

Université de Montréal

***The Cut* by Fatih Akin: A Western?**

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The Cut by Fatih Akin: A Western?

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RÉSUMÉ

C'est après deux opus sur l'immigration turque en Allemagne que le réalisateur turc-allemand Fatih Akin décide d'explorer la période la plus sombre de son pays d'origine. Avec le film *The Cut* (2014), il clôt la trilogie *Liebe, Tod und Teufel*. Ce mémoire réfléchit sur l'utilisation du genre Western dans la représentation du génocide arménien. Nous ferons tout d'abord un court historique du genre Western et de la représentation génocidaire au cinéma, pour ensuite analyser le film d'après la notion de genre et voir dans quelle mesure l'utilisation d'un genre connu universellement permet à Fatih Akin de ne pas justifier ses choix esthétiques. Au cours de cette analyse, nous nous baserons sur quatre éléments clés afin d'établir un lien avec le genre Western: la figure du héros, les paysages, le mythe de la frontière ainsi que le titre du film lui-même. Le but de ce travail ne sera pas d'être comparatif, mais bien de déterminer dans quelle mesure le film s'inscrit dans le mouvement Postwestern. Enfin, la notion d'identité nous permettra de comprendre de quelle manière le film *The Cut* s'insère au sein de la trilogie d'Akin.

MOTS-CLÉS :

Fatih Akin, Turquie, Allemagne, Western, Génocide arménien, Cinéma turc-allemand, Représentation, Heimatfilm, Postwestern, Genre

ABSTRACT

It is after his second opus on Turkish immigration in Germany that Turkish-German director Fatih Akin decided to explore the darkest period of his country of origin. With the film *The Cut*, he ends the trilogy *Liebe, Tod und Teufel*. This master's thesis reflects on the use of the Western genre in the representation of the Armenian Genocide. We will start with a short history of the Western genre and the representation of genocide in cinema. Then we will analyse the film as per the notion of genre and see under which measure the use of a universally known genre enables Fatih Akin to justify his aesthetic choices. During this analysis, we will use four key elements as the groundwork to establish a link with the Western genre. They are the figure of the hero, the landscapes, the myth of the frontier and the title of the film itself. The intention of this research is not to be comparative, but to situate the film within the movement that is the Post-western. Finally, the notion of identity will allow us to understand how the film *The Cut* exists within Akin's trilogy.

KEYWORDS :

Fatih Akin, Turkey, Germany, Western, Armenian Genocide, Turkish-German cinema, Representation, Heimatfilm, Post-western, Genre

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Nach seinem zweiten Opus zur türkischen Immigration entschied sich der türkisch-deutsche Regisseur Fatih Akin, die dunkelste Periode seines Heimatlandes zu verfilmen. Mit dem Film *The Cut* beendet er seine Trilogie *Liebe, Tod und Teufel*. Diese Magisterarbeit analysiert die Verwendung des Westerngenres in der Darstellung des armenischen Völkermordes in *The Cut*. Begonnen wird mit einem kurzen Überblick über die Geschichte des Westerngenres, bevor auf die Darstellung des Völkermords im Film eingegangen wird. Im Anschluss wird untersucht, inwiefern die Verwendung des Genres Western Fatih Akin seine filmästhetischen Entscheidungen ermöglicht. Diese Untersuchung basiert auf der Grundlage von vier Schlüsselmotiven: der Heldenfigur, der Landschaft, des Mythos des Grenzlandes sowie des Filmtitels selbst. Die Intention dieser Analyse ist jedoch nicht vergleichender Natur. Es wird vielmehr versucht, den Film in seine Einzelteile zu zerlegen, um ihn in die Post-Western-Bewegung einbetten zu können, ohne dabei das Identitätsstreben der ersten beiden Filme der Trilogie außer Acht zu lassen. In diesem Kontext lässt sich eine Verbindung mit dem Heimatfilm herstellen und es wird ein besseres Verständnis für die Rolle von *The Cut* innerhalb der Trilogie ermöglicht.

SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER:

Fatih Akin, Türkei, Deutschland, Western, Armenischen Völkermord, Deutsch-Türkisches Kino, Darstellung, Heimatfilm, Post-Western, Genre

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Introduction

Fatih Akin

“Imagine I’m a painter, and we speak more about the background of the paintings than the foreground of the paintings, or we speak about the framing but not about the painting.”

“For sure this is frustrating, and for sure that’s why I will leave it behind sooner or later.”

- Fatih Akin (New York Times)

Born in 1972, Fatih Akin is the son of Turkish parents who immigrated to Germany in the 60s. His father was a *Gastarbeiter*¹ who came to Germany in 1965 and his mother joined him a few years later. Growing up in Hamburg, he attended the University of Fine Arts studying visual communications. His introduction to the film industry was as an actor before the production company *Wüste Film* who, by hiring him in 1995, gave him his first chance to be behind the camera. His first short films, *Sensin – Du bist es!* and *Getürkt* won many international prizes and revealed his talent at an early stage. This, in turn, allowed him to film his first feature length film *Kurz und Schmerzlos* in 1998. Before his *Liebe, Tod und Teufel* trilogy, Akin filmed *Im Juli* (2000) and *Solino* (2002), which are perhaps light-hearted compared to the later. His two most famous films, *Gegen die Wand* (2004) and *Auf der anderen Seite* (2007), are the two first opuses of his trilogy.

In 2008, the New York Times interviewed Fatih Akin about his then upcoming movie *Auf der anderen Seite*. His answers focused on his discontent with the constant reminder of his Turkish roots and his identity being his go-to theme for his oeuvre. *Auf der anderen Seite* was the follow up to *Gegen die Wand* (2004), the first movie of the trilogy titled *Liebe, Tod und Teufel*. The film was about two young adults with Turkish backgrounds struggling to find their place in their new homeland, Germany. It was unsettling to find out that Akin had such a problem with the way his cinema was

¹ *Gastarbeiter* is a German word that can be translated in English to “guest at work”. The beginning of Turkish immigration dates back to 1961 in the Federal Republic of Germany. Guest workers were called from many countries like Italy and Spain to help Germany who was lacking workforce. While most of the guest workers went back to their homelands when their contracts were expired, many Turkish workers decided to stay in Germany and had their families join them, which is what happened in the case in Akin, his mother coming to Germany to reunite with her husband.

perceived since these two films are not the only ones he's made about immigrants in Germany, *Solino* being about Italian immigrants.

Akin surprised us by keeping his word, and ended his trilogy about love, death and evil with an epic on nothing less than the Armenian Genocide. It is surprising because before filming *The Cut*, Akin released a comedy about a Greek immigrant in Germany, titled *Soul Kitchen* (2009). The film was shot in Hamburg and is about the owner of a Greek tavern where Akin was a regular. Akin needed a rest period after filming *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*. Shooting *Soul Kitchen* served as his well-deserved hiatus². Being another film about immigrants in Germany, *The Cut* came as a more than welcomed revelation.

Although he grew up in Germany, Akin did not feel concerned by the Holocaust. It was in his twenties that he became aware of Germany's troubled past and began to feel guilt. He then learned about the Armenian genocide, and his feeling of guilt spread to this part of history. He later came to the conclusion that he felt guilt not because he was Turkish or German, but because he is human, and humans are responsible for these atrocities. This will be important when time comes to understand the choice of the Armenian Genocide to represent evil or the devil. Akin insists that his film tells the story of a father, the story of a man like himself. He also adds that he felt a certain obligation to his origins when he decided to make this film.

Since the beginning of my graduate studies, I have been interested in the work of Turkish-German director Fatih Akin. Although my first intention was to write about the second film of the trilogy, *Auf der anderen Seite*, my interest for the latter developed

² Shortly before finishing filming *Auf der anderen Seite*, Andreas Thiel passed away. He was a close friend of Akin, and also the producer of the two first films of the trilogy. This is why he needed a lighter project before taking on the devil.

itself naturally since its release coincided with the end of my course work and a trip to Germany. I had the chance to see the film on the day of its release in a small independent theatre, in a Turkish district in the city of Mannheim. The main theme of the narrative of the film, the Armenian genocide, immediately caught my attention since I had just taken part in a seminar on the representation of the holocaust in literature. It is only then that I found out that this particular genocide was so underrepresented in the arts, especially visual arts.

The decision of not working on the film *Auf der anderen Seite* was justified by the irrelevance of the project, since the film had already been analysed from many point of views, and I did not think that I would be able to bring something new to the table. On the other hand, all of the work that I have put into researching the second film will help to situate *The Cut* in the trilogy itself that has, up to now, been about identity and its relation to the German *Heimatfilm*, which will be touched upon in chapter 4. Fatih Akin is part of new young directors that are participating in the effervescence of German cinema. Before we try to situate this film in a larger setting, it is essential to look at the film as an entity of its own.

The idea to develop a research project on Akin really came to life after watching an interview in 2015 with an Armenian journalist³ in which Akin mentions that making a western was his way of finding a framework that would allow him to break the silence on one the most painful events of his country of origin, Turkey. Debates on how to represent genocide or if it is even morally acceptable to do so have been on going for decades. By using a genre that is universally popular with specific codes and mechanisms, Akin therefore does not need to justify his aesthetic choices, choices that can easily be

³ Interview with Maria Titizian from CivilNet, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwCUGyDmWJ4>

criticized when representing genocide. Such a statement presupposes knowledge of the western genre's historical background. This will be the key element in analysing the movie *The Cut* as a western film, and will make it possible to link this German-Turkish epic to, for example, a classic from John Ford like *The Searchers*. This Western will serve again as an example for the concepts that we will be using in our analysis, although not in a comparative manner but as a way to support our argumentation. It is a classic for a reason as it holds all of the key elements to making a Western.

John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, is it imaginable to have never heard of them? As far back as I can remember Western movies have been something familiar, something easily recognizable. I was just a girl when my mother used to bring me to my grandfather's house to spend the weekend. I can still recall him sitting in his chair, watching old Westerns on television for hours. They were his favourite: it did not matter which movie was airing, as long as it had cowboys, Indians, guns and saloons. Westerns, or *vues westerns* as my grandfather used to call them, are not only a part of the foundation myth of the United States of America, but also of cinema and television.

By exploring the Western genre, we will be able to determine how it is codified to the extent of being recognisable to all. Again, this will be imperative in our research because it is not meant to be comparative but is about finding key elements that link the film *The Cut* to the Western genre. We want to determine how Fatih Akin worked with the genre in his own way. We will then summarize the traditional topics addressed to the Western genre and discuss the politics surrounding them, trying to determine how the birth of political order through violence can be related to our film. Afterwards, we will study the place taken by the Armenian genocide in the film's narrative. It is essential to

start with a brief introduction to the representation of genocide and especially the Holocaust, since it is the most represented in visual art. Our goal here is to compare the representation of the Holocaust, which is at a state of *postmemory*, and the Armenian genocide, which is at a stage of *prememory*. This will help us understand why the Armenian Genocide is under-represented in film compared to the Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide.

From there, we will analyse the film *The Cut* by Fatih Akin. Our focus will be on what exactly allows us to say that this film adheres to the Western genre and on four aspects in particular: the figure of the hero, the landscapes, the myth of the frontier and the title of the film. The hero is typically a man of integrity and principle. Brave, he often faces danger alone: “Asked to define "hero", Hegel replied that a hero is somebody who artistically embodies the unity of individuality and universality in mythical or violent times.”⁴ We believe that there is a link here to be made with the protagonist of the film. Although he is pursuing his own individual quest, he embodies all the survivors of the Armenian genocide simultaneously, which is what Hegel is referring to with his notion of individuality and universality.

The landscapes of the different settings will also be essential to our analysis; therefore the focus will be made on the many different places visited by our protagonist throughout his journey. We will analyse it according to the typical features of the Western desert landscapes and their meaning. The railways also serve as a key element in *The Cut*. They give us information on the time and place in which this story is taking place. During production, they played a key part in determining where the film would be

⁴ Früchtel, Joseph. *The Impertinent Self* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 36.

shot. Fatih Akin filmed several scenes in Jordan for two reasons: first, he could not film on the Syrian border of Turkey because of the current political situation, and Jordan offered him old railway locations which were required for the film since it is set in the early nineteenth hundreds.

The myth of the frontier will allow us to explore the Armenian genocide as a narrative, mainly because the film is not about representing the genocide but about using it to tell a story. In his book *The Impertinent Self*, Josef Früchtl describes the frontier using a linguistic point of view and associates it with the English verb *to front*. To create our own concept we will focus on the theory that the Armenian genocide serves as a “symbolic” frontier in *The Cut*, which the protagonist will have to face from beginning to end.

Fatih Akin plays a lot with the notion of the symbol in his film. A memorial for the Armenian genocide, which is located in Erevan, literally inspired the title *The Cut*. This “cut” also represents the life and the struggles of the protagonist who is cut off from his family, his homeland and loses his voice.

Finally, our last chapter will put all these aspects in relation to each other. Exploring the notion of genre itself will help us understand Akin’s choice of using the Western genre to represent the Armenian genocide. By exploring the notion of genre, we will do a brief overview of the concept of the German *Heimat* and questions of identity, which will help us to link the three films of the *Liebe, Tod und Teufel* trilogy in the hopes of finding a common thread that isn’t as obvious as in other famous trilogies. Since the two first opuses have been said to take part in a revival of the *Heimatfilm*, we feel like it is necessary to address this topic, but while being aware that this is a connection that

could lead to an entire research project. This is why we will concentrate on the identity aspect of this German genre. Ending this reflection with the Post-western will grant us the answer to our thesis, which is to determine whether the film *The Cut* by Fatih Akin is a Western or not. Questioning the genre itself and its evolution into the Post-western will be the key element in synthesizing our research.

Before starting the core of this research project, I would like to address the choice of writing this master's thesis in English and not in French or German. While I am currently studying in the German studies department of a French speaking university, the majority of work being written in the field of film studies, as in humanities all together, is in English and I wanted to make this work accessible to as many readers as possible. I also think that writing in English is a first step in continuing my graduate studies abroad and opens more doors in terms of research opportunities. The multilingual aspect of this project can only be a positive in an era of interdisciplinary studies.

As I am ending this introduction, I cannot help but wonder what Fatih Akin would think of this project. If we think back to our opening quote taken from an interview in the New York Times, in which Akin refers to the fact that he is tired of people speaking of immigration being his go-to theme and compares it to the frame of a painting, I can only wonder what he would say about this project that analyzes the frame of his film *The Cut*.

Chapter 1

The western genre

The Western genre's popularity has died down over the years but it has been making a comeback in contemporary cinema not only in North America but also in Europe. Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* and *The Hateful Eight* are testaments to this resurgence of the Western genre, which will be introduced in the last part of this chapter as the *Post-Western*. Over the past two decades, Westerns have been reinventing themselves and adapting themselves to contemporary cinema. Westerns are no longer something that is thought of as tacky, but as a classic approach to storytelling.

It is important to note that before being used by the moving image, the genre already existed in literature and paintings. It was present in 1895 when the cinematograph was first invented and was used from its inception. The main appeal of this new medium was the way that it could be a direct and true representation⁵ of reality:

This aspect of the medium was particularly useful to makers of Westerns, because many of the sites and personages celebrated in frontier fiction and the Wild West were still in existence; the dress, weaponry, and life-styles of modern cowboys had not changed much since the 1880s. The crime on which Porter's *Great Train Robbery* was based occurred in 1900, only three years before the film appeared.⁶

The first film to be defined as a Western is *The Great Train Robbery*, filmed in 1903 as one of the first codified genres of cinema, we tend to feel the need to attribute it as a beginning, a birth. However, a genre is something that crystallizes over time, which can become a tradition and an art. Before giving a certain aesthetic the title of genre, we need a large enough sample over a certain period of time to determine how it can be

⁵ Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation. The Myth of the frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Atheneum, 1992, 235.

⁶ Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 235.

recognized as such. According to Jean Mitry, cofounder of the *Cinémathèque Française*, a Western is a film “dont les mobiles, les actes, les personnages, furent conditionnés par un milieu historiquement et géographiquement déterminé, aux évènements qui n’auraient pu se produire en d’autres lieux ni d’autres temps, y être ce qu’ils furent. C’est à dire tous ceux de l’Ouest américain, lors de la conquête progressive des territoires, entre 1840 et 1895.”⁷ In light of the first part of Mitry’s definition, the historical setting of Fatih Akin’s film *The Cut* would be enough to qualify it as a Western. The fact that its narrative starts with a specific event like the Armenian genocide, which is something that occurred once and that could only have happened then and there, is historically and geographically sufficient. Yet, this single aspect of the Western genre won’t suffice to elaborate on the aesthetic of the film. Therefore, it will be imperative to deconstruct the Western myth to be able to analyse the film for its original content and not in a comparative manner.

It is crucial to address the fact that the notion of genocide is already present in the Western genre even though we might see it as an unusual choice in the representation of the Armenian genocide. The book *Through a Lens Darkly: Films of Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing* dedicates a whole chapter to the genocide of Native Americans, as well as one on the Armenian genocide. It is one of the most thorough volumes to have been written on film and genocide. By acknowledging the notions of genocide and ethnic cleansing all over the world, it does not focus solely on the Holocaust like many other works. Before taking a closer look at the notion of genocide, we will start with a historical background of the American Western and its beginnings.

1.1 The American Western

⁷ Bourton, William. *Le Western : Une histoire parallèle des États-Unis* (Paris: Presse universitaire de France, 1995), 15.

While most European countries have had centuries to create and perfect their foundation myth or mythical figures, the United States of America did not have that luxury. Switzerland has William Tell⁸, Germany has the Rhine Maidens⁹ and America has Western movies. As André Bazin writes in his essay *The Evolution of the Western*, dating from 1955, “the western is rooted in the history of the American nation.”¹⁰ Robert B. Pippin goes even further, saying that the United States “is a very young country by world of mythic standards” and claims that its most mythical form of self-understanding “could be said to be the very best Hollywood Westerns.”¹¹ The notion that the Western is linked to history comes from the historical setting of the genre, which is mainly during the conquest of territories in the late 19th century. The link between Westerns and history will be our main focus in this sub-chapter since writing an exhaustive account of the American Western would be a research project in itself. We will therefore base our conclusions on existing research.

1.1.1 *The Searchers* by John Ford

For the sake of our analysis, we will use the classic example of John Ford’s *The Searchers* (1956): “In 1949 there was only a single important box-office star whose name was associated principally with the Western and that was John Wayne; and only a single major director, John Ford, and he had only directed five Westerns in the sound era, four

⁸ William Tell is a folk hero of Switzerland, whose legend is set during the foundation of the Old Swiss Confederacy, and represents Swiss patriotism.

⁹ The Rhine Maidens, who appear in Wagner’s opera *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and throughout German literature over centuries, are the guardians of the gold that can serve to obtain power.

¹⁰ Bazin, André. "The Evolution of the Western." In *What is Cinema?*, translated by Hugh Gray, vol. 2, 140–157. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971

¹¹ Pippin, Robert. *Hollywood Westerns and American Myth: The Importance of Howard Hawks and John Ford for Political Philosophy* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), 62.

of them starring Wayne.”¹² Using this film as an anchor in our analysis is based not only on the notoriety of the film itself, but also on Ford’s filmmaking. The way the director portrays America is reminiscent of Akin’s storytelling purpose:

Seine Filme, insbesondere seine Western, sind sehr persönliche, individuelle, vielschichtige Kunstwerke. Gleichzeitig war Ford ein Chronist seiner Zeit. Gesellschaftliche Strömungen, historische Tendenzen und Ereignisse, finden starken Widerhall in seinem Werk. Darüber hinaus gestaltet er mittels seiner Filme seine ureigene gesellschaftliche Vision über die mythologischen Wurzeln der US-amerikanischen Gesellschaft.¹³

This really relates to Akin’s way of making films. *The Cut* is a personal and individual take on the Armenian genocide and can be seen as a way for Akin to represent the world in which we live in through past events.

Not only does the film have all the classic characteristics of the American Western, it also plays with patterns, a concept that Emmanuelle André calls *l’esthétique du motif*, which we will be using to analyse the pattern of the cut throughout Akin’s film in chapter 3. In *The Searchers*, the main character played by John Wayne, Ethan Edwards, returns home to Texas after the Civil War, where he finds out that members of his brother’s family were killed or abducted by Comanches. He then decides to track them down and bring them home. On his quest, Ethan will be made aware that his niece Debbie is alive. Along with her adopted brother, he will embark on a dangerous mission in Comanche territory to try and find her and bring her home. There is a similarity that is undeniable between Ethan and Nazareth’s quests, which we will explore further in our film analysis. Its use of music is also very important because it is another characteristic that makes it instantly recognizable.

¹² French, Philip. *Westerns: Aspects of a Movie Genre*. (London: British Film Institute, 1973), 14.

¹³ Low, Dirk Christian. *Versuch über John Ford : die Westernfilme 1939-1964*. (Norderstedt Books on Demand, 2005), 328.

To elaborate on the choice of this particular Western as our main reference, it is important to emphasise its classic Hollywood structure, and most importantly its use of a simplistic figure as a protagonist. Just like in *The Cut*, we are confronted with a man that has lost his identity. To our surprise, the Western can also be said to be about *Heimat*:

The Western is a *Heimatfilm*, a German term for which there is no direct English translation, but which is correctly circumscribed as a “sentimental film in an idealized regional setting.” This would imply, however, that the Western is not a *Heimatfilm* after all [...] Nevertheless, the Western *is* a *Heimatfilm*. The genre’s most influential director is John Ford, and his most salient (multifaceted) movie is *The Searchers*.¹⁴

This is very interesting for our research because much has been written of the second film of the trilogy *Liebe, Tod und Teufel*, which is said to be a new *Heimatfilm*. The author uses the film *The Searchers* by John Ford as an example in his chapter and makes a link to the *Heimatfilm*. He draws his conclusions on the story of the film and puts the emphasis on the soundtrack, which confirms that the protagonist, in this case Ethan, is looking for something, perhaps his identity. The words that are sung at the beginning of the film are: “What makes a man to wander, what makes a man to roam? What makes a man leave bed and board and turn is back on home? Ride away. Ride away.” Right as we hear them, we know that this film will be about a journey, just like in the case of Nazareth.

The author mentions in his analysis, that the main character “Ethan Edwards is a romantic, a man full of desire and sentiment in search of his lost *Heimat*.”¹⁵ Fatih Akin, who describes *Heimat* as being a feeling and not having much to do with geographical location, mainly connects the concept to family. In the case of Ethan, this takes a whole new meaning. Ethan’s journey in the film is to find his niece Debbie, whom he intends to kill. When he does find her, in one of the last scenes of the film, he takes her in his arms,

¹⁴ Früchtl, *Impertinent Self*, 27.

¹⁵ Früchtl, *Impertinent Self*, 30.

even though he could've easily killed her, and says: "We're going home, Debbie." At the end, we hear the same song that was playing at the beginning of the film, but this time:

Off-screen the somewhat sad title song "What makes a man to wander? What makes a man to roam?" strikes up again. This time, unlike at the beginning of the movie, the song does not merely pose questions. Its lyric is no longer about the cozy home that the man is leaving behind, but about an entirely undefined, symbolic, religious, ethical place "up there".¹⁶

Through finding and accepting Debbie, the protagonist has found his lost *Heimat*. Of course, this is in a romantic manner. At the very end, Ethan will leave again, riding into the unknown. What we know for sure is that we'll never know exactly where he belongs, but he seems to have made peace with it.

In the film *The Cut*, the protagonist is searching for his twin daughters that can represent his lost *Heimat*. Having lost his entire family, his home and his land, Nazareth is alone. Being a father first and finding his daughters is what will give purpose to his life. Having said that, this film is about a man like himself as Fatih Akin pays a nice tribute to his own children with a message, that a father should do anything to find his children when he gets separated from them. While music plays a big role in understanding Ethan's quest, it doesn't play the same role in *The Cut*. Akin refrains from showing violence by having a score that is hostile and pushy. One could say that if the scenes themselves had been stronger, there would be no need for this music. The scenes unfortunately seem to be forcefully underscored, something that is not reminiscent of the classic Westerns.

What is also interesting about the American Western is the fight between good and evil, a concept that can be seen in Ford's *The Searchers*. Being based on the history

¹⁶ Früchtl, *Impertinent Self*, 31.

of the American people, the themes of the earliest Westerns carry a strong presence of hostility within them. Man is up against nature as a hostile environment that can also lead to encounters with hostile natives. What this portrays is good versus evil against a background of untouched nature, something that can also be found in the last opus of the *Liebe, Tod und Teufel* trilogy.

1.1.2 The Traumatic Western

Janet Walker interprets the film *The Searchers* as a “traumatic western”. She starts her article *Captive Images in the Traumatic Western: The Searchers, Pursued, Once Upon a Time the West, and Lone Star* with an anecdote on the particular circumstances in which the movie was made. Footage of the making of the film can be found on the DVD editions of *The Searchers*, in which “images of tractors gouging roads “into a wilderness where roads had never existed” are followed by images of buses and trucks bringing “pioneers from Hollywood” (John Ford and company) into a formerly “trackless Navajo country... a thousand square mile domain of the yucca, the cactus, and the bones of earlier pioneers who had died.”¹⁷

What Walker is trying to show is that Westerns are not only historical in their content, but also internally in the way that they are produced. The filming of *The Searchers* can be seen as an allegory of the conquest of American territories. The concept of the “traumatic Western” can also be observed in the film *The Cut* that has the Armenian genocide as a subject. It might not be a Western about America, but it has its own share of trauma.

1.2 The Western Myths

¹⁷ Walker, Janet. *Westerns: Films Through History* (Routledge, New York and London, 2001), 219.

The Western genre is accompanied by many myths that create its imaginary world, and these are the main reasons why it is so recognizable. This sub-chapter will serve as an introduction to the myths that we will be using in chapter three to analyse Fatih Akin's *The Cut*.

Myths are stories drawn from a society's history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society's ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness. [...] Over time, through frequent retellings and deployments as a source of interpretive metaphors, the original mythic story is increasingly conventionalized and abstracted until it is reduced to a deeply encoded and resonant set of symbols, "icons," "keywords," or historical clichés.¹⁸

Along with the myths comes an aesthetic that is proper to the genre. Gore Verbinski's *Rango* (2011) is one of the most recent examples of it¹⁹. This film could be perceived as a simple animation film for children, but it is actually following the footsteps of the great Western classics in its font and form. This is what makes the genre so great: a chameleon replaces the cowboy, and it is still obvious that it's a Western. Starring Johnny Depp as a chameleon, Rango tells the story of a family pet that finds himself with an identity crisis, having problems standing out when his nature is to blend in. His escape will bring him to a frontier town called Dirt, where he will become the town's new sheriff and will be forced into becoming a hero. The film, like many children's movies of our era, is just as much for kids as for adults. Using a genre that dates back to the beginning of cinema is a clever way to insure a certain level of comprehension, because the codes and mechanisms of the Western have already been assimilated by most.

1.2.1 The Hero

¹⁸ Slotkin, *Gunfighter nation*, 5.

¹⁹ Gore Verbinski reunited with the Western genre and Johnny Depp in 2003 to make *The Lone Ranger*, which can be qualified as a classic Western, being based on a radio show of the same name, about a duo composed of Lone Ranger, a Texas Ranger, and Tonto, a Native American.

The hero is a concept that is closely linked to the Western. Westerns are films that often follow one protagonist throughout a journey. Whether they are good or bad they will have a purpose to fulfil and the spectator will be taken along for the ride. The fight between good and evil is always at the centre of the genre's films:

[...] the hero is the embodiment of good. He is upright, clean-living, sharp-shooting, a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant who respects the law, the flag, women and children; he dresses smartly in white clothes and rides a white horse which is his closest companion; he uses bullets and words with equal care, is a disinterested upholder of justice and uninterested in personal gain. He always wins.²⁰

The main characteristic of the classic western hero that can be associated with Akin's protagonist is that he is the embodiment of good, which we will see in chapter 3. It is also a genre that plays with the notoriety of its actors and directors. Just like John Wayne starring in Ford's *The Searchers*, Verbinski gave the role of the chameleon to Johnny Depp, a well-known actor that can attract an audience just by being in the film.

If we look at the trailer for Fatih Akin's film *The Cut*, it was already hinting that the film was going to be a Western. After seeing a few scenes from the movie itself, with no narration, we hear the sound of a blade cutting. A subhead then appears with the title of the film, *The Cut*, followed by the last scene ending on a second subhead that reads « Tahar Rahim. In a film by Fatih Akin. ». Tahar Rahim, who stars in the film *Un Prophète* (2009), was probably Akin's way of reaching an international audience by using his recent fame to add notoriety to his latest opus:

More often than not, contemporary trailers that operate primarily within the rhetoric of stardom ensure that their stars are recognized by audiences (segmented and mass ones alike) as multiplicitous entities — whether by way of a multiplicity within their primary identities as stars, multivalent relationships with other star/characters within the trailer, or the increasingly multivalent intertextual echoes of their presence in other films and their positioning of celebrities within the contemporary media marketplace.²¹

²⁰ French, *Westerns: Aspects of a Movie Genre*, 48.

²¹ Kernan, Lisa. 2004. *Coming attractions. Reading american movie trailers*. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 22.

The film, that was supposed to open at Cannes, but had its first audience at the Venice Film Festival²², had a promising future with a renowned director and actor on its side.

In his book *The Impertinent Self*, Josef Früchtl quotes Hegel when he writes that a hero embodies individuality and universality in mythical or violent times,²³ as we have seen in the exact quote in our introduction. Früchtl uses the film *Red River* to exemplify his analysis of the hero in Westerns, another film starring John Wayne as the protagonist. This definition by Hegel will be useful for our analysis of Nazareth, the main character in *The Cut*, since we can easily argue that he represents not only a single man facing a genocide, but can also represent the entire Armenian community.

1.2.2 The American West

The Far West²⁴ is probably the myth that is the easiest to recognize as it serves as the setting to classic Westerns. The Far West, which is used to designate the American West, is a romanced name for a region that is anchored in people's memories: "L'Ouest est envisagé par les Américains à la fois comme terre régénératrice, comme sanctuaire des valeurs américaines et comme paradis perdu."²⁵ It serves as an object of nostalgia towards virgin territories that can never again exist because when all the land is mapped, reality sets in. Westerns are thus about the myth of the West, and this is why we need

²² Fatih Akin presented his film to both festivals at the same time and the reaction at Cannes was less enthusiastic than the one of Venice. Akin decided to follow his instincts and pulled the film from the Cannes festival. The festival never rejected the film, but the director had a feeling that this wasn't what they were expecting from him.

²³ Früchtl, *The Impertinent Self*, 36.

²⁴ Americans prefer to refer to the American West as the Wild West, and not the Far West. The term Far West is mostly used in Europe and in French speaking Canada.

²⁵ Leutrat, Jean-Louis. Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues. *Western(s)* (Paris, Klincksieck, 2007), 49.

“[...] to receive the western-as-myth as being apart from history. That is, the film western (as with other cultural forms) is *not historical in and of itself*, it *draws on* historical material. But while history is argumentative and discursive, westerns give *narrative form* to ideological beliefs and values.”²⁶ This is one of the reasons why the Western is an appropriate choice to talk about the Armenian Genocide, as the genre draws on historical material but is not about one particular historical event.

1.2.3 The Myth of the Frontier

The myth of the frontier is also of undeniable importance in the Western genre. Not only does this film genre paint a picture of the formation of America as we know it now, but it also depends on it. It is present in a majority of films, such as *The Searchers*: “Ford kreierte und kommentiert in seinen Western einen kontinuierlichen Zivilisationsprozess. Diese persönliche Vision und Schilderung findet ihren Spiegel im Bild der Armee, der Gemeinschaft der Kavallerie. Der Ort, an dem Ford dieses Bild darstellt, ist ein mythischer Ort, die Keimzelle der amerikanischen Nation: der Westen, die *Western Frontier*.”²⁷ This myth constitutes “the single most important frame of reference for America’s self-understanding”²⁸, which we have already started discussing with the American Western in general:

Westerns are movies about a frontier that is merely a natural and geographical frontier, nor only a social and sociopsychological frontier. Its import, or even its national import, when seen through the eyes of U.S.-Americans, is far more the result of a different level altogether, namely, the *mythical* level. Westerns are movies about the frontier (of America), about confrontation (with the existent, the different, the new) in its mythical dimension, ultimately movies about the individual in its mythical dimension.²⁹

²⁶ Walker, *Westerns*, 15.

²⁷ Loew, *Versucht über John Ford: die Westernfilme 1939-1964*, 328.

²⁸ Walker, *Westerns*, 49.

²⁹ Früchtl, *Impertinent Self*, 20.

The author is speaking of the myth of the frontier in Westerns specifically and explains the notion of territory behind it. This will be appropriate in the context of our research since *The Cut* is based on the Armenian genocide and the question of territory plays a huge role in this very dark period of Turkish history. Speaking of the Western, Früchtl argues that “the principle they demonstrate is that of territorial expansion. The country also appears to be “without frontiers” as a *social space*. The constraints of civilization, the constricting stipulations of morality, rights and the law, here have no validity (yet).”³⁰ This notion is easily relatable to the events of 1915 in the sense that Armenians thought they were being deported when asked to cross the desert. They did not think they were being led to their deaths.

But what will really allow us to explore this notion in the analysis of the film *The Cut* is to interpret the frontier as a key element of the Western: “Its most prominent guise is individualism, the figure of the individual who defies the challenges of nature and history and remains true to himself. In addition to reinforcing the notion of the hero, this is what makes it possible to find the metaphorical frontier of the film, which is the event of the Armenian genocide itself. The noun *frontier* comes from the same root as the verb *to front*.”³¹ This is a notion that needs to be conceptualised in a post-western manner:

However, in 2004 Stephen Tatum recognized the “ongoing reorientation of the field imaginary of the literary West” into its “postfrontier” phase, wherein old ideas of assimilation and clear-cut lines of expansion were being disrupted by the sense of the West as “an intercultural contact zone”. And in 2006 Nina Baym commented that in the post-West there are considerable “worries about the ontological status of any story a western historian or writer or literary academic might want to narrate.” Taken together, these multiple points of view formulate a growing awareness of the need for “thinking postwestern” and shifting beyond the conditioned responses to frontier, nation-building, and expansionist Manifest Destiny mythologies.³²

³⁰ Früchtl, *Impertinent Self*, 19.

³¹ Früchtl, *Impertinent Self*, 20.

³² Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 5-6.

Since we are speaking of the verb *to front*, the frontier is what is being faced, thus the genocide, which leads the quest of the protagonist.

1.2.4 The Human Groups

Finally, we cannot talk about the Western without acknowledging the people that are represented in them. This key element of the Western is what Nicole Gotteri refers to as the human groups:

Le western met en scène des représentants de diverses composantes de la population américaine du XIXe siècle engagées dans la conquête et l'organisation des territoires progressivement découverts. Constituées en sociétés unies par des intérêts communs, on les voit intervenir dans les espaces déterminés qu'elles occupent dans le déroulement du récit.³³

The two main groups that can be observed in classic Westerns are Native Americans and Americans, who tend to confront each other. While these characters can be classified into groups, it is important to remember that they have individualities within them. For example, in the American group, we can find the Cowboy, the Sherriff or the Outlaw. Like we have mentioned before, this research is not about comparing *The Cut* to classic Westerns, but to analyse similar mechanisms found in the film. Therefore, we will not try to associate the different groups found in the film, which are mainly the Armenians and the Turks, to the human groups found in Westerns. Trying to make such a comparison would be considered a lack of ethics on our part.

1.3 The Influence of the Western in Europe

³³ Gotteri, Nicole. *Le Western et ses mythes: Les sources d'une passion* (Bernard Giovanangeli Éditeur, Paris, 2005), 71.

Like most trends coming out of the United States, the Western genre had a big influence on European cinema. One of the most famous examples of the influence of the Western on European cinema is the spaghetti western in Italy, a genre that is the fruit of the very famous Sergio Leone, who gave a new life to the Western in the 1960s. Working at first under the name Bob Robertson, Leone worked with American and Italian actors, recreating American settings in the Cinecittà studios and in Spain.

Although the genre's success was only for a mere two decades, its influence is still palpable in the post-western of today, again, due to a filmmaker like Quentin Tarantino. This is a nice example of how cinematographic art works. Here, talking about how classic Westerns influenced European cinema, we see how a new stem of the genre was created and influenced an American director from the new generation. Looking back on the work that has been done in Europe, we can see how Fatih Akin was exposed to the genre, not only with American classics, but also with films that were produced close to home. This is his way of paying tribute to Clint Eastwood who adapted Italian Westerns. The influence of Italian cinema can also be felt when comparing his work to Bernardo Bertolucci. His choice to make the film in English can be compared to Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* (1987), in which the famous director chose to have the Chinese speak English.

1.3.1 Germany's Karl May

In Germany, it is the novelist Karl May that popularised the Western. While there is a lot of controversy over his work, his presence in German literature is undeniable. In his career, May wrote more than 60 books on the American West³⁴ without ever having

³⁴ Campbell, Neil, *Post-Westerns: Cinema, Region, West*. (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 120.

been to America. Without real experience or historical knowledge, the author entered the collective mythology of Germany and created western heroes like Winnetou and Old Schatterhand. May's stories were brought to life on film and are still a part of Germany's cult television classics. Quentin Tarantino pays a tribute to these fictional characters in his film *Inglorious Basterds*, in a scene where the characters are in a bar, playing a card game. The name of Winnetou comes up as the answer to a riddle, which is a nice homage to the author.

Even though Karl May passed away in 1912, his work has been finding its place in more recent literary studies but this might not be for positive reasons: "A more analytical and textually oriented concern with May has long suffered from two major impediments: the inaccessibility of original text versions and the ideological stigma that derived from Adolf Hitler's reported enthusiasm for May's writings."³⁵ The author is the source of many controversies, which we will leave aside for the reason that they are not relevant to our research. What is although pertinent for this passage on the influence of the Western in Europe is the film *Der Schatz im Silbersee* (1962), a West German film based on one of May's novels. Released in 60 countries, it is said to be the most successful German film after the war. It had a huge impact on European cinema and can be linked to the success of Sergio Leone, whom we mentioned earlier:

[...] its success was ultimately responsible for the avalanche of European – later mostly Italian – westerns, some of which would eventually capture even the American market. Many "spaghetti westerns" including the first two films of Sergio Leone's "Dollar Trilogy," *Per un pugno di dollari* (A fistful of Dollars, 1964) and *Per qualche dollaro in più* (For a Few Dollars More, 1965), and Leone himself has stated that it was the success of the German May adaptations that got Cinecittà interested in the genre.³⁶

³⁵ Schneider, Tassilo. "Finding a New Heimat in the Wild West: Karl May and the German Western of the 1960s" in *Journal of Film and Video*. Vol. 47, No. 1/3, The Western (Spring-Fall 1995), pp. 50-66.

³⁶ Campbell, *Post-Westerns: Cinema, Region, West*, 121.

What is interesting to observe in the Karl May phenomenon is that he served as a catalyst for the fame of the Western genre in Europe by basing himself on something he had never seen. In contemporary Germany, or anywhere else for that matter, it would be impossible to reach such a level of fame without being well documented. The influence of the Western can still be felt in Germany in recent years, as we can see with Thomas Arslan's *Gold* (2013) or Andreas Prochaska's *Das Finstere Tal* (2014).

1.3.2 *Gold* by Thomas Arslan

Thomas Arslan is, just like Akin, a Turkish-German director. Born to a Turkish father and a German mother, he left Germany at a young age to attend elementary school in Ankara and then came back to Germany to continue his schooling. Although not having had the same level of recognition as Akin over the past two decades, he is best known for his *Berlin* trilogy. The director takes part in the cinematographic movement called the *Berliner Schule*³⁷. His cinema is intimate, with no name actors and small budgets. Just like other directors from the *Berliner Schule*, he is mostly known in smaller circles of film enthusiasts. In 2003, the director released a Western film titled *Gold* that strangely reminds us of Fatih Akin's new film.

Gold is a film set in 1898, during the Klondike Gold Rush. It is a slow film about a group of Germans traveling from the United States through Canada, looking for gold. It is a strange choice for a director known for his intricate and personal story telling that brings a beautiful aesthetic to his work. By saying that his film *Gold* reminds us of Akin,

³⁷ The *Berliner Schule* movement takes its name from the *Deutsche Film und Fernsehakademie Berlin*, a film school situated in Berlin. The movement was created by film critic Merthen Worthmann and is also referred to as the New German Wave. Thomas Arslan, along with Christian Petzold and Angela Shanelc, are the first figures of the movement, having all attended the film school in Berlin. Their films often remind auteur cinema.

we are referring to the fact that Akin also went out of his usual way of making films to create *The Cut*. Both of the directors accustomed us to a singular type of filmmaking that they both left behind with their most recent movies. We think that the film *Gold* was worth a mention in our work, not because of its content or for analysis purposes, but because even though Turkish-German movies are a big part of recent German cinema, it is surprising to see two Turkish-German productions influenced by the Western genre come out in the span of two years.

1.4 The Post-western and Contemporary Cinema

Is the Western dead? If we go back to the notion that a genre does not take birth in one specific film, but when a number of said films share a certain aesthetic or other feature over time, the Western cannot be dead. It has simply evolved, taking itself out of its original historical context, which was the birth of the United States and its moving frontiers.

“As minor cinema post-westerns have the power, not to represent the world or located subjects, but to imagine, create and vary affects that are already given.” For Deleuze, art is always productive, creative and “becoming”, refusing simply to represent established and accepted models or to add to the tradition; rather it “produces what is not already recognizable... disrupts and dislocates the tradition.”³⁸

As Neil Campbell here points out, the post-western is a genre that allows creativity and that should not be imagined as a box. We need to stop thinking about the Western and its connection to American history, and start seeing it as a way of telling classic stories in a long-established manner.

1.4.1 Deleuze, Walker and the Post-western

³⁸ Campbell, *Post-Westerns: Cinema, Region, West*, 120.

In his book *Cinéma 1: L'image-mouvement*, Deleuze qualifies the Western as one of the great genres of cinema. When writing about John Ford, he insists on the fact that landscapes and an endless sky are constructing spaces that allow for tragic storytelling. While this can also be said of Akin's film, it is his thoughts on the hero figure in relation to the space that are of interest to us as it brings us back to Hegel and universality: "Englobé par le ciel, le milieu englobe à son tour la collectivité. C'est en tant que représentant de la collectivité que le héros devient capable d'une action qui l'égale au milieu, et en rétablit l'ordre accidentellement ou périodiquement compromis: il faut les médiations de la communauté et du *land* pour constituer un chef et rendre un individu capable d'une si grande action."³⁹ This definition can only be reminiscent of Nazareth and his journey.

Deleuze sees the western, hence the Post-western, as a cinema in constant evolution and not one trying to stay in the same old box of clichés that can only be attributed to one distinct part of history. The Post-western allows us to play with the guideline of the Western genre. This will be the aspect that will be of the most use to our analysis mainly because a movie that is not about America cannot be a classic Western.

To continue in Deleuze's line of thought, this theory of the post-western will reinforce the justification of the use of this particular genre by Fatih Akin to represent the Armenian Genocide. However, it is imperative to understand that post-western films are not traditional Westerns:

In its 1990s resurgence, however, the western re-emerged under distinctly different conditions, specifically those of postmodernism. Two significant marks of postmodernism are generic destabilization and the questioning of traditional myths and master narratives. That is, under postmodernism, the form-content relationship often can be radically altered. The crucial difference in the western's revitalization, then, is this: the western can

³⁹ Deleuze, Gilles. *L'image-mouvement*. (Paris: Les éditions de Minuit, 1983), 202.

no longer take its central position, or even its very existence, for granted. Almost every western made in the 1990s has to justify itself as a western.⁴⁰

In what follows, I draw on Walker's comments about the Post-western. This provides the background for the manner in which I read the film *The Cut* by Fatih Akin as a Western. The post-western makes it possible for Akin to represent events in a visually structured manner and to design his narrative as fiction, rather than base it solely on history. It gives him the means to create as opposed to represent what is often regarded as unrepresentable, especially in Holocaust related film and literature. By doing so he is also refusing the existing models of representation, which are the documentary and the biographical fiction.

1.4.2 Wim Wenders as a German Example

To continue on the trail of German cinema, we will discuss the German director Wim Wenders as an example of the Post-western genre. Wenders is mostly known for his film *Der Himmel über Berlin* (1987) which he co-wrote with Peter Handke⁴¹. The influence of the Western on Wenders is present in his film *Paris, Texas* (1984). The influence is most palpable in the setting of the film, which was shot in Texas and is known for the beauty of its images. The director worked with cinematographer Robby Müller, who was also in charge of the cinematography in Wender's *Alice in den Städten* (1974), a road movie about identity and memory:

In an interview in 2005, Wenders commented on why the West haunted him as a filmmaker and why he returned to it as a source of images and stories over the years. For him it provided a powerful condensation of affect – emotions, dreams and longings – that permitted complex human narratives to unfold in landscapes of immense beauty and mythic intensity.⁴²

⁴⁰ Walker, *Westerns*, 28.

⁴¹ Peter Handke is an Austrian author and translator.

⁴² Campbell, *Post-Westerns*, 242.

Since the post-western has left the Far West and Cowboys behind, the influence can often be felt in the aesthetics and story telling. *Paris, Texas* won the Palme d'Or in 1984 against big contenders like Lars von Trier's *The Element of Crime* and John Huston's *Under the Volcano*. For example, the film has its own mythical equivalents of the figures of the hero and the saloon girl without being a classic Western. The influence of the Western genre on Wenders reflects his fascination with America, characteristic to many of his films. The film, which was not shot in Paris, Texas but mostly in the western part of Texas, shows the new West, the new America. Gas stations and old advertisement billboards set the tone for this road movie, about a man who is chasing the American dream, trying to get away from the modern world. He also worked with legend Ry Cooder for the score of his movie, enhancing his obvious fascination for Americana.

Wim Wenders work marks the beginnings of what can be referred to as the post-western, and the German director continues to use the genre to this day. His most recent work influenced by the Western is *Don't Come Knocking* in 2005, a film about an actor who flees the set of a western movie on nothing less than a horse: "Sure, it is not a real western – it is a contemporary story and people drive cars – but the western looms behind our film and everything it is about. After all, that is the only genre that deals primarily with the question: Where do I belong? No other film genre deals so much with the issues of "home" and "identity".⁴³

The genre is thus perfect for his work, since he is known for his quest for a lost identity as can be seen in his *Road Movie* trilogy. Being part of the New German Cinema,

⁴³ Wim Wenders, quoted in Lily Percy, "The Lingering Auteur" in Campbell, *Post-Westerns*, 240.

a movement that was a reaction to the films being made at the time that ignored the German past, his work showed journeys that “became the driving force of the narrative”.⁴⁴ This is something that can also be found in Akin’s *The Cut*, which is not only a film about the Armenian genocide, but also about the quest of a father who has lost his family, his homeland and his voice.

Just like Wim Wenders, Fatih Akin is a fan of the Western. Both directors are known to explore the notion of *Heimat* in their films, so it is not surprising that Akin decided to use the genre to end his *Liebe, Tod und Teufel* trilogy. Violence has always been a part of Westerns, and is thus justified to represent the evil part of Akin’s work. Just like other post-western films, *The Cut* plays with some myths of the Western, but is not a Western per se. Before starting the analysis of the film itself, our next chapter will concentrate on the notion of genocide in film and more particularly of genocide in Westerns.

⁴⁴ Eichmanns, G. and Y. Franke. *Heimat Goes Mobile: Hybrid Forms of Home in Literature and Film*. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 5.

Chapter 2

Armenian Genocide and Film

“Wer redet denn heute noch von der Vernichtung der Armenier?”⁴⁵ The famous quote from Hitler’s’ Obersalzberg speech is what opens Geoffrey Robertson’s book *An inconvenient genocide: Who now remembers the Armenians?*, which is translated to “Who, after all, still speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?”. The Armenian Genocide is a complex case, and this book is a gathering of evidence to prove that it did in fact, happen. The Genocide was mainly perpetrated from early 1915 to 1916, even though it went on until the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Some two thirds of the Armenians who then lived on what is now Turkish soil perished. The Young Turks were responsible for the massive deportations that cost the lives of 1 200 000 Armenians. Not being recognized to this day, the Genocide was at the center of many political debates on the mark of its centennial in 2015. While the Armenian Genocide is at the center of Fatih Akin’s film and can be directly linked to the use of the Western genre, the goal of this research is not to address the veracity of this historical event, even though we strongly agree with the Armenian community when asking for recognition:

Due to the proliferation of genocide in an era devoted to the prevention of such atrocities, the need to investigate the Armenian situation within the more comprehensive “genocide studies” has intensified, yet debates continue around the historical accuracy of the “genocide” label in describing the mass deportations and slaughter of the Armenian population.”⁴⁶

Turkey’s denial of the events is somewhat understandable. The government claims that it does not want to project the country’s dark history on its current population. But why do only twenty-four world parliaments recognize these events? World politics are largely

⁴⁵ The quote in its original language, German, can be found in *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945, Serie D, Band VII*, (Baden-Baden, 1956), pp. 171-172.

⁴⁶ Wilson, K. M. and T. F. Crowder-Taraborrelli. *Film & Genocide* (Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 88.

based on the relationships and alliances between different countries; for example, Barack Obama still hasn't recognized the Genocide⁴⁷. Why? Maybe because Turkey has been a strong ally of the United States in the fight against the Islamic State. As mentioned before, we will not be concentrating our research on the debate around the recognition of the Armenian Genocide but it is imperative to take it into consideration when focusing on its representation in visual arts.

By ending his trilogy about love, death and evil with an opus on the Armenian Genocide, as well as being of Turkish decent, German director Fatih Akin is making a strong statement. The symbolism of mutism in the film is definitely a comment on the state of the question about the Armenian genocide, which Fatih Akin has confirmed in an interview. His film, a project he began about five years before its release, coincides with the centennial of the Armenian genocide, which brought back this unfortunate event into the public sphere. What Akin is claiming with this film is freedom of speech. He did not make a political film, but the film is political in and of itself.

His comment on freedom of speech is expressed in three ways, namely freedom of expression itself, meaning to talk publicly and freely about the events of 1915; secondly, the fact of denying the said events; thirdly, the Armenian people that have no voice. Again, Akin gives a concrete example of these points in the interview mentioned at the beginning of this research. He talks about his own experience with the history of his country of origin, and his relationship with the latter before and after the film. Before the release of the film *The Cut*, the Turkish-German director was very popular in Turkey.

⁴⁷ Before seeking presidency, Barack Obama, as a US senator, claimed that the Armenian Genocide should be recognized as historical facts and not as a point of view or a personal opinion. In 2015, year that marked the centennial, the president of the United States still refused to use the word Genocide, to the Armenian populations discontent.

Being an award-winning director, he often went to Istanbul and felt that people liked his work. Since the film's release, he says that he is unable to walk alone in the streets of Turkey, by fear. Not only of the critics, but also for his safety since he has received several death threats. Using or representing genocide in the arts comes with an ethical responsibility and one's aesthetic choices are often criticised by others.

2.1 Representation of genocide

Representation of genocide has been at the hearts of many philosophical debates that are still on-going, and probably forever will be. Like we've established previously, the Holocaust is the most represented of all genocides. Since the end of the Second World War, hundreds of artists, such as filmmakers and writers, have been concerned with this theme and have struggled to represent it. The documentary and fiction film are the two most common forms of representation, and both of them lead to questions of ethics, mainly because of images, whether they be created or taken from archives.

In March 1994, right after the release of *Schindler's List*, Claude Lanzmann wrote an article in *Le Monde* that was titled *La Représentation Impossible*. When watching Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah*⁴⁸, the spectator senses a certain sensibility from the director to his subject. He decided to make a documentary that is composed of interviews with survivors. Lanzmann feels very strongly about the representation of genocide in fiction films. He does not see a purpose in doing so and he even refuses to watch such films, especially films made in Hollywood that use the Holocaust as a spectacle. For example, entering a gas chamber should not be the climax of a film. Robert A. Rosenstone's thoughts echoes with Claude Lanzmann:

⁴⁸ The documentary *Shoah* is a 10-hour long film with no archive footage, but only survivor's testimonies.

This sort of criticism of history on film might be of no importance if we did not live in a world deluged with images, one in which people increasingly receive their ideas about the past from motion pictures and television, from feature films, docudramas, mini-series, and network documentaries. Today, the chief source of historical knowledge for the majority of the population – outside of the much-despised textbook – must surely be the visual media, a set of institutions that lie almost wholly outside the control of those of us who devote our lives to history.⁴⁹

If this was the case in the late 1988, it is especially relevant today. There is a line in this domain that can easily be crossed, and this may be why most people should refrain from making films about genocide.

2.1.1 The Second Generation

For this section to be relevant, we will concentrate on the works of the second generation, a point of view that can be compared to Fatih Akin's, being of Turkish decent and not having lived through the massive deportations that occurred in the early nineteen hundreds. Not having immigrated himself, he also has a second-generation perspective when it comes to the Turkish community in Germany, subject of his previous work. When looking at film, most of the examples of representation that we can find are of the Holocaust. In literature, there are many accounts of survivors, but we can also find some great work by second and third generations.

In her article *Entre témoin et héritier : une certaine inquiétude*, Régine Robin questions herself on where those generations get their memories:

La génération qui s'exprime ici, en effet, ne connaît l'Holocauste qu'au second degré, même si du récit a circulé dans leur famille. Elle ne connaît vraiment l'événement qu'à partir de la culture populaire, hollywoodienne, hypermédiatisée. La plupart du temps, la transmission a fait défaut alors même qu'il existe une profusion d'images, non pas de l'événement lui-même, mis à part les quelques films d'actualité de l'ouverture des camps, les images des bulldozers poussant vers les fosses les cadavres de Bergen-Belsen, mais

⁴⁹ Rosenstone, Robert A. «History in Images/History in Words. Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film». In *The American Historical Review*, 93.5, 1988.

des images de films, de bandes dessinées, des séries télévisées, de la publicité. C'est une génération qui vit avec une mémoire médiatique saturée, mémoire "d'overdose », [...].⁵⁰

The author questions the image of the Holocaust that this second generation is projecting, whether being on film or in comics since they have not lived through it. Hence, their representation is shadowed by the images they have seen during their whole life and by the stories they've heard growing up. Since the majority of the images we are confronted with are created and not images of the event itself, it is understandable that we question these images that are mental reconstructions of pop culture. A great example for this line of thought would be the comic *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* by Art Spiegelman.

2.1.2 Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

Art Spiegelman is the author of the graphic novel *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*. He was born in 1948 in Stockholm, Sweden, and immigrated to the US with his parents, both Holocaust survivors, when he was still a boy. He studied visual arts and became a professional illustrator. He lives in New York City, where he is part of a large community of comic book fans and creators. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* was a great success and is known worldwide, having been translated into many languages. His graphic novel serves as an introduction to the Holocaust for many people, especially youth, and educated them on a subject that should be known to all.

Maus: A Survivor's Tale is an autobiographical graphic novel. It tells the story of Art himself in a cartoon form of him collecting the testimony of his father and there is an alternation between two eras, the present and the past of war. The story is illustrated in black and white and Spiegelman uses animals as a metaphor in order to represent ethnic

⁵⁰ Jurgenson, Luba. Prstojevic, Alexandre. *Des Témoins aux Héritiers : L'écriture de la Shoah et la culture européenne*. (Éditions PÉTRA, Paris, 2012), 30.

and religious groups. Thus, the Jews are represented by mice (hence the title *Maus*, which means mouse in German), the Nazis by cats, the Poles by pigs, the British by fish, the Americans by dogs and finally the French by frogs.

Spiegelman is aware of the fact that he is trying to illustrate something that cannot be illustrated and that he must do everything that he can to stay true to his father's testimony. He is working with his father's testimony and not his own. What makes this piece of art unique is the way in which Spiegelman tries to stay true to his father's story while simultaneously illustrating his own collection of the testimony. To be more precise, Spiegelman is telling the story of how he collected his father's testimony based on interviews. The rephrasing is done through the images since the graphic novel writer is drawing his father's memories. Since he did not live through it he had to reformulate, hence drawing the way he sees fit.

At first glance, using graphic novels to represent the Holocaust can seem like an odd choice, just like the Western for Akin. Graphic novels are usually associated with humor and happier themes. Were graphic novels an obvious choice of medium for Art Spiegelman? We think that it is right to make that assumption based on this statement:

It never could have occurred to me to tell it in any other form. Comics are just the idiom that naturally came with trying to fulfill a mandate I wasn't conscious of fulfilling when I went back to *Maus* in '78 – my mother's desire that I somehow tell her story. What consciously motivated me was the impulse of wanting to do a long comic that needed a bookmark.⁵¹

The author was already a part of the graphic novel scene, and it is a medium that obsesses him. Like we can feel in the short statement above, he is a fan of the medium himself and could not have imagined another way of telling this story. Spiegelman is part of the *underground* American comic book scene and some of the characteristics of this

⁵¹ Spiegelman, Art. *Metamaus*. (Paris: Flammarion, 2011), 165.

particular genre can be found in *Maus*. It is intended for more mature readers, is drawn in black and white and is not afraid to talk about taboos, which clashes with mainstream American comics about superheroes. The length of the graphic novel is also worth mentioning because it makes it fit into the graphic novel category that was emerging at the time.

The choice of using animals to represent the different human groups is a conscious one, and it serves as his answer to the issue of representation:

How to show the unshowable may also underpin Spiegelman's use of animals for humans here. When Spiegelman is asked, 'Why mice?'" he answers, 'I need to show events and memory of the Holocaust without showing them. I want to show the masking of these events *in* their representation.' In this way, he can tell the story and not tell it at the same time.⁵²

This conscious choice in his oeuvre might be why it has been so well received. He doesn't fall into the clichés of representation that are usually associated with the Holocaust. As he explains in *Metamaus*, it is easier to stay true to the events of the Second World War when drawing them, as opposed to filming them. He gives an example that illustrates this well, when speaking about showing prisoners in film that are well nourished and in perfect health. It is essentially impossible to forget that these are actors playing a role, having seen real images of the opening of the camps.

2.2 Holocaust in film and *postmemory*

As we have brought up before, when we think about film and genocide, the first thing that comes to mind is the Holocaust. It is the genocide that has been the most represented through the last decades in visual art and it will continue to be so with the next generations. The representation of the Holocaust started immediately after the war,

⁵² Young, James E. "Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and the After-Images of History", in *At Memory's Edge. After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, Yale University Press 2000, 12-41.

with photography and documentaries shot at the opening of the camps. The notion that will be of interest to us in this chapter is *postmemory*, a concept elaborated by Marianne Hirsch. The work surrounding memory in Germany has been slow but constant, and this is what has helped the country build its new identity. The main reason why this is so relevant to our research is that even though Fatih Akin is not directly a part of this problematic, growing up in Germany has definitely shaped his way of thinking about memory and the place that it occupies in our history.

2.2.1 Marianne Hirsch's *Postmemory*

In her book *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, Marianne Hirsch explains the notion of *postmemory* very carefully:

“Postmemory” describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.⁵³

Postmemory is thus not the end of memory, or the after-memory, but the continuity or the evolution of this one. Since they were exposed to the experiences of their parents for their whole lives, these kids have the impression of having their own memories of the Holocaust. This notion of *postmemory* will be very important when trying to understand how the Holocaust is represented in contemporary arts, since they are basing their art on these “memories”.

Going back to Spiegelman’s *Maus*, this notion of *postmemory* is closely linked to the artist’s way of transmitting a testimony. Spiegelman works his medium in a way that

⁵³ Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

accentuates the fact that he is telling his father's story, and illustrates the way that he collects it and assimilates it:

As becomes clear, then, especially to the author himself, Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* is not about the Holocaust so much as about the survivor's tale itself and the artist-son's recovery of it. In Spiegelman's own word, "Maus is not what happened in the past, but rather what the son understands of the father's story. [...] It is an autobiographical history of my relationship with my father, a survivor of the Nazi death camps, cast with cartoon animals."⁵⁴

Spiegelman insists on this fact in an interview in *Metamaus*, a book dedicated to his comic: "Ce qui est décrit, c'est spécifiquement son histoire, fondée sur ses souvenirs [...] mon père n'a pu se rappeler/comprendre qu'une partie de ce qu'il a vécu [...] moi à mon tour, je n'ai pu comprendre qu'une partie de ce qu'il a pu me dire". According to Hirsch's definition of *postmemory*, this is it.

If we look at films like *Schindler's List*, *Night and Fog*, *Shoah* and *La vita è bella*, we can observe that the genre is already codified. Just like the Western, it is recognizable by many clichés. This is due to the work of memory that started right after the opening of the concentration camps. As mentioned before, this is a theme that has been the focus of many researches in many fields, as opposed to the representation of the Armenian Genocide. And like we intend to previously, the representation of the Holocaust is not always made properly and it is easy to cross the ethical line.

2.2.2 *La vita e bella* de Roberto Benigni

Roberto Benigni, who was born in 1952 and grew up in rural Italy, is the son of a survivor of the Holocaust. Before shooting the film *La vita e bella* in 1997, he was best known for his humor. He started off as a comedian and actor, and later became a screenwriter and filmmaker. It is this film that has made him famous worldwide, and

⁵⁴ Young, James E. "Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and the After-Images of History", in *At Memory's Edge. After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, Yale University Press 2000, 12-41.

made people aware that he is the child of a survivor. If we look at *La vita e bella*, we are dealing with a very different approach than the one of Spiegelman.

In his film, Benigni uses humor to show the absurdity of the camps. For those of us who have not lived through it, the horror of the camps is so unimaginable that, due to its magnitude, it can seem ridiculous. Throughout the film, the character of Guido makes a mockery of Nazi regulations. Whether in the first part, when his son wonders why dogs and Jews cannot enter into a store, or in the camp itself, when he asks his father if they will be turned into soap or buttons, Guido always finds a way to turn everything into a joke.

Since we are dealing with comedy, it is unfortunately easy to create something tacky, and that is a misrepresentation of the Holocaust said to be “l’esthétique de l’irreprésentable”⁵⁵, like we have mentioned before. The lack of documentary quality to his film can be critiqued since he does not draw an authentic picture of the concentration camps; however, he does use visual codes such as uniforms, gas chambers, etc. The reception of the film, contrary to Spiegelman’s *Maus*, was very controversial due to the fact that the events of the Second World War are unrecognizable. It is hard to say if it’s supposed to be humor or if it is derision: “Une fois de plus, on constate à quel point les échanges sur *La vie est belle* peuvent prendre un tour violent. C’est que ce film, pour reprendre une analyse de Bakhtine, correspond à l’un des genres dérangeants du spondogeloin, faisant coexister le plaisant et le sérieux, qui émerge en période d’affaiblissement des repères éthiques et esthétiques.”⁵⁶ Like it is mentioned in the

⁵⁵ Jurgenson, Luba. Prstojevic, Alexandre. 2012. *Des Témoins aux Héritiers : L’écriture de la Shoah et la culture européenne*. Paris : Éditions PÉTRA.

⁵⁶ Walter, Jacques. “Rire de tout ? Réactions à ‘La vie est belle’ dans la presse juive”. in: *Hermès* 29, 2001, 133-143.

article, *La vita e bella* challenges the conventional ways of representing the Holocaust⁵⁷, and this is what is disturbing about the film. In order to represent it, we can either see it as a misrepresentation or a deconstruction of the Holocaust through humour.

To conclude, if we think of Lanzmann and his opinion about the representation of the Holocaust, and probably genocide in general, it is worth mentioning that the director has seen the film *Son of Saul*, and has written that the film is the anti-*Schindler's List*.⁵⁸ This year's Academy Awards awarded *Son of Saul* the Oscar for best foreign movie. The Hungarian film is about a man and his life in a concentration camp. The film can be considered an author film, and it follows the protagonist in a first person manner. We are living the experience of the camp through his eyes. In this way, the film does not try to represent the Holocaust in a perverse manner, and this is probably why Lanzmann has seen it.

2.3 Armenian genocide and *prememory*

The Armenian genocide is not an easy subject to address, especially because it has yet to be recognized. Although there are some documentaries on the subject, not a lot of narrative films have been made. This means that there is not a lot of research on the place the Armenian Genocide holds in film. This is why we will attribute it the stage of *prememory*.

Contrary to *postmemory*, *prememory* would be the very beginning of the work of memory around the Armenian Genocide. This leads to a very important question: Is it even possible to start this work of memory while Turkey continues to deny the events of

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ <http://www.telerama.fr/festival-de-cannes/2015/claude-lanzmann-le-fils-de-saul-est-l-anti-liste-de-schindler,127045.php>

1915? If the Genocide is not recognized, it leads to an issue of freedom of speech just like Akin mentioned about his work. The Armenian Genocide is still a political taboo and its representation is very problematic. Therefore, we feel that it is crucial to start this work of memory whether the Genocide is recognized or not. Akin's film is a first step in that direction especially given the fact that he has a Turkish background. His film is a step in breaking the silence.

2.3.1 Atom Egoyan

Up to now, the genres that have been used to talk about it have been the documentary and fiction film. *Ararat* (2002) by director Atom Egoyan is said to be the first film about the Armenian genocide. Egoyan is an Armenian born in Egypt who grew up in Canada. The director has a long list of work to his name, which includes films like *Where the Truth Lies* (2005) and *The Captive* (2014). His most recent film *Remember* (2015) is also about genocide, which we will overview at the end of this subchapter.

In the book *Film and Genocide*, a whole chapter is dedicated to Egoyan, in which we can read: "Atom Egoyan's film *Ararat* (2002) is the first to address the Armenian Genocide in great detail, even though the director prefers to see it less as a historical account of the events than as a meditation on the question of denial and its repercussions."⁵⁹ His films are thus not directly about the genocide but about the people that are left behind. Through fiction films, he explores the way the Armenian diaspora deals with the repercussions of the genocide in their everyday lives. Again, we felt strongly about mentioning the work of Egoyan but since he is not the subject of our research, we will not go further in the analysis of his work.

⁵⁹ Wilson, *Film & Genocide*, 88.

His new film, titled *Remember*, was released in 2015. *Remember* is a Canadian-German drama about a Holocaust survivor that follows the stories of seniors in a nursing home. As we can assume from the title of the film, it is about memory of the Holocaust. It is interesting to see this subject being treated by an Armenian, who also has a genocidal background. It would be interesting to put his work in relation to Akin's work and see how their specific backgrounds allow them to deal with such themes. Since Akin grew up in a country that has worked and is still working through its approach to genocide, and Egoyan comes from a country that is still trying to get recognition. One can wonder how this has shaped them as filmmakers.

2.4 The Western and genocide

Being so stereotyped and part of popular culture, the Western genre can seem like an odd choice to represent the Armenian Genocide. Before we start analysing the film *The Cut*, this last part of our chapter on genocide and film will serve as an introduction to genocide already being part of the themes of the Western. The tensions between Cowboys and Indians is not something that is surprising when watching a Western, but in most films it is not intense enough to remind the viewer about ethnic cleansing. It can often be regarded as any other duality.

2.4.1 *Soldier Blue* by Ralph Nelson

In the book *Film & Genocide*, the chapter that deals with this matter takes the example of the film *Soldier Blue* (1970) by Ralph Nelson. While this chapter deals with “coloniality” and “postcoloniality”, the example of *Soldier Blue* is in a section that is about massacre and movies. While these “massacres” are not referred to as genocides, “The destruction of indigenous peoples throughout America represents one of the greatest

and most extensive human catastrophes in history.”⁶⁰ The author elaborates on the use of the word genocide: “Given this, it is important that care is taken when employing the term genocide relative to colonial expansion: each and every claim must be assessed individually and on its merits.”⁶¹ We feel strongly about these specifications, mainly because our research is also dealing with a sensitive subject that needs to be addressed carefully. This, however, means that the last thing we want to do is write about other traumatic historical events in an insensitive manner.

Going back to *Soldier Blue*, it is the first film to address the Sand Creek massacre: “It was a fictionalized treatment of the events leading up to, and culminating in, the massacre; and it was a stinging indictment of white American expansion into Native American lands during the nineteenth century.”⁶² The film is a revisionist Western and probably one of the most violent ever made. Loosely based on the events of 1864 in the Territory of Colorado, Americans are presented in this film as monsters: “It is unique within its genre because it was the first Western of its kind to really paint the army as inherently evil.”⁶³ Our goal here is not to analyse the content of the aesthetic of this film, but to present it as proof that the Western genre is one that already deals with subject matter like massacres and genocides.

We have already started using Ford’s *The Searchers* as an example in our research. While this film is not as violent visually as *Soldier Blue*, it is a film “which showed that indiscriminate white racist obsession could be destructive – and totally

⁶⁰ Ibid., 110.

⁶¹ Ibid., 110.

⁶² Ibid., 116.

⁶³ Ibid., 119.

unacceptable.”⁶⁴ The massacre might be happening off-screen in the film, but “there is a direct confrontation with the fact that the origin of the territorial United States rests on a virulent racism and genocidal war against aboriginal peoples, a war that would not have been possible without the racist hatred of characters like the John Wayne character.”⁶⁵ What Pippin is referring to here is the birth of political order through violence. This is also something that we will be able to relate to *The Cut* by trying to figure out what has come out of the violence of the Armenian Genocide. This is something that Janet Walker also acknowledges when speaking about *The Searchers* as being a “traumatic” Western, which we have seen in Chapter 1.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 119.

⁶⁵ Pippin, *Hollywood Westerns*, 104.

Chapter 3

***The Cut* and the western myths**

The Cut by Fatih Akin is the third and last film of the *Liebe, Tod und Teufel* trilogy. The choice of working on the film *The Cut* by Akin is justified by itself. The film, which dates from 2014, is of great interest because of its recent release. Moreover, as already mentioned, its release on DVD⁶⁶ coincides with the centennial of the Armenian Genocide, which made the headlines in the past year mainly because Turkey and several other countries still refuse to recognize it. It is the only film of its kind, so no other film could have been chosen to link the Western genre and the Armenian Genocide. In addition to its contemporaneity, the fact that Akin is a German-Turkish director gives us the opportunity to make a direct correlation with the Holocaust and its representation in relation to the representation of the Armenian genocide, which is still in a state of *prememory*, like we have discussed in the previous chapter. This brings us to the core of our research project: why Fatih Akin chose the western genre to address the issue of the Armenian Genocide in his film *The Cut*. As mentioned above, the western genre, which is widely known, is a genre that is very codified and typical in addressing specific subjects. This is why it is extremely important to try to understand what has pushed Akin to use it, and see if it is treating the subject of the Armenian Genocide in an appropriate manner.

⁶⁶ *The Cut* was released on DVD in April 2015, and translated into many languages, including Armenian. The Pomegranate Film Festival organized the only viewing that occurred in Montreal. It is a festival that celebrates the Armenian film and culture. To my surprise, the film was not showed in its original version, but in the Armenian translation with no subtitles. Before finding out about this event, I had contacted the Montreal Turkish Film Festival, that had informed me that the film would not be a part of their program because it was a “German” film.

If we go back to Josef Früchtl's book *The Impertinent Self*, we can read his definition of a myth in a linguistic point of view, saying that "mythical" means something akin to "legendary", "phenomenal" ("epic" and "incredible"), "conceptually ungraspable," "fundamentally meaningful," "timeless".⁶⁷ This definition makes it possible to extend the notion of myth and use it in our analysis. Even though the Armenian genocide is clearly not a myth, the myth as an epic event can be found as the genocide in Akin's film: "The myth is an autonomous, irreducible form of the human self-comprehension, equal to religion, art, science, and – employ Cassirer – language, ultimately technology. It cannot be translated completely into one of the other forms of self-comprehension, nor can it be "overcome"."⁶⁸ The timelessness of this story is hinted from the very beginning, the film's first scene being a subhead that reads "Es war Einmal, es war Keinmal" which can be translated to "Once upon a time, Once upon no time". Alongside the genocide itself, many other elements can be found in the film that relate it to the Western, such as the hero, its landscapes, the myth of the frontier and the title, which has a large connotation to the genre.

In this chapter, we will be deconstructing western myths as closed concepts and using them to analyse the film *The Cut* as a Western. Again, it is imperative to remember that we are not analysing the film in a comparative manner, but by working with key elements of the Western genre. This chapter will thus be divided in five sub-chapters, starting with a synopsis of the film. We will then focus our analysis on four main aspects that are crucial in the categorizing of this film as a Western. This analysis will also make

⁶⁷ Früchtl, *Impertinent Self*, 20.

⁶⁸ Früchtl, *Impertinent Self*, 23.

it possible to dig deeper and try to understand how Fatih Akin is depicting the Armenian genocide and what message he is trying to bring across with this epic film.

3.1 Synopsis

Set in 1915, *The Cut* tells the story of Nazareth, an Armenian blacksmith who lives a peaceful life with his wife, his two daughters Lucinée and Arsinée, and his extended family in the small town of Mardin. The story starts with Nazareth at work, who then leaves at the end of the day to go to his church to confess his anger about the war. Afterwards, Nazareth Manoogian walks his twin daughters back from school, asking them about geography. While seeing a crane in the sky, Nazareth tells his daughters it means that they will set out on a long journey. At dinner, the whole family discusses the disappearance of men in the village. Later that night, soldiers force Nazareth and his brother to leave with them.

They are forced, with other Armenian men, to work in the desert and build roads. On their way to the camp where they are to be held, they see women and children being taken away, while one of the women is raped. After being told by an ambassador of the Sultan that men who convert to Islam will be pardoned, they wake up in the camp with no soldiers in sight. Just when we thought that it was over, the soldiers come back and lead the prisoners to their deaths. Their throats are slit while they are kneeling down, but Nazareth survives because his executor, a Turk named Mehmet, stabs him in the neck instead of slitting his throat. He plays dead until Mehmet comes back at night to give him water and help him escape.

They come across a group of deserters and that is when Nazareth learns that his vocal cords were cut and that he is no longer able to speak. The deserters attack and rob a carriage that belongs to a rich client that Nazareth worked for in the first scene of the film. He begs Nazareth to let him and his family through, telling him that there is a city nearby with survivors but the deserters rob them anyway. Nazareth then decides to leave the group to head to the city in the hopes of finding his family. The three-day-long walk leaves him dehydrated and he falls to the ground, only waking up after his wife appears in a dream and tells him to.

On his way, Nazareth encounters a group of men that will help him reach the city of Ras al'Ayn. When he gets to the refugee camp, he finds his brother's wife Ani who is on the verge of death. Before asking Nazareth to relieve her of her suffering, she tells him that the entire family has passed away. It is only late at night that he will find the courage to strangle her, not without feeling anger. When he leaves the camp, he comes across train tracks and jumps on a train, on which he will ride all night.

In the morning, the wagons are searched so Nazareth jumps off and lands in the desert. He is later found, starving and dying of thirst, by a soap manufacturer named Omar Nasreddin. He takes him to his town of Aleppo, where his soap factory is. He takes Nazareth in and in exchange he works for Omar, where he will meet another Armenian, Krikor. In November 1918, the war ends and Turkish soldiers occupying Aleppo are forced to withdraw while the people throw stones at them. Later that night, Nazareth attends a viewing of Charlie Chaplin's film *The Kid*. It is at that moment that he will meet his former apprentice Levon who informs him that his two daughters survived. This will

be the beginning of Nazareth's journey to find the two girls. After looking through newspapers, a refugee will suggest that he looks in orphanages.

After leaving Krikor and Omar, his first stop will be at an orphanage in Lebanon. His visit will confirm that his daughters are alive and in good health, apart from Lucinée who is now limping because of a serious accident during the death march. The mathematic teacher of the orphanage arranged for the twins to be married to Armenian men in Cuba. Nazareth decides to find work on a boat and make his way to Cuba.

When he arrives, he learns from a barber named Hagob Nakashian that one of the men refused to marry Lucinée because of her limp, and therefore Arsinée rejected the engagement with the second man to stay with her sister. Both girls left together to find work in a textile factory in Minnesota. Hagob learns by telegram that the twins are no longer in Minnesota, and no one knows where they went. Later, at a church service, Hagob's wife points out the men that would not marry his limping daughter. Nazareth knocks the man down and steals his money, which he uses to pay his way to Florida on a boat of smugglers, arranged by Hagob.

When he arrives in Florida, American men who were waiting for the boat to arrive tell him how to get to Minnesota. On his way, Nazareth passes a house where he sees a chicken. When he tries to steal it, the owner comes running after him with a gun. He is able to get away and jumps on a train yet again. Nazareth will arrive at the textile factory, but no one will have any information for him about his daughters. Frustrated, he takes a job working for a railway company.

By 1923, he is in North Dakota. After being beaten by his co-workers for trying to save a woman that they were trying to rape, Nazareth is left unconscious on the train

tracks. While the cold threatens to kill him, his now adult daughters apart to him, just like his wife did in the first part, and they encourage him to stand up again. On his way, he discovers a house where Armenians live. He shows them a picture of his daughters. They cannot help him, but inform him that there is a city called Ruso close by where more Armenians live.

The next day, Nazareth reaches the city and sees a limping woman far away. He has found his daughter Lucinée. They fall into each other's arms and Nazareth can miraculously speak again. He asks the girl about her sister and she tells him that she died the year before. They visit her grave together and the film ends with a long walk into the unknown.

3.2 The hero

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the figure of the hero is very important in the Western genre. Up to now we have seen that the hero is not only a part of the narrative of the Western, but of the production itself. We could also go as far as affirming that without Nazareth, there is no *The Cut*. He is the lifeblood of this narrative. We have also seen that the genre likes to play on the fame of certain actors and directors, which we can also link to the hero. If we take note of the fact that Akin decided to cast a well-known French actor for the main role of his film, we can compare the film not only to classic Westerns, but also to Früchtl's notion of the hero as an actor: "Not only does the actor play a hero, but vice versa the (portrayed) hero is also an actor, wishing to fit a role and an image of himself. Notably going against conventional and morally diffused opinion, the definition of a hero thus includes the fact that he is an actor, parading a heroism."⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Früchtl, *Impertinent Self*, 155.

What this says about heroes is that they are constantly playing a role in order to be heroic. We will draw on this thought to continue our analysis of Nazareth as a hero. We will divide the protagonist's heroism into four different roles, which will be the father, the survivor, the worker and the traveller.

To quote Früchtl once more, he says: "Regarding the hero, adventure stories are obviously no match for Westerns. [...] The Western delivers a genre in which the heroic figure as described by Hegel can celebrate its modern resurrection."⁷⁰ Früchtl applies Hegel's hero theory to the Western genre in his book *The Impertinent Self*, a genre that had not yet been invented at the time. He is therefore transferring his theory onto the genre.

A film like Akin's *The Cut* is not only a Western but also a tragedy, another genre that Akin used in his trilogy with *Gegen die Wand*. "[...] tragedy is therefore for Hegel the ideal place for heroism to unfold; notwithstanding the tragedies that occur in reality."⁷¹ Tragedy can also lead to pity in some cases. If we think about the notion of hero in a Post-western manner, Nazareth can be seen in much different light:

Seen out of his time and place, the Western hero seems an incongruous figure. Depending on the dramatic use to which he may be put, he can be variously seen as vulnerable and pathetic or dangerous and anarchic, an upholder of cherished traditional values of the embodiment of outmoded ways which linger menacingly on, a challenge to modern conformity of the incarnation of a past that must be rejected.⁷²

When faced with a heroic figure, we often tend to analyse it only in context and forget to study it as an entity of its own. With this in mind, we will now analyse Nazareth's journey as being reminiscent of the utmost classic Westerns.

3.2.1 Nazareth the Father

⁷⁰ Früchtl, *Impertinent Self*, 49-50.

⁷¹ Früchtl, *Impertinent Self*, 41.

⁷² French, *Westerns: Aspects of a Movie Genre*, 139.

After leaving his church after a confession, we see Nazareth walking in the village on his way to pick up his twin daughters. A light and joyful music accompanies the scene in which he is presented as the perfect father. This part of the soundtrack clashes with the heaviness of the introduction scene. While walking he quizzes his daughters on geography right after they give him a handkerchief embroidered with his name. The trio seems happy and peaceful. The camera follows a crane in the sky and Nazareth tells his daughters that when someone sees a crane, it means that they will be going on a very long journey. The twins then ask if it will be the three of them, and their dad confirms. This constitutes the first moment that we can qualify the protagonist as a hero. He incarnates good, and we can already see that this is a man who is ready to do anything for his children. At this point, he does not know that he will in fact go on the biggest and most difficult journey of his life.

The problem with this journey is that it will not be the one that is expected from this scene. The way that he tells his daughters about the legend of the crane, we expect the trio to stay together and not to be separated by the awful events that are to come. It is important to mention, that if Akin had not started his film with an introduction on the Armenian Genocide, as we will see in the next part of this chapter, there could've been an element of suspense in the announcement of this journey. When Nazareth is taken away from his family, he tells them that he will be back soon, and that everything will be fine. This is a perfect example of "playing the hero", as Nazareth has to appear strong for his family to feel safe.

Since the stereotypical hero is usually a man with good morals going on a journey, Akin uses this type of hero. Again, Akin is detaching himself from his usual

filmmaking techniques and narratives as this big budget film follows the typical Hollywood narrative. Like we have seen in the synopsis, Nazareth, who has lost his voice for the most part of the film, is miraculously able to speak once he finds his long lost daughter.

3.2.2 Nazareth, the Survivor

Surviving the Armenian Genocide will be Nazareth's biggest accomplishment, if we can use such a word to describe it. After being taken away from his family, Nazareth is put to work in a camp in the desert to build roads. We will get to the scene of the execution right away, since we have already seen in the synopsis what happens between then.

While this scene might be the most horrific of the film, it just could be the most important one. Akin draws on the Armenian Genocide for his narrative, but this is the only time that it will be represented in all of its cruelty. After having hoped to escape after the guards leave them for a night, the prisoners are taken on a walk that will lead them to their deaths. In the middle of nowhere, they are told to kneel down and the guards are instructed to slit their throats. The scene is slow and horrible to watch, enough to make us feel the protagonist's agony for a split second. While the other men fall like flies, Nazareth is still alive and waiting for his fate. The guard in charge of killing him has clearly never killed before. He is hesitant and his conscience is telling him what he his doing is wrong but the pressure from his superiors and the threat of dying at their hands is enough to make him obey. In his obedience he is still not strong enough to kill. Instead of slitting Nazareth's throat, he jabs the knife in his throat and the protagonist falls to the ground. While the other guards are going through to dead prisoners' personal

belongings to steal whatever is valuable before leaving, Mehmet, the guard that stabbed Nazareth, notices that he is still alive. He quickly runs towards him, telling the others that he is “his”. This is his way of repenting himself, by giving Nazareth a chance to live. He comes back that same night to help him escape, and this displays a double use of the hero.

Not only is Nazareth a hero by surviving the Armenian Genocide, Mehmet is a hero for allowing him to live. Of course, it is with a certain ambiguity that we give Mehmet the title of hero. At first, the fact that he is unable to kill Nazareth can be perceived as a cowardly act, depending on the side that we are on. To see it as a heroic act, we need to be on Nazareth’s side, opposite the Turks. This is what will allow his journey to start and end the first part of the film.

3.2.3 Nazareth, the Worker

When taken in by Omar in Aleppo, Nazareth works for him in his soap factory. When they approach the village, Nazareth hides from the Turkish guards to enter. Once in the safety of the factory, his new boss puts him to work. The music from the beginning of the film, when Nazareth was happily walking with his daughters, starts again. We can observe lightness in our protagonist, which would not be expected after losing his entire family. It is in a heroic manner that he goes on with life before finding out that his daughters are alive. In this particular narrative, there might be a reason why Akin chose to have his character be found by a soap manufacturer.

There are two metaphors that could be elaborated around the soap. The first one could be about our protagonist, Nazareth. Working in the soap factory could be a way of showing that the protagonist is being cleaned of his past and is starting a new life. Up to

this point, like we have just mentioned, he is not aware that his daughters are still alive. After the end of the war in 1918, he attends a viewing of Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid* and before he is reminded of his daughters by the film, he seems happy. His time at the soap factory can be seen as Nazareth's way of making a fresh start before embarking on the biggest and longest journey of his life.

The other metaphor that can be found in this choice of having the protagonist be found by a soap manufacturer could be a comment by Akin on the role of the Turks in the Armenian Genocide and its denial. Soap can hint to Turkey washing its hands clean of this genocide. Akin is not one to refrain about expressing his opinions and this might be continuity in the way he expresses his discontent with the fate of the Armenian people and the continued denial of the Armenian Genocide by many countries.

3.2.4 Nazareth, the Traveller

In what can be qualified as part two of the film, Nazareth embarks on a journey to find his twin daughters. This journey will take him from Lebanon, to Cuba and finally to the United States. The quest being set in the 1920s can be reminiscent of the struggles of the hero's of the Westerns. If we think about Ethan in Ford's *The Searchers* and his quest to find his niece Debbie, travelling was a big part of his journey. Even though Nazareth relies on more than a horse and can count on the use of trains and boats, he is still travelling the world over a period of several years to find his daughters.

With this journey, he is not only looking for his children, but he is also giving us an overview of the Armenian diaspora. After the war, surviving Armenians relocated themselves all over the world: "A hero is not only someone who aids the breakthrough of a new world, a new form of living and thinking, but also someone who does so in

irreconcilable and hopeless confrontation with the old world, prepared to defend his views to the death.”⁷³ He is traveling towards a new life, but always keeping his Armenian background, of which he cannot escape. Since he is looking for his daughters, he must follow the path of the Armenian people that have left before him to be able to track them down.

This takes us back to the notion of individuality and universality of the hero in mythical or violent times.⁷⁴ Nazareth is not only fighting for his personal gain, but also for the Armenian community and the diaspora that is being created. It is the same as when we think of him being a hero for surviving the genocide; he is representing all of the survivors, not only himself. Yes, Akin is telling the story of a father but, with *The Cut*, he is also telling the story of every single survivor.

3.3 The landscapes

Landscapes are essential characteristics of the Western mainly because of their beauty and their familiarity. Since Westerns are set in a specific time and place, the virgin territories in which they are shot make them easily recognizable. What is interesting about the classic Western is that “America’s geography made it possible for Americans to keep reenacting the core element of the American myth – a new beginning.”⁷⁵ In Fatih Akin’s case, he was obligated to find other places to shoot his films since he did not have access to the necessary parts of Turkey, as we have mentioned before. This is why a big part of the film was shot in Jordan. Before getting to the setting of the film *The Cut*, we will start by analysing the very first scene of the movie, which is not typical for a contemporary film.

⁷³ Früchtl, *Impertinent Self*, 40-41.

⁷⁴ Früchtl, *Impertinent Self*, 36.

⁷⁵ Pippin, *Hollywood Westerns*, 23.

3.3.1 An Introduction to Genocide

While we could have expected a panoramic shot of a desert or of the town of Mardin, in Turkey, the film starts with a long introduction sequence composed of text and a map. While Fatih Akin claims to be telling the story of a man like himself and that the focus is not only the Armenian genocide, he reminds us in his comments of his use of Turkish immigration in the first two films of the trilogy. Akin leaves nothing to the imaginary. The film start with this text written in white on a black screen:

**ES WAR EINMAL,
ES WAR KEINMAL,**

**NACH JAHRHUNDERTELANGER HERRSCHAFT,
BEFAND SICH DAS OSMANISCHE REICH IM NIEDERGANG**

**IN EINEM VERZWEIFELTEN VERSUCH
VERLORENE GEBIETE ZURÜCK ZU EROBERN,
VERBÜNDETEN SICH DIE OSMANEN IM ERSTEN WELTKRIEG
MIT DEUTSCHLAND UND ÖSTERREICH-UNGARN.**

**MINDERHEITEN IM REICH
WURDEN ÜBER NACHT ZU FEINDEN ERKLÄRT**

Afterwards, the shot changes to a map of Europe in the early nineteen hundreds and zooms in on the Ottoman Empire. For a mere two seconds, there is a screenshot where we can clearly see the emplacement of the cities of Mardin, Aleppo and Ras al'Ayn. The map fades into a pile of burning coal. From the burning coal we move to a close up of the work of a blacksmith, seeing only his tools and the burning metal. This scene ends on the screen going back to black, with the title *The Cut* written in bold red letters. The entire opening scene is accompanied by a heavy and sombre music that foreshadows the dark times ahead.

With this opening, Fatih Akin is taking the viewer by the hand. The text at the very beginning is a brief introduction to the Armenian Genocide and the setting of the film. It is the same with the map. This gives us a feeling that Akin does not trust the viewer to understand his film or that he does not think that the viewer will have the necessary knowledge of the historical background. The close up on the coal is, however, very clever on his part. Anyone who knows that the film is the third of a trilogy about love, death and evil will immediately make the connection with the theme of the movie, which in German is *Teufel*, the devil. This is also the first hint that Akin was trying to make a film that could reach an international crowd. It does not go without reminding us of bigger Hollywood productions that have a tendency to infantilize their viewers.

Even though the first scene of the film does not show any landscapes, we feel like it was a necessary first step in our analysis mainly because of the link that can be made with the very first words that can be read, which we have already written about: “Es war einmal, es war keinmal”. Even as Akin starts by telling the viewer that this story could’ve happened anytime and anywhere, he then gives us very specific information to make sure that we associate the events with the Armenian Genocide. This leads us to the landscapes seen in the film that are very close to the ones we could observe in any Westerns, which is probably why Akin felt the need to specify where the story takes place, because if judged only by looking at the scenery, the location could be ambiguous.

3.3.2 The Deportation

The first scene that we will be looking at in terms of analysing the landscapes is the march of death, which occurs in the first part of the film about the Armenian Genocide. Like we have mentioned before when speaking of Ford’s *The Searchers*, their

is a visual leitmotiv of a cut in the film, just like there is the leitmotiv of the scar in the latter. When looking at scenes in the desert in *The Searches*, a visual scar can be seen that separates the different territories. This scar leitmotiv could take its origin in Navajo weaving, a pattern that can be observed many times in the film. This cut in the film is also part of the editing. The different takes are short, and the camera, still.

In *The Cut*, we can observe the same kind of fragment. Throughout the scenes where the prisoners are in the desert, the desert landscapes create a cut between the ground and the sky. The ground is bland, colourless and dry and does not inspire life, as opposed to what we can see of the sky, always blue and full of hope. Thinking back to the beginning of the film, the sky is where we see the crane that foreshadows a journey that we now know will end up being a positive one. When the prisoners are asked to kneel down before they are killed, they do so in the shape of a crooked line. When the camera takes a shot of the dead bodies on the ground later that night, the line that they make can be seen as a cut in the desert. It has the same shape as the mountains nearby and again this is very reminiscent of the “scars” in *The Searches*.

These grand scenes are a wonderful opportunity to observe Akin’s filmmaking influences. The way he catches the light is reminiscent of Terrence Malick, an American director who inspired him. Malick, famous for his splendid cinematography, is known to use light to his advantage. Akin follows in his footsteps, always trying to have it behind them when filming. This gives depth to the scenes that are, again, still. It is very rare for Akin to follow his characters with the camera. This might be what saves this film visually as the still frames taken from a distance add splendour to the cinematography.

To these landscapes, we can also add the sounds that they bring. Taking place in the same category of settings as the Western, we can hear the wind, the cracking sound of the sand underneath their feet and also the neigh of the horses. If these particular scenes of the film were playing in the background and someone asked to determine the genre by what you can hear, the first thing that would probably come to their mind would be the Western. This is probably one of the main reasons why Fatih Akin decided to work with the Western genre as opposed to an other one; because the periods are very similar, even if a few decades apart. We are still at the beginning of modernity which makes it easy to blend Akin's story into a genre like the Western, generally very codified due to its historical settings. The director is striving for a classic Hollywood look and what better way to pay homage to his idols than to work with the American genre par excellence.

3.3.3 A Walk Into the Unknown

The very last scene of the film, after Nazareth finds Lucinée and visits Arsinée's grave, ends with a walk into the unknown. The two of them leave together and walk towards the horizon in an empty field, partially covered with snow. After a few seconds, the scene turns into the closing generic that continues over the two characters walking. The camera stays still while Nazareth and his daughter walk away from us. Until the screen goes black, we never lose sight of them. They are not disappearing into the unknown, but walking towards it. While the wide-screen cinematography was representing the space between Nazareth and his daughters, it now represents their future. This closing scene adds to the epic side of the film as it is grand and bold, and not without significance. This scene can easily remind us of Wim Wenders, who we have used as an example for the post-western in Chapter 2. If we think back on why Wenders

said he used the Western genre, it was for the beauty of its landscapes and the way they can represent a quest for a lost identity.

Robert B. Pippin says about Westerns and more specifically about Red River that: “We are shown that there are very wide open spaces in this setting and, so it would appear, room to avoid such questions, room for some psychological and social distance between such political citizens.”⁷⁶ This concept of empty spaces appearing as room to avoid questions can easily be transposed to the case of the film *The Cut*. At the end of the film, we are dealing with what can be seen as a huge life crisis. The wide-screen photography also gives a sweeping sense of the vast distances that are separating the father from his daughters. Yes, Nazareth will reunite with his daughter, and yes, he will have thus “completed” his quest, but what do they have to look forward to?

This walk towards the unknown alludes to the faith of the Armenian diaspora. These people, who were forced into migration, now have to start over. In the case of Nazareth, he has lost the people he loves, he was brutalised and he was forced to travel across the world to reunite with his daughter. This brings up questions of belonging and identity, which we will explore in Chapter 4. These questions are common to the Western genre and to the German *Heimatfilm*. We will use this scene in our last chapter to make a connection between the three parts of the *Liebe, Tod und Teufel* trilogy, using the concepts of *Heimat* and identity. While the first two films have nothing to do with the Western, we feel like it is elemental to determine how the three films are connected to one another in this trilogy. Making a link between the Western genre and the *Heimatfilm* allows us to find a common thread that goes deeper than aesthetics.

⁷⁶ Pippin, *Hollywood Westerns*, 5.

3.4 The frontier

Like we have seen in our previous chapter on the Western, the frontier is part of the essence of the genre. One of the main characteristics of the genre is it being about the foundation of the United States of America and its frontiers, which we have already started discussing with the American Western:

Westerns are movies about a frontier that is merely a natural and geographical frontier, nor only a social and sociopsychological frontier. Its import, or even its national import, when seen through the eyes of U.S.-Americans, is far more the result of a different level altogether, namely, the *mythical* level. Westerns are movies about the frontier (of America), about confrontation (with the existent, the different, the new) in its mythical dimension, ultimately movies about the individual in its mythical dimension.⁷⁷

It will thus be imperative to use the myth as a mean to analyze this film as much in its visual aspects as in its story and we cannot define it as a Western without defining how the frontier plays a part in its construction. Our goal will be to justify our theory, in which the Armenian genocide serves as a frontier in *The Cut*, and can be compared to the struggle that is the American frontier in Westerns. We will also be coming back to Robert B. Pippin's notion of the birth of political order through violence, and to Janet Walker's "traumatic" Western. Both of the ideas can be transposed to Fatih Akin's *The Cut*, due to its political and historical subject.

3.4.1 A Constant Battle

As eluded in our introduction, Josef Früchtl has based this concept on the linguistic aspect of the verb *to front*. This is exactly what will allow us to see the Armenian Genocide as the metaphorical frontier in the film *The Cut*. The Armenian Genocide is what is being confronted by Nazareth and what fuels the narrative of the film. Without the genocide, the protagonist would not embark on a journey to find his

⁷⁷ Früchtl, *Impertinent Self*, 20.

daughters, therefore would not be said a hero and would not travel to the other side of the world. The frontier really is the start of seeing this film as a Western: “Its most prominent guise is individualism, the figure of the individual who defies the challenges of nature and history and remains true to himself. The noun *frontier* comes from the same root as the verb *to front*.”⁷⁸ This is what allows us to see the frontier as something that can be a metaphor, and does not need to be physical.

During the entire film, Nazareth will be going against the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide. Without this event, there is no *The Cut*. Since the entire film is based on Nazareth finding his daughters, and his daughters would not be in America without the genocide, the metaphorical frontier is the most important part of the film. At first, this is not something that we would’ve thought possible since the film is not about representing the genocide. It can be seen as a narrative that gives a setting to Akin’s story about a father, since he implies in the interview that it is a story about a man like himself, a simple one. It also brings us back to the notion of universality present in and around the film because, not only does Nazareth represent the victims of the Armenian genocide, he represents a man that has lost his family and children.

3.4.2 Politics of Space

It is safe to say that through the violent times represented in the Westerns, came the birth of political order, the birth of the United States as we know it. In the case of Fatih Akin’s *The Cut*, what came out of it is not as clear. We will base our connection on the use of territory in Westerns: “The principle they demonstrate is that of territorial expansion. The country also appears to be “without frontiers” as a *social space*. The

⁷⁸ Ibid., 20.

constraints of civilization, the constricting stipulations of morality, rights and the law, here have no validity (yet).”⁷⁹

Even though *The Cut* does not refer to a specific and restrained space, we can substitute the use of a country in classic Westerns for the world in the case of this film. At first, his story is taking place in his hometown. But once Nazareth leaves Turkey, it is the world that appears to be without frontiers. This process represents the creation of the Armenian diaspora. On his journey, Nazareth encounters different groups of Armenians that live in very different parts of the world. While what happened in 1915 is a horrible event, not to mention a violent one, it has permitted the expansion of the Armenian community, as they spread world-wide and had to adapt and recreate their home elsewhere. This can be linked to the concept of *Heimat* which is present in the two first films of the trilogy.

3.5 The title

The Cut is not only the title of Akin’s latest film, but also a cut that serves as a leitmotiv⁸⁰ in the film itself. According to the online Oxford dictionary, a cut is to “make an opening, incision, or wound in (something) with a sharp-edged tool or object or to remove (something) from something larger by using a sharp implement.”⁸¹

The title serves as a first insight into the theme of the movie, the Armenian genocide, which is the cause of many cuts, literal and physical. First, the title of the third film is in English, which is the first cut that can be noticed. It is not a translation of a

⁷⁹ Ibid., 19.

⁸⁰ A leitmotiv is a recurring theme in a musical piece or in a novel that can also be applied to film, which we will explore as *l’esthétique du motif* of Emanuelle André.

⁸¹ This definition is from the Oxford online dictionary.

German title, like some might think, but its original title. If we look at the two first films of the trilogy, *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*, the original titles are in German and were later on translated to *Head On* and *The Edge of Heaven*, respectively. What might seem like a detail is a first step in distinguishing this movie from its predecessors. Not only is the original title in English, but also the film itself is mainly in English and in Turkish, which is a first for Akin, who usually takes pride in making multilingual films⁸². The director is known for his linguistic diversity, which would qualify his cinema as multinational, since it doesn't adhere to Hamid Naficy's "accented cinema" which is an aesthetic response to exile, migration and diaspora, and he admits himself that Akin does not belong to this category⁸³.

"The cinema discussed here derives its accent from its artisanal and collective production modes and from the filmmakers' and audiences' deterritorialized locations. Consequently, not all accented films are exilic and diasporic, but all exilic and diasporic films are accented. If in linguistics accent pertains only to pronunciation, leaving grammar and vocabulary intact, exilic and diasporic accent permeates the film's deep structure: its narrative, visual style, characters, subject matter, theme, and plot."⁸⁴

His cinema is thus multinational, mainly because it is not an answer to exile. Akin plays with the main characteristics of accented cinema but without it being reactionary to his situation. It serves as a theme for his oeuvre and as a means of representation. This is one of the reasons why the lack of linguistic accuracy in this film is so shocking. Communication or problems related to communication are usually put forward as a

⁸² The reason why the film *The Cut* is not mainly in Armenian is because Akin does not speak the language, and he wanted to have full control on the dialogues. It might also have something to do with the fact that Tahar Rahim is a French actor, and does not speak Armenian. When he speaks English, it is clear that it is not his mother tongue. It would be interesting to find out if Akin decided to make his protagonist mute before or after he casted Rahim.

⁸³ In the summer of 2015, I had the honor of taking part in a seminar taught by Hamid Naficy at the Summer Institute Cologne on migrant cinema. I had the chance to speak with Naficy about Akin's work, and this is how our work group came to the conclusion that Fatih Akin is part of a multinational cinema and not accented, since his cinema is not a direct response to exile or migration, since he was born in Germany.

⁸⁴ Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2001), 23.

means to overcome a linguistic barrier, but in this case we are left with a mute protagonist that understands Turkish and Arabic but speaks English.

If we go back to the example of Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, it shouldn't be so shocking for the film to be in English: "I used the concept that Polanski used in "The Pianist," where he made all the Polish characters speak English and the Germans speak German, making English a language of identification. It's a clear concept, but it's surprising for some people because they're used to my films in German and Turkish. But this film is more about the whole world. It's not set in a minimalistic frame."⁸⁵ Almost all American films about historical events are filmed in English, not in the appropriate language. What can be irritating when a European film does the same is that we might have the feeling that they can easily have access to the resources to keep a certain authenticity. In this case, we need to keep in mind that Akin was trying to make a film that can be considered mainstream compared to his earlier work, and the easiest way to make a film that can be accessible to all is to make it in English.

3.5.1 Symbolic Cuts

The title can also easily remind us of Ford's *The Searchers*, which plays with the leitmotiv of the scar. This is something that Emmanuelle André refers to as *l'esthétique du motif*. What this essentially is is something that runs through the film⁸⁶. It can be an image, an object of a theme that is repeated throughout. It is meant as a tribute to the genre, which is close to Akin's heart. Whether it is in the story or in the images, the scar is omnipresent in *The Searchers*. Not only is Scar the name of the chief of the

⁸⁵ Interview with the New York Times about the release of the film *The Cut*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/27/arts/international/fatih-akin-on-his-new-film-the-cut.html>

⁸⁶ André, Emmanuelle. *Esthétique du motif: Cinéma musique peinture*. (Saint-Denis, Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2007).

Comanches, it is also recurrent as a visual. It can be observed in the Navajo weaving that is present throughout the film. A scar-like print can be found in this traditional art of the Navajo people. It is also present in the landscapes, like we have seen earlier, through the boundaries between territories. “Scar” could have easily been the name of Akin’s movie, suggested to him when looking for a title for his film whilst in Erevan.

The inspiration for the title came from a monument to the Armenian Genocide that is situated in Erevan, Armenia. The monument is shaped like a spike, 44 meters high, and represents the rebirth of the Armenian nation. This spike is divided into two distinct parts that overlap and that symbolize the two Armenia’s, the oriental and the occidental. In the monument, we can see a cut that represents the genocide. It is this cut that inspired the title of the film and this is why we used the word literally to qualify Akin’s inspiration.

From the very beginning, we can feel the weight of the title of the film in the story. The protagonist experiences life-changing cuts. The first of these cuts is when he gets taken away from his family, as he is torn from his people and cut from his village. He is forced to leave everyone he loves behind and from then on he will be lead to his death and survive, but not without a scar. A literal cut to his throat will leave him mute and cut from the world and, just like the Armenian people that are still fighting to get the genocide recognized, he his left with no voice.

3.5.2 A Cut in the Trilogy

In a larger sense, the film itself is a cut from the trilogy as Akin moves away from his main subject, the Turkish community in contemporary Germany, and leads us towards the darkest part of Turkey’s history. Akin is known for building bridges between

Germany and Istanbul. *The Cut* enters a whole new chapter in Fatih Akin's career, as the film is an epic that reminds us of Spielberg and Hollywood. This film is what could've been Akin's big break in Hollywood, but unfortunately, or fortunately, wasn't. We would also imply that it is a cut from the trilogy when looking at the way immigration and migrations are portrayed. The first two films were about Turkish immigration to Germany, which was by choice, and the last film is about forced migration due to the Armenian Genocide. Whilst this last fact can serve as a break in the trilogy, it could also be what brings it all together.

Chapter 4

Conclusion:

Post western and genocide

This final chapter of our project will serve as a first attempt to conclude our research. In order to do so, we will concentrate on the use of genre in film. Up to now, we have used the Western genre to analyse the film *The Cut* from Fatih Akin, but another genre can be found in the two first opuses of the trilogy: the *Heimatfilm*. While this typically German genre has been associated with the Western, like with Ford's classic *The Searchers* to mention it one last time, we will use one of the genre's main focuses, which is identity. Exploring notions of identity will be of great use to our analysis. We will then refocus on Fatih Akin and the first two films of the trilogy, *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*. To be able to situate *The Cut* within the trilogy, it is imperative to understand how the other films work together since they seem so different from the last one. While we will be making some connections to the *Heimatfilm* genre, it is important to note that the purpose of this research is not to determine whether *The Cut* by Fatih Akin is a *Heimatfilm* or not, but if it is a Western.

4.1 The Mechanisms of a Genre

In film, a genre is used as a classifying technique. It can be used to organize films through many different aspects, like their narratives, their ideologies or their aesthetic, to name only a few. Films can also be classified through periods, for example gangster films in the 20s. Genre can be used for marketing, because it is a great way to target audiences. Even if this is a classifying technique that can be criticised by film enthusiasts because it can be perceived as reductive, the general public appreciates such a system that allows them to choose a film based on what they have previously enjoyed. It is the same idea as with famous actors or directors used by the Western and many other genres: to sell a film

based on who is starring in it or who has produced it. We have previously mentioned in our analysis that Akin might have used this technique by promoting his film with Tahar Rahim's as his main character.

A genre works with specific codes and mechanisms and this is how we are able to recognize it. The use of a genre also changes the way we interact with film. While a genre is something abstract, it is formed by a multitude of particularities from that said genre: "The genre setting contains not only a set of objects signifying a certain time, place, and milieu; it invokes a set of fundamental assumptions and expectations about the kinds of event that can occur in the setting, the kinds of motive that will operate, the sort of outcome one can predict. If setting does not absolutely determine the story, it at least defines the range of possible plots and treatments."⁸⁷ By analysing a film according to its genre, we are putting it in a box with others from the same category instead of trying to see how it can relate to different genres. By trying to find out how it fits in, we are putting aside other aspects of the film that could be of use to making sense of it.

The Cut has his own homage to genre cinema within itself. At the end of the occupation in November 1918, Nazareth is with his friend and hears a crowd laughing. They are watching a film. His friend tells him not to look because it is the work of the devil and suggests visiting the whorehouse instead. The film that is being shown is Chaplin's *The Kid*. This can be seen both as a reference to genre cinema because Chaplin's work is as identifiable as the Westerns, but also to the medium itself. The only problem with this is that the scene is set in 1918, and *The Kid* was only released in 1921, unusual anachronism for an historical account.

⁸⁷ Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 232.

By concentrating our efforts in finding characteristics of the Western genre in the film *The Cut*, we may have overlooked an important aspect of the film, which is mentioned before: identity. Along with the notion of Heimat, identity is a key element in linking the three films of the *Liebe, Tod und Teufel* trilogy.

4.1.1 The Notion of Genre in Akin's Trilogy

In his *Liebe, Tod und Teufel* trilogy, Fatih Akin uses different genres to tell stories. The two first films, *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*, can be interpreted as *Heimatfilms* and, as we have seen up to now, *The Cut* can be understood to be a Western. Before analyzing the final scenes of the three films, we will have a brief look at the two films, and establish why they have been perceived as *Heimatfilms*.

Gegen die Wand is the first film of Akin's trilogy and represents love. The film tells the story of two Turkish-German protagonists, Cahit and Sibel. Sibel is a young woman who dreams of emancipation. Born in Hamburg to Turkish parents, she lives with her traditional Turkish family but, as we quickly find out, she aspires to freedom, but more specifically sexual freedom. On the other hand, Cahit is a 40 year old alcoholic who works collecting empty bottles in a bar. In the very first scene of the film, we see him crashing his car in a wall. This tragic event leads to his encounter with Sibel in the hospital, where she is detained after slitting her wrists. The film is about two Turkish-Germans trying to find their place in their adoptive country and struggling with their identities and their sense of belonging.

Auf der anderen Seite is the second film of the *Liebe, Tod und Teufel* trilogy and represents death. Nejat is a professor of German philology at the University of Bremen who decides to travel to Turkey after his father, a first generation Turkish

immigrant, kills his girlfriend Yeter, who was a prostitute. He sets out to find Yeter's daughter, Ayten. He wants to pay for Ayten's university, which had so far been financed by her mother in Germany. Being a member of a political opposition group, Ayten flees Turkey after a demonstration and makes her way to Hamburg to find her mother. This is where she will meet Lotte and fall in love. They will travel together to Bremen to find Yeter, not knowing that she has died. Ayten is then deported to Turkey, and Lotte goes to Istanbul to free her. She will die there in an accident, and her mother will go to Istanbul to continue her daughter's mission of freeing Ayten, and this is where she will meet Nejat. This film is a multi-layered film about identity and the politics surrounding it.

Both films can be qualified as *Heimatfilms* because they deal with the struggle of being unsure where one belongs. The protagonists of both films seem to always be in between Germany and Turkey, and they do not feel at home in either one of these countries. By the end of the films, they seem to find peace with where they are. In the last section of this chapter, we will analyse the last scenes of all three movies, which will open a space of discussion about the fact that the notion of *Heimat* can also be found in Akin's *The Cut*.

4.2.3 The Final Scenes

All of the films of the trilogy end on a scene that can keep us guessing. These scenes make us wonder if the protagonists have really found what they were longing for. Nazareth finds his one daughter who survived, but is this enough for him to feel at home again?

In the film *Gegen die Wand*, after a rocky arranged marriage, Cahit and Sibel part ways. At the end of the film, Sibel, who is now married and has had a baby, is living in

Turkey. This is surprising, because Turkey represents everything that she was fighting against throughout the film. But a series of poor choices will make her realise that the conventional life that comes with living in Turkey might just be what she was missing. The same goes for Cahit, who travels to Turkey to his dad's village. The two will meet in a hotel for one last night together. Cahit will declare his love to Sibel, and ask her to leave with him. He will tell her to meet him at the bus stop the next day and bring her daughter with her. We can then see a scene of Sibel, in her room, packing. But, yet again, she is struggling with her decision. When Cahit leaves alone on the bus, we can assume that Sibel decided to stay with her husband. Even though what is happening at the end of the film is very clear, nothing convinces the viewer that Sibel made the right decision and that she is truly happy with her new life.

In *Auf der anderen Seite*, the protagonist Nejat, decides to stay in Istanbul. In an ironic twist, the teacher will acquire a German library. Even though he decides to stay in his country of origin, he still has a part of Germany with him. Lotte's mother, who met Nejat when she first arrived in Istanbul, will look after the library while Nejat goes on a trip to find his father. She will make peace with Ayten and stay in Turkey for a while. When Nejat stops to put gas in his car, he hears a Turkish song playing and asks who is singing. This alludes to the fact that Nejat is not at home. At the very end of the film, Nejat gets to his father's house, but he is not there and he decides to wait for him. We see him sitting on the shore, looking towards the horizon. Just like in *The Cut*, the scene continues until the generic. There is no certainty for Nejat in this scene; will he make peace with his father? The question will never be answered.

In Chapter 3, we have already started analysing the last scene of the film *The Cut*. What links it to the two other films and to the notion of *Heimat*, is the walk into the unknown. If *Heimat* for Akin is family, than Nazareth has lost his. Looking for his daughters during the entire film, the viewer has the feeling that this is the only thing that Nazareth is looking for. But when you see him walking into the horizon with Lucinée, there is a feeling of uncertainty; they may have found each other, but what will they do now? This confirms our theory that Nazareth universally embodies the faith of the Armenian community after the genocide. He is left to find himself a new home, a new *Heimat*.

Identity is what we think links the three films together. Of course, these questions of identity are a product of immigration, or in this case, forced migration. For the second and third generations of Turks in Germany, there is a constant struggle to find their place, as we can see in a film like *Gegen die Wand*. Even in *Auf der anderen Seite*, when we seem to have to perfect example of successful integration with Nejat, he still wonders where he belongs. This identity crisis is similar in *The Cut*, in which the two characters are left to rebuild in a new country. The characteristics of the Western genre that were used in the film exemplify these struggles.

4.3 Post-western

From what we have seen about Western and the post-western in Chapter 1, we think that it is now time to affirm that *The Cut* by Fatih Akin cannot be qualified as a classic Western, but as a part of the post-western movement. The main reason we cannot associate it directly to the Western genre is that Westerns are set in and are about a specific historical moment. It holds, like we have seen in our previous chapters, many

characteristics of the genre, like the figure of the hero, the landscapes and the myth of the frontier.

What allows us to argue that this film is not a classic Western, but a post-western is that Akin works with the elements of the Western and incorporates them into contemporary cinema: “Hence when the post-Western “repeats” tropes and styles established under earlier forms of the Western, it does not so not to emphasize their timelessness, continuity, or essential significance to identity, community, or nation but to refocus attention on them in order to critically reflect and disclose their assumptions.”⁸⁸ Fatih Akin is not emphasizing the notions of identity, community, or nation in his film, but using them in his attempt to represent the Armenian Genocide. It is certainly not the first post-Western to be used to represent violent times.

In his book on the post-Western, Neil Campbell refers to Spike Lee’s film *25th Hour* (2002)⁸⁹, which is about 9/11. This is an example of a film that uses a traumatic event as the setting: “In a time of political crisis and deep national mourning, the film, I believe, uses the events of 9/11 to reflect rather more obliquely on the histories of the United States and the consequences of its actions through the personal and specific story of one man’s journey to punishment and (possible) redemption.”⁹⁰ This is a film that uses the Western genre to continue to criticise the policies of the United States. This idea can be transposed to Fatih Akin’s film, in the way that he uses the genre to denounce the Armenian Genocide and its denial. By making a Hollywood-like film on this subject, Akin is fighting against the under-representation of this genocide, in the hopes of finding an international audience for his message.

⁸⁸ Campbell, *Post-westerns*, 37.

⁸⁹ Campbell, *Post-westerns*, 52.

⁹⁰ Campbell, *Post-westerns*, 52.

This can be seen as a way of depoliticising the Armenian genocide. With the Holocaust being so present in visual arts like we have seen in chapter 2, doing the same with the Armenian genocide will maybe create enough discussions to accelerate the work of memory. Fatih Akin did not make a movie about the genocide, but used it as a narrative. His goal was to produce something that could help people inform themselves about the concept.

This last chapter has served as a conclusion to our research project. Our aim with this research was to determine whether the latest film by Fatih Akin, *The Cut*, was a Western or not. Since Akin had hinted in an interview that he had used the genre to help him find a restrictive frame in representing the Armenian Genocide, we felt like this was an original point of view to take while analyzing the last opus of the *Liebe, Tod und Teufel* trilogy. Situating the film in this trilogy was also important to us because this opus on evil was not made independently and cannot be analyze without considering its two predecessors.

After an overview of the Western genre, its myths and the historical setting that surrounds it, we feel like we were able to delimit what were the key elements in analyzing the film as a Western. Those elements were the figure of the hero, the landscapes, the myth of the frontier and the title itself. Thinking about the place of genocide in film was also very important in understanding this film. The fact that the Armenian Genocide is in a state of prememory and not yet part of film culture, like the Holocaust, is the reason why Fatih Akin needed to use a restrictive genre. Using elements of the Western (hence making it a post-Western) to make a film about the Armenian Genocide was his way of finding a frame for his work.

While we have used the concept of identity to link the three films together, rethinking this notion in relation to the German *Heimatfilm* renewal could be a strong base for a doctoral research project. While this master's thesis did not allow this idea to be developed further because of its complexity and the need for a complete historical context, we still felt the strongly about allowing this theory a first introduction.

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Filmography

25th Hour (USA 2002, Spike Lee)

Ararat (Canada 2002, Atom Egoyan)

Auf der anderen Seite (Germany, Turkey 2007, Fatih Akin)

The Cut (Germany, France, Italy, Poland, Canada, Turkey, Jordan 2014, Fatih Akin)

Gegen die Wand (Germany, Turkey 2004, Fatih Akin)

Gold (Germany, Canada 2013, Tomas Arslan)

The Kid (USA 1921, Charles Chaplin)

Kurz und Schmerzlos (Germany 1998, Fatih Akin)

The Last Emperor (China, Italy, UK, France 1987, Bernardo Bertolucci)

La vita è bella (Italy 1997, Roberto Benigni)

Nuit et Brouillard (France 1956, Alain Resnais)

The Searchers (USA 1956, John Ford)

Schindler's List (USA 1993, Steven Spielberg)

Shoah (France, UK 1985, Claude Lanzmann)

Solino (Germany 2002, Fatih Akin)

Red River (USA 1948, Howard Hawks)

Remember (Canada, Germany 2015, Atom Egoyan)