

# Transferability of Cultural Meanings: A Case Study on Contemporary German and South Korean Cinema

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## Introduction

During the last decade, South Korean cinema came to be regarded as the most challenging and productive cinema emerging from Asia. New developments can be found in Korean cinematics which are pivotal for contemporary film aesthetics. Although these films belong to different genres, several motifs frequently recur within the varied approaches. Noteworthy is an ongoing preoccupation with the eventful history of the country. The implications of the traumatic Korean War and the enduring division of the country are treated in various ways.

While unification of Korea is still a potential, the reunion of East- and West Germany is the furthest-reaching experience in recent German history. In the last years, division and reunification, as well as coming to terms with the previous GDR dictatorship, have evolved as thematic focal points in German cinema. Thus, from a German point of view, it is of special interest to examine how a still divided country, which has seen a number of wars, is coping with its own history — especially within cinema as a medium of collective cultural memory.

Against the background of the shared experience of national division in both countries, my paper will discuss the transculturally effective elements of western as well as eastern cinema. The transcultural comparison is based on the analysis of two examples of recent German and South Korean films which strongly deal with the difficulties of border crossing within both countries: *JSA: Joint Security Area*<sup>1</sup> and *Yella*<sup>2</sup>. One main focus lies on the depiction and development of identity. As personal identity is always linked to national, cultural, or collective identity, it is accordingly transformed by (fratricidal) war and division.<sup>3</sup> The construction of a stereotypical enemy as in the Korean attributions of ‘good South’ and ‘bad North’ or the affirmative or resistant use

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<sup>1</sup> *JSA: Joint Security Area*, dir. Park Chan-Wook, (South Korea: CJ Entertainment, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> *Yella*, dir. Christian Petzold, (Germany: Schramm Film Koerner & Weber, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> In accordance with theoretical thinkers like Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and, in a closer context of national and cultural identity, Stuart Hall, identity will be understood as discursively generated and thereby constructed within the societal framework.

of the German clichés ‘Ossi’ (easterner) and ‘Wessi’ (westerner) plays an important part of the constitution of national identity. The two movies analysed here both operate with these well-known attributions but thwart them and overcome established focal points in both countries’ memory culture. Regarding movies as pieces of art as well as of mass media, the analysis can offer an insight on how new aesthetics and narratives are being utilised to discuss social, political and cultural changes that function transculturally.

After a short summary of the content of both movies, I will analyse them by comparing several motives and how they are implemented in the particular film.

### ***Joint Security Area***

The movie opens with the picture of the ‘Bridge of No Return’. Several gunshots are fired, a bullet hole is seen in the wall of a military post. Three days later, a female military officer, Sophie Jean, arrives as a member of the fictive Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission. The daughter of a North Korean dissident and a Swiss mother, she tries to investigate a shooting rampage at the border which left two North Korean soldiers dead and one North and one South Korean injured. Both survivors tell completely different stories: while the South Korean, Sergeant Lee, claims to have been kidnapped whilst on guard duty and to have freed himself by shooting three North Koreans, the North Korean, Sergeant Oh, speaks of a surprise attack in the middle of the night. Both stories are supported by cinematic flashbacks that depict the events as reported.

The actual, true story only gets exposed in the end: during a night-time military exercise at the border, South Korean sergeant Lee got lost in North Korean territory and stepped on a mine. Passing by North Korean soldiers Oh and Jeong rescued him by deactivating it. Following this accidental meeting, secret communication leads to frequent meetings between North Koreans Oh and Jeong and South Korean guards Lee and Nam in the North Korean military post. The four men fraternise despite all prohibitions and differences, and dream of a reunification of the divided nation. One night, another secret meeting is disturbed by the sudden appearance of a North Korean officer. After unsuccessful attempts to de-escalate the situation, South Korean soldiers Lee and Nam lose control and shoot excessively — even at their new friend Private Jeong, who is killed by more than ten bullets. Sergeant Oh is the only one who can handle the situation: he suggests to Lee that he fakes the story of his kidnap and escape, while Private Nam pretends to never have been there. To verify both the story of the surprise attack and the kidnapping, Sergeant Oh volunteers to be shot in the shoulder.

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This course of events is only revealed in a private meeting between investigator Sophie Jean and Sergeant Lee, but never told officially. Sophie Jean is forced by the authorities to leave the investigation because of her potential prejudice caused by her North Korean ancestry. After telling her the truth, Sergeant Lee shoots himself in front of Sophie Jean.

### ***Yella***

A young woman who lives in a small town in East Germany decides to leave her hometown for a new and promising job in a West German city. She also seeks to leave her possessive husband Ben, whose business was unsuccessful and is now close to ruin. On the day of her departure, Ben pretends to drive her to the station and causes an accident. The speeding car crashes through a bridge railing and falls into a river. Yella is able to save herself and gets on the train to her new life at the very last second. In the new city, she learns that her new boss has made false promises and her job never existed. In a hotel bar, emotionally crushed, she gets to know Philip, a venture capital negotiator who does some illegal business on his own in addition to his regular job. Yella joins him as his assistant and adapts well to her new, half-legal, profitable position. She falls in love with Philip and sees a potential future with the serious, ambitious businessman. But something goes wrong and Philip is about to lose his regular job and the needed capital for starting his own business. Yella is so obsessed with the idea of starting a promising life with him that she blackmails his last client and threatens the client to the point that he commits suicide. When she flees the situation and takes a taxi back home, the movie suddenly returns to a scene from the beginning: Yella is sitting in her husband's car while it is crashing through the balustrade. In the following scene, police officers and rescue vessels surround the river, recover the submerged car and pull Yella's and Ben's bodies out of the water. They were dead from the start and Yella's whole new life seems to have been nothing but a ghostly dream.

### **Dying Heroes, Lost Identities**

It is crucial that in *JSA*, as well as other blockbuster films dealing with the Korean crisis, the protagonists do not succeed in actually changing or solving the situation. Even if Korea's box-office hits of the last decade evoked a blockbuster trend comparable to Hollywood's film industry, a basic difference to the common 'hero-saves-the-world' stories is notable: "Having Korean modern history as their backdrop, the main characters are agonized by such historical traumas as the division of the country and hysterical fear of

communism. Instead of rising to become heroes, the characters are faced with death or go through great tragedies.”<sup>4</sup>

Therein *JSA* resembles *Yella*. The border-crossers in both films, *Yella* and the South and North Korean soldiers, meet their death. Even if *Yella* is already dead and the whole narrative nothing but some kind of dream, and the actual events which took place in the Joint Security Area turn out to a utopian dream, they both force their dreamers to a bad end. *JSA* seems to be more fatalistic as a whole due to the current unresolved situation between North and South Korea. Even at the present, long-time anti-communist sentiments established within South Korean minds and life experiences do not allow for the consideration of a possible reunion. Thus, the ending of the movie appears inevitable. Lee takes his own life because he is “unable to free himself from psychological guilt and the weight of history that punishes even the slightest gesture of reconciliation between the North and the South.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet in *Yella* as well, the director paints an ambivalent, not to speak of pessimistic, picture about identity issues and societal changes caused by reunification. *Yella* is torn between two worlds: her former life without prospects beyond her shelter-providing father; and her new, independent but possibly lonely life. Several times she attempts to return home but simultaneously reaches out for personal and economic independence. She personifies the identity struggle that most East Germans had to deal with after reunification because, as Bärbel Göbel states: “The West did not lose its identity. It embedded into itself a nation and a character. It did so by assimilating the new ‘partner’ rather than sharing the experience and compromising in a newly formed country.”<sup>6</sup> East Germans were forced to rapidly adjust to completely different social and economic systems that offered a desirable yet frightening freedom when compared to living under a socialist dictatorship.

Inga Scharf, who worked on identity in the New German cinema, points out that “in spite of the ‘Other’ and ‘Self’ being (constructed as) binary opposites, the ‘Other’, too, can be regarded as necessary part of the ‘Self’.”<sup>7</sup> While the ‘Other’ in *JSA* firstly is found across the border in a different political and ideological system, *Yella* finds this ‘Other’ in herself, when she,

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<sup>4</sup> Mee Hyun Kim, ed., *Korean Cinema from Origins to Renaissance* (Seoul: CommBooks, 2007), p. 385.

<sup>5</sup> Kyung Hyun Kim, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Bärbel Göbel, *German Cinema and the Nation's Past. Contemporary German Film and its Treatment of National History* (Saarbrücken: VDM, 2007), p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> Inga Scharf, *Nation and Identity in the New German Cinema. Homeless at Home* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 11.

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little by little, changes her shy and observant nature to become a tough, adamant business partner. The clash of socialistic and capitalistic social systems is fought out internally in Yella's character. This struggle is also represented cinematographically through visible changes. As Christa Thien portrays in her work about unification movies and series in post-Wall television, East German characters are commonly identified not only by their clothing — often looks shabbier, more unfashionable and humble — but also by their body language. Yella acts like an ambitious yet faint-hearted woman who shies away from confrontation. She is unable to definitively sever the relationship with her ex-husband and feels guilty leaving her father alone. Her posture demonstrates her weak self-esteem, which Thien makes out as an indication for East German's distressed self-conception after the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>8</sup> Little by little, Yella grows with her new responsibilities until she becomes a self-confident, demanding woman who faces tough business partners as well as her new lover. This change is also through the use of colours. Throughout the movie, Yella wears a blazing red blouse when entering and moving through West Germany. In the beginning, she changes every time she comes back home and it becomes obvious that the stylish red blouse is her choice of clothing for job interviews and office work: in other words, the success which awaits her in the West. In the end she continues to wear the blouse even when she tries to return to her hometown. The strong colour and business-like style of the blouse symbolise not just the strength she gains in during her life in the West, but also the danger that this new life can bring. It thereby underlines the ambivalent spirit of the whole movie.

The unification of Germany caused an amount of cultural shock for both East and West Germans.<sup>9</sup> Former Chancellor Willy Brandt coined the slogan of 'everything growing together that belonged together' and in that process, culture was seen as the one idea that would unite people from the two German states and help them to find a common national identity. However, a closer look at recent the German literature and movies which deal with a unified Germany shows that they clearly reflect the still existing tensions and difficulties in the ongoing process of 'growing together'. Made almost twenty years after the first unification movies, which dealt mostly with this

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<sup>8</sup> See Christa Thien, *Der andere und der bessere Deutsche. Über die Rezeption der Wiedervereinigung in Filmen und Serien im Fernsehen in den frühen 90er Jahren* (Münster: Telos, 2008), p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> See Thien, *Der andere und der bessere Deutsche*, p. 19.

antagonistic east-west doctrine in a humoristic or stereotypical manner,<sup>10</sup> *Yella* is an example of recent German post-Wall movies that “mark the fall of borders, measuring the seismic jolts that have come in the wake of unification while remaining acutely aware of the continuing divide that separates east and west.”<sup>11</sup> The ambivalence which was stated by Leonie Naughton for German unification in general is truly one of the most crucial features of recent German cinema that broach the issue of unification.<sup>12</sup> Most of early post-unification movies presented the character of an economically successful but morally destitute citizen who obeys only the laws of capitalism.<sup>13</sup> *Yella* depicts a more ambivalent nature of Western capitalism. On the one hand, it is one of several examples of films about the German division that broach the issue of an East-West love story. The clash of diverging values and differently constructed identities is often narrated through the antagonistic construction of someone from the East falling in love with someone from the West or vice-versa.<sup>14</sup> However, in *Yella* the characters seem to be interwoven and less clearly specifiable. Personified by Philip, capitalism shows the possibilities and freedom people can achieve. On the other hand, Philip gets strongly emotionally involved with *Yella* and soon becomes the weaker part of their relationship. In the end it is *Yella* who adapts to the new system and in doing so crosses the border of humanity. By approaching the difficulties of identity loss in the new unified Germany in this manner, Christian Petzold evades the most common stereotypes that are found in many German unification movies, as Bärbel Göbel worked out: “Germany's films concerned with the country's division tend to place the focus on only one side of the Wall at a time and create a binary in which citizen's [sic] of ‘the other’ Germany are negatively depicted.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Göbel, *German Cinema and the Nation's Past*, p. 12. Exemplary movies are *Go, Trabi, Go* (Peter Timm, 1990) and *Das war der wilde Osten* (*That Was the Wild East*, Wolfgang Büld, Reinhard Klooss, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> Eric Rentschler, ‘Postwall Prospects: An Introduction’, *New German Critique*, no. 87 (2002), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East. Film Culture, Unification, and the “New” Germany* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2002), p. ix: “Now that the jubilation of the autumn of 1989 has well and truly subsided, ambivalence is one of German unification's unmistakable and distinguishing features.”

<sup>13</sup> See Thien, *Der andere und der bessere Deutsche*, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Exemplarily shown in *Das Versprechen* (*The Promise*, Margarethe von Trotta, 1994), *Wie Feuer und Flamme* (*Never Mind the Wall*, Connie Walter, 2001), and *Lichter* (*Distant Lights*, Hans-Christian Schmid, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Göbel, *German Cinema and the Nation's Past*, p. 70f.

### **Landscapes — Territories — Utopian Places**

By having the secret meetings take place in North Korean territory, Park Chan-Wook underscores his effort to show the human nature of North Koreans. Conventionally regarded as a hostile land, North Korea becomes a place of utopia, where a friendly reunion of people from the same culture is possible. This peaceful nightly space is contrasted with daylight reality. The protagonists' identities as friends collide with their identities as soldiers. Back on the other side of the border, the two South Korean soldiers return to their conventional roles, predetermined by their regime. They participate in sabre-rattling rituals like provocative shouting and aiming guns at the others. However, the denial of their friendship and a permanent shift of identities lead to awkward situations: when Lee and Nam go through target practice, they hesitate to aim at the wooden figures of North Korean soldiers.

Even the soldiers' nocturnal meetings are clouded by the historical background. In one scene, Private Nam wants to take a picture of the two North Koreans and Sergeant Lee inside the North Korean post. He is disturbed by the portraits of North Korea's founding father Kim Il-Sung and present leader Kim Jong-Il hanging on the back wall. He instructs his friends to get closer to each other until the portraits are obscured from view. For a brief moment he can cover the ideological conflicts that usually separate them. But an ongoing tension remains between the enemy soldiers, which is articulated by Lee right before the shooting rampage: "After all, we are enemies!" The following violent act of killing the former North Korean friend shows how deeply lifelong anti-communist propaganda creeps into the subconscious. Director Park has commented on the necessity of this explosion: "The North Korean soldiers should be killed extremely violently. Their heads are blown into pieces, and their fingers are cut off, because this is the moment when our subconscious communist-phobia violently explodes. Ironically, violence always emerges out of fear of the other."<sup>16</sup>

In *Yella*, an imaginary space is opened only in her mind, where she can change her life and become a completely different person. This utopia of accomplishing financial and personal success in the West turns out to be a false image that appears in a surreal manner. This ghostly atmosphere is closely linked to the real appearance of East German landscapes, as the director of *Yella* points out:

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<sup>16</sup> As quoted in Suk-Young Kim, 'Crossing the Border to the "Other" Side: Dynamics of Interaction between North and South Koreans in *Spy Li Cheol-jin* and *Joint Security Area*', in *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema*, ed. Frances K. Gateward (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), p. 235.

The East is a region that can no longer feed its inhabitants in dignity. People are forced to leave there, but walking away is the hard part. The world they leave behind, the towns and villages which have been emptied, ghost towns. Someone who has come from a ghost town like this and who wants to enter into life, but carries around the ghostly with them, that is what *Yella* is all about.<sup>17</sup>

By confronting not only the superficially observable outer appearance of East German landscapes and people within Western industrial areas, metropolises and urbane business men, but also depicting the inner challenge of the differing systems of norms and values, director Petzold deals with a stated “continued disunity of the German people” that furthers a “growing sense of alienation amongst those in the East towards the West.”<sup>18</sup> Both *Yella* and *JSA* are movies that strongly rely on cinematography and less on dialogue. Scenes of speechlessness and silence generate an atmosphere in which the surrealistic, dream-like setting gains ground.

### **Narrative Strategy — Starting Points**

*JSA* is one of the first South Korean films to break with the well-known stereotypes of friends and enemies in this unresolved conflict and foil the cliché of the bad communist. Before *JSA*, movies mostly depicted South Koreans as war heroes, fighting a righteous war against brutal, cold-blooded or dull communist ‘red devils’. The possibility of northern and southern soldiers being friends was far from the imagination. Playing with genre conventions and unreliable narration as well as time structure, the film designs its inventive aesthetics to deal with Korean reality.

The North and South Korean soldiers realise that their fantasy about a united Korea will not come true. The true motive for the false stories and hushed soldiers lies within this realisation: announcing their prohibited friendship would endanger both themselves and their secret friends across the border. The director highlights the joint efforts to cover the unthinkable yet undeniable. By presenting the made-up stories as real memory flashbacks, the audience is led astray just like the investigators.

Notably, only Sophie Jean can uncover the truth: although the Swiss-born woman signifies a neutral nation and part of the mediating parties in the *JSA*, her Korean ancestry distinguishes her from other investigators. To understand the secret friendship and the unfortunate breakdown, she has to be

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<sup>17</sup> See ‘Comments from director Christian Petzold’, *Press Book for Yella*, p. 4, download available at [http://www.yella-der-film.de/downloads/YELLA\\_PH\\_Efinal.pdf](http://www.yella-der-film.de/downloads/YELLA_PH_Efinal.pdf). Accessed 10/07/2010.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Cooke, ‘Performing ‘Ostalgie’: Leander Haußmann’s *Sonnenallee*’, *German Life and Letters*, vol. 56, no. 2 (2003), p. 156.



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part of the Korean cultural identity. She also realistically appraises the situation by deciding to hide her findings. Korea is not yet ready for a reunification and unveiling the prohibited encounter would only cause trouble for the soldiers.

In *JSA*, the director pursues several goals. First, he tries to be what is stated in the film as the supreme duty of the Supervisory Commission: to be neutral in this delicate area of instability. The different ways of telling demonstrate the different possible answers to questions of history. Like the two soldiers who maintain their differing stories, both Koreas persist in their own version of the Korean War and who began it. Park Chan-Wook's movie reveals the mechanism of diverging interpretations of what has happened. Collective memory is a construction based on specific symbols, narratives and modes of representation. He thereby points out that there are maybe several, simultaneous truths and that it is time to revise confirmed opinions and prejudices against the North Koreans. He forces the audience to critically question the "ideologically distorted representation of people of the other side and make them realise that the people of the other side are simply people, just like 'us'."<sup>19</sup>

Likewise in *Yella*, the movie plays with construction of (hi)story and shaping of identity. The concept of truth concerning visualization – "what you see is real" – is undermined. Frightened of her ability to easily adopt Philips's criminal behaviour, Yella ignores her feelings and becomes even more ruthless to preserve her dream: in order to save her lover from being fired she blackmails his business partner without a hint of doubt. After the man commits suicide, Yella realizes that she went too far. This is the moment when the film returns to its starting point: the fatal car crash. Yella starts with a classic narrative structure and seems to tell the story of a relationship at its conclusion and the extrication from an old life. However, after just thirteen minutes, everything is turned upside down with the unexpected car accident. At this point, the cinematic language turns into a surreal imagery; the movie ends with the disclosure that Yella and Ben did not survive the accident. The whole story that occurred after the accident was either a dream or the imaginings of a ghost after all.

At the end of *JSA*, the film also returns to its starting point: the perpetual status of the Cold War. Human desires have to be suppressed in order to sustain an unchangeable ideological system. This leads to the final conclusion that a solution of the deep-rooted crisis is only possible if both parties stop to confront each other with unchallengeable positions. Accordingly, the tragic deaths of the soldiers strongly express the absurdity of the current political situation in both Koreas. Not even fiction can overcome the reality, as Kim

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<sup>19</sup> Kim, 'Crossing the Border to the "Other" Side', p. 237.

Kyung Hyun accurately articulates: “Denied is the peaceful process toward a salient post-traumatic identity even in the cinematic realm of fantasy.”<sup>20</sup> Park Chan-Wook offers an insight on how a mutual approach might be possible, but also concludes that both countries are not yet ready for appeasement.

## **Bridges**

Both movies utilize the strong symbol of the bridge. The German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel emphasises the dualistic character of bridges: they connect things that have been isolated before but still remain disconnected in a sense.<sup>21</sup> In the way that in both movies bridges seem to be the initial point of connecting the divided parts of a country, they show this ambivalence and persisting isolation.

The first shot of *JSA* displays the so-called ‘Bridge of No Return’ where after the Korean War prisoners from both sides were exchanged. People who decided to cross the bridge and go to the other state lost the possibility of return. In one of the first scenes, where investigator Sophie Jean is led to the crime scene, the commission comes across the chalk drawing of a murdered soldier – a reminder of the so-called ‘Axe-Wielding Incident’ that occurred in 1976. Two American soldiers were killed by North Korean soldiers with an axe – a tool originally used to cut down a tree in the joint area around the border. Right after that incident, even the Joint Security Area was divided into a Southern and a Northern part and the soldiers on guard were no longer allowed to cross the demarcation line. The chalk outlines look freshly painted and give us a clue how critical this incident was for the history of the *JSA*. And yet, this bridge offers the only way for the South and North Korean soldiers to unite. When Sergeant Lee invites Private Nam to join him on his way to the North Korean post for the first time, the camera shows only the feet of both soldiers: Lee quickly crosses the demarcation line while Nam strongly hesitates to overstep it. Lee expresses the importance of this step by telling him: “After half a century of division... overcoming our history of agony and disgrace... we are gonna open the dam to reunification, okay?” Notably, we only get to see Nam’s hesitation and a lame effort to resist by asking “Could we maybe do that later?”, but we do not see the actual crossing by Private Nam. The next shot already shows the two North Korean soldiers welcoming the guests from the South. By omitting the act of crossing, the director stresses the difficulty and even inconceivability thereof.

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<sup>20</sup> Kim, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*, p. 269.

<sup>21</sup> Georg Simmel, ‘Brücke und Tür’, in *Brücke und Tür. Essays des Philosophen zur Geschichte, Religion, Kunst und Gesellschaft*, ed. Michael Landmann (Stuttgart: Koehler, 1957), pp. 1–7.

Equally in *Yella*, the bridge connects two worlds. In this case the alleged connection firstly does not provide the possibility to unite one part with another or even start a new life since *Yella* is not able to actually cross the bridge. It turns out to radically cut something off rather than connecting it. Yet, on another level this bridge also opens the way to a mental journey, a would-be world in which *Yella* can imagine a life in the West. Interestingly enough, nearly twenty years after unification, *Yella* still depicts an almost impossible way of ‘growing together’ and thereby underlines the difficulties that the implications of the *Wende* caused, especially for East Germans. The movie makes clear that it needs more than dismantling a material and artificial border to unify a divided country.

### **Conclusion**

Transcultural analyses bear a danger regarding the account provided. As E. Ann Kaplan discusses in her reading on Chinese cinema, the question of perspective should always concern: “Cross-cultural analysis, we know, is difficult — fraught with danger. We are forced to read works produced by the ‘Other’ through the constraints of our own frameworks/theories/ideologies.”<sup>22</sup> Despite the fact that this quotation was made in the context of post-colonial studies, which cannot (and should not) be easily transferred to this study, it is still important to keep in mind the position is taken by the author. In this article, I drew a line connecting two movies from two very different cultures while always maintaining my own West German point of view. It is obvious that within the limited context of this study it is not possible to undertake a deeper comparison of the movies regarding diverging filmic and narrative traditions and the applicability of symbols specific to the respective culture. Nonetheless, the analysis made evident possible benchmarks for an intercultural comparison and the transferability of meanings.

Both movies challenge the audience by exposing the mental mapping of people of both nations: the pairs of opposites like East-West, North-South, and Communist/ Socialist-Capitalist. They also show clearly that these ‘mind mapping’ increases in times of conflict and drastic environmental changes — not in a specific national or cultural context but transculturally. Only few German movies before the fall of the Berlin Wall broach the issue of border

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<sup>22</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, ‘Problematizing Cross-cultural Analysis: The Case of Women in the Recent Chinese Cinema’, in *Perspectives on Chinese cinema*, ed. Chris Berry (London: BFI, 1991), p. 142.

crossers, or the division in general.<sup>23</sup> Thus, it is most fascinating to see how the still divided Korean nation — at least in the context of South Korean cinema — vividly deals with its historical and present situation. This rising interest in artistically constructing not only the past but also the future is probably closely linked to a growing concern in how one defines one's cultural and/or national identity in times of an increasingly globalised world. While literal and mental border crossing become easier through cultural and political exchange, it grows more important to refer to commonalities and cultural roots.<sup>24</sup> This search for identity operates with established borders and mappings as seen in the German movie *Yella*, but also through embracing the formerly rejected 'Other' like in *Joint Security Area*.

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<sup>23</sup> One outstanding exception is *Der Mann auf der Mauer* (*The Man on the Wall*, Reinhard Hauff, 1982), based on the novel *Der Mauerspringer* by West-German Peter Schneider.

<sup>24</sup> This was reasonably observed by William Brown, 'Lost in Transnation', in *Cinemas, Identities and Beyond*, eds Ruby Cheung and D. H. Fleming (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publ., 2009), pp. 16–32.