper of their individual 1974 film productions [7]. The uniquely German aspects of the films reflect uncertainty about German identity and nationalism in the post-Nazi era, and skepticism about the merits of normalizing social influences most marked in the processes of reindustrializing Germany after World War II. In particular, both Thomas and Mayne argue that Fassbinder reflects deeply about the "social reality of West Germany and of modern capitalism," and the leveling of difference that accompanies a more economic perspective on life [5].

In an interview conducted in 1978, Fassbinder notes of his cinematic production over the previous ten years:

The themes remained the same, and always will remain the same: the manipulability, the exploitability of feelings within the system that we

live in, and that at least one generation or more after us will certainly have to live in [3].

Skepticism concerning the prospects of modernity especially vis-à-vis capitalism and globalization, and its limited potential for ennobling human creativity runs rife throughout Fassbinder's comments in the interview. The main characters of our analysis – Ali and Emmi – suffer, not necessarily from modernity itself, but from its push to force individuals within the limits of a prescribed and absolute social convention. The combination of the couple's inability and refusal to conform to the prevailing conventions of their social environment exposes them to an insidious Stare through which postcolonial violence operates. Ali's suffering of physical repercussions at the end of the film, contextualized within the New German Cinema themes of identity formation, dislocation and uncertainty about the future, forces the viewer to consider to what extent she aligns or diverges from the conventional in her own social context. The violence inherent in divergence from absolutist social convention, the consequences seen in the effects on the deviant and diasporic, and our own possible complicity all prompt deep reflection on how our place (or lack thereof) contributes to our experiencing society, experiencing film, and shaping the discourses that dictate the disseminations of power and violence in our respective social environments.

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