

## Dubbing Almanya (Multilingual) Musical Intertextuality and Literary Solidarity in Duygu Ađal's *Yeni Yeşerenler*

Duncan Gullick Lien

**ABSTRACT:** Building on Anna Kornbluh's characterization of literary form as a key symbolic infrastructure for solidarity, this article studies the role of musical intertexts in literary expressions of solidarity. In analyzing Duygu Ađal's *Yeni Yeşerenler* (The Newly Sprouted 2022), I focus on the formal stakes of musical lyrics as epigraphs and allusions to music in the text itself. I relate these features to the novel's themes of racism and queer self-actualization. It is in this context that Ađal proposes solidarity that transcends the (Turkish-)German context through musical references in the text.

„In her 2022 article *Solidarity Words*, literary scholar Anna Kornbluh applies her framework of ‚political formalism‘, previously developed in *The Order of Forms* (2019), to solidarity. Focusing on the significance of aesthetic formalism realized in linguistic ‚practices of the symbolic‘, such as slogans, Kornbluh turns to music as a paradigmatic linguistic infrastructure of solidarity (Kornbluh 2022, 43). Specifically, she argues that a scene in the film *Pitch Perfect* (2012), in which members of a chorus engage in an improvised performance, exemplifies the ‚sociating link‘ afforded by aesthetic forms (Kornbluh 2022, 47). It is no coincidence that Kornbluh turns to a choir to exemplify solidarity. Songs such as Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Busch, and Hanns Eisler’s *Solidaritätslied* or *Solidarity Forever*, penned by Ralph Chaplin, are among the most memorable expressions of solidarity, amplifying and engendering claims of solidarity.

In this article, I take up the question of how allusions to music are a privileged symbolic form in the literary discourse of solidarity, exemplified through a study of the novel *Yeni Yeşerenler* (The Newly Sprouted 2022) by Duygu Ağal. The work challenges the monolingual publishing conventions of the literary industry in Germany (the text itself is primarily in German, albeit with significant amounts of Turkish, often untranslated, as the title shows). Ağal’s multilingual writing strategies certainly merit consideration in their own right, however in the present article I will concentrate on the musical allusions found in the work. These parallel both the multilingualism and the cultural and generic multiplicity of the work. In *Yeni Yeşerenler* Duygu Ağal alludes to works of pop and folk by musicians from Turkey as well as RnB and hip-hop songs primarily by African-American artists. I examine these references as part of a practice of elaborating novel bonds of solidarity in the text, a practice I theorize in reference to scholarship on the ideological landscape (queer) people of color navigate in the contemporary German context. Furthermore, I rely on Tom Boellstorff’s notion of ‚dubbing culture‘ (Boellstorff 2003) to argue that allusions to music are particularly well-suited to holding multiple cultural logics and identities together, a practice essential to elaborating new forms of solidarity.

*Yeni Yeşerenler* is narrated from multiple perspectives in non-chronological chapters. The plot spans the protagonist Derin’s childhood in a Turkish-German community in Hamburg, her decision to leave her family home, cutting ties with them in the process, and eventually her life in Berlin, spanning the 1990s to the 2010s. She is lesbian, and her sexuality is central to the plot and the work’s critique of homophobia and patriarchy – both in the Turkish-German community that Derin grows up in and in conjunction with the racism she encounters beyond this milieu.

## Musical Epigraphs

The novel is prefaced with four epigraphs, lyrics from the following songs: *Amman Felek* (Oh Fate) by Onur Şan, *Loyalty* by D12 und Obie Trice, *Yerine Sevemem* (I Can't Love Anyone but You) by Gökhan Kırdar, and *O Kaş O Göz* (Those Brows, Those Eyes) by Arif Sağ. Each is printed on a separate page in bold and appears in their original languages (English in the case of *Loyalty*, Turkish for all of the others). Beyond their multilingualism, the epigraphs are notable for the variety of musical genres. As I will explain presently, they introduce the trajectories of solidarity at play in the work. Onur Şan is a performer of *özgün müzik* (original music), a genre that synthesizes Anatolian folk music with pop and rock. The term refers to the fact that singers write their own songs, rather than performing traditional compositions. In *Amman Felek*, the speaker alludes to a life of emotional suffering and expresses resignation to whatever fortune may bring in the future. D12 and Obie Trice are hip-hop artists and the quoted lyrics discuss loyalty in relation to family, echoing Derin's negotiation of biological and non-biological families. Gökhan Kırdar is a Turkish-language pop musician. Finally, Arif Sağ stands in the Anatolian folk music tradition. *O Kaş O Göz* praises the eyes and eyebrows of the speaker's beloved. As is common in many Turkish-language love poems, the gender identity of the beloved remains ambiguous – principally because Turkish does not have gendered pronouns.

In the present study, I employ Gérard Genette's taxonomy of paratexts as it provides a framework to succinctly analyze the musical epigraphs found in *Yeni Yeşerenler*. Paratexts are discourse adjacent to the literary text, marking it as such and structuring how the text is received and circulates and epigraphs are a paradigmatic example of it. In the case of *Yeni Yeşerenler*, two of the three functions Genette assigns to epigraphs come to the fore: commenting on the text and creating an association with the person quoted (Genette 1997, 153). I have briefly alluded to the commentary function in my gloss of the epigraphs above. Of these, *Loyalty* most clearly signals the importance of figuring new, mediated forms of collectivity in the literary work. My analysis is otherwise mainly based on the associative function of epigraphs. They invoke an association with African-American and Anatolian cultures and by extension allude to relationships of solidarity across the full scope of the work's setting. In the chapter, which I will analyze in greater detail below, hip-hop, RnB and Turkish pop are the key genres referenced. The mixture of genres in the epigraphs also serves as the basis of a heteroglossic solidarity. That is to say, *Yeni Yeşerenler* presents readers with a

conception of solidarity that transcends social difference without negating plural identities. Before undertaking a closer examination of how musical references function to strengthen such a conception of solidarity in the work, I will briefly discuss the significance of these cultural allusions in it.

## Beyond Homonationalism

Jasbir Puar's concept of ‚homonationalism‘ (Puar 2007) is a useful starting point to appreciate the juxtaposition of African-American culture and that of Turkey seen in the epigraphs. This points not only to the expanded cultural coordinates of contemporary Turkish-German literature but also to narratives rooted exclusively in conflict with the traditional cultural values of older generations in post-migrant families and communities. While such conflict is found in *Yeni Yeşerenler*, the novel inherited from cultural practices of rural Anatolian society. While candidly representing homophobia and patriarchy in Derin's family, the Turkish-German community, and in Turkish society, Ağal resists culturalizing them. The significance of this act is apparent in Puar's work and Fatima El-Tayeb's studies of similar dynamics in the context of racialization in Europe. Puar explains how queer liberation has been co-opted in service of U.S. imperialism, whereby „the recognition of homosexual subjects“ is made to serve „the national and transnational political agendas of U.S. imperialism“ (Puar 2007, 9). Such recognition provides a justification for military action in the Middle East under the guise of sexual liberation. Homonationalism also describes a prevalent self-understanding of North America and Europe as sites of „sexual exceptionalism“, a pillar of their „racial and national norms“ (Puar 2007, 9). El-Tayeb's work, on the other hand, concentrates on the intersection of sexuality and racialization, and she demonstrates how a racial hierarchy has emerged in which the imputed sexual mores of racialized groups are „cast as products of a culture that is fundamentally inferior to the secular West“, taken to be inherently progressive (El-Tayeb 2013, 307).

Nevertheless, homophobia shapes Derin's experiences in all quarters of society. The chapter „Goldene Birkenstocks“ conveys one such event. Derin decides to begin therapy and gets an appointment from a therapist „im tiefsten Charlottenburg“ (Ağal 2022, 41 – references to this work will subsequently be abbreviated YY). Ultimately, she breaks off the session when it becomes apparent that the therapist's interaction with her is too heavily filtered through

heteronormative tropes. The therapist asks, „hat ihr Vater Sie schon mal sexuell belästigt?“ The reason, the therapist adds, is „weil ich oft Patientinnen habe, die Männern abgeschworen haben, weil sie unschöne Erfahrungen gemacht haben“ (YY 46).

Anti-racist critique is also significant here, particularly in structuring the networks of solidarity figured by the musical allusions in the work. The novel emphasizes racism in supposedly safe spaces, too. As such, Christopher Ewing’s recent work on the racist structures that „ran through white, queer politics“ in the German LGBTQ movement resonates with *Yeni Yeşerenler* (Ewing 2024, 3). In a chapter that is aptly titled *Safe Space Blah-blah*, Derin joins a women’s football club after moving to Berlin. Her stated aim is to find „Solidarität unter Frauen und – sein wir ehrlich, so’n bisschen Frauenpower, Sisterhood und den ganzen Equality-Schnickschnack“ (YY 57). The protagonist recalls similar experiences playing the sport in Hamburg with „einer Handvoll deutsche Teamkolleg\*innen“ and teammates from other backgrounds who are confronted with their „Anderssein hier in Deutschland“ (YY 60). This feeling gives rise to solidarity: „In diesem Kampf standen wir immer zusammen“ (YY 60). In Berlin, Derin has a much different experience. Initially, the club seems to truly be a safe space where Derin can speak openly about sexuality for the first time. However, this new-found freedom is overshadowed by racism. Before a game against Türkiyemspor, the coach describes their (Turkish) opponents as „hysterisch, cholerisch“ and „aggressiv“ (YY 60). Nor is such a worldview limited to the coach. Derin reports that „[e]ine Mannschaftskollegin teilte mir seelenruhig mit, dass ich N\*\*\*\*-Knie hätte“ (YY 61). Finally, she quits the club after yet another teammate makes insulting comments about migrants.

Accordingly, the engagement with African-American culture in the work exemplifies how racialized German activists and cultural producers engage with Black politics and culture. Damani Partridge’s exploration of this dynamic in *Blackness as Universal Claim* underscores how such an orientation is crucial to engagement with racism in Germany, above all because to address post-World War Two racism in Germany directly means risking „being accused of Holocaust denial“ (Partridge 2022, 10). As a consequence, activists approach racism by analogy, specifically, with reference to anti-Black racism in the United States. Although the capacity for social change is central to Partridge’s analysis, he evinces skepticism towards solidarity, reminding us that it „is always already caught up in asymmetrical relations of power“ (Partridge 2022, 147). However, this critique is calibrated to claims of solidarity of citizens with non-citizens in the context of asylum-based migration. Indeed, Ağal’s dramatization of

racism, as described above, resonates with the dialectic of the universal and particular in Partridge's work. „Universalizing claims to Blackness [...] must insist on the connection between the particular circumstances and their broader application“ vis-à-vis „the production of Blackened subjects [...] and via Blackness as the means for making social change“ (Partridge 2022, 124). The musical intertexts thus serve to structure the representation and critique of racialization in Germany. (Post-)migrants from Turkey (and beyond) look to African-American racism in the struggle against racism in Germany. However, the potential bonds of solidarity explored in *Yeni Yeşerenler* extend beyond the shared experience of racism. Indeed, Derin's experience in the football club makes clear that solidarity that exceeds given collective identities is needed (along the lines of no queer liberation without anti-racism and vice versa).

Derin explores possible solidarities through encounters with racialized groups in the U.S. As a teenager, she travels to the U.S. to work as an au-pair. Beforehand, she interviews with families who are looking for child care. One of these families is a young Indian-American couple. The husband and wife are ophthalmologists, and Derin is impressed by the family and above all their prosperity, speaking of them as „Kanax, die es geschafft hatten und ein wohlhabendes Leben in Chicago bestreiten“ (YY 112). Thus, we see that Derin does not focus on the shared experience of racism, but foregrounds the promise of a better life (and implicitly a more just society) in her view of racialized groups in the U.S. Considering the co-mingling of performances of resistance and wealth in mainstream hip-hop, this account applies just as much, if not more to Derin's taste in music. This impulse becomes apparent in the musical allusions in the text itself. Before analyzing the final chapter of the work, where these issues are most apparent, I will outline the theories of dubbing and musical intertexts that shape my understanding of Ağal's work.

## Dubbing Culture

I turn to Tom Boellstorff's notion of ‚dubbing culture‘ to better understand the role of music in *Yeni Yeşerenler*. While his theory of lesbi and gay subject formation (Indonesian terms related to, but distinct from, the terms gay and lesbian) is rooted in 1990s Indonesia, his use of dubbing to theorize this context will be shown to suit analysis of the musical intertexts and notions of solidarity in Ağal's narrative. Boellstorff's article is most immediately an account of how „dubbing allows lesbi and gay individuals to see themselves as part of a global

community but also as authentically Indonesian“ in the context of global media networks (Boellstorff 2003, 237). He foregrounds how transnational mass media inflect queer identities in Indonesia, articulations of sexuality, and how collective identities coalesce around these discourses. More to the point, Boellstorff holds that gay and lesbi identities are to be understood as cultural dubbing, enabling individuals „to hold together multiple cultural logics without resolving them into a unitary whole“ (Boellstorff 2003, 226). Dubbing, the practice of replacement of a soundtrack in one language by one in another language, describes how the terms *gay* and *lesbi* are adapted by Indonesians (from Anglophone media), while echoing contemporary debates about dubbing foreign television and film into Indonesian and a ban on the practice in the country.

This constellation also illuminates how dubbing and shifting linguistic practice challenge established national and sexual identities. The emergent queer identity charted by Boellstorff that negotiates both local and global histories and identities is not foreign to the scale of *Yeni Yeşerenler*, which spans from the local to transnational while a dynamic where transnational dimensions resonate with postmigrant identity and the novel’s musical landscape is also apparent in the novel. Boellstorff’s approach to the ideological nature of subject formation also refines our understanding of solidarity in the work. Dubbing culture „is crucially concerned with agency: It questions deterministic theories of hailing persons through ideology and voluntaristic theories that assume persons voice and negotiate their subjectivities vis-à-vis structures of power“ (Boellstorff 2003, 226). Insofar as solidarity is conceived as a critical political practice that seeks to transcend given ideological formations, it implies a capacity to transcend given ideological structures. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that given ideologies structure and limit possibilities for solidarity. Fashioning new social bonds requires actors to elaborate a novel collective identity while navigating existing identities, ideologies, and cultural practices. Thus, Boellstorff’s call for holding together multiple cultural logics is not simply multiplicity for its own sake. It is a fundamental political practice, particularly where solidarity is concerned.

As Kornbluh’s argument demonstrates, solidarity is fundamentally rooted in „practices of the symbolic“, and music is a key aesthetic form that can be mobilized in this regard (Kornbluh 2019, 43). Approaching the musical allusions as intermedial references implicate a similar dynamic along an intermedial axis. Indeed, my use of Boellstorff suggests an intermedial shift in his theory. This shift also implies a move from the conceptual and ideological dimensions

of texts in the mass media to the aesthetic qualities of cultural texts that lend themselves to the elaboration of novel subjective and collective practices across given social and cultural divisions. In *Dubbing Culture*, the titular practice refers not to the musical practice of dubbing, but dubbing in the context of television and film. Following this intermedial orientation, the musical allusions in Ağal's work imply a virtual dubbing in the mind of readers who are familiar with the songs (that is to say that they cannot help but *hear* the song while reading). However, in the age of readily available streaming music, it is not a stretch to suppose that curious readers who are not familiar with the particular songs will also listen to them, perhaps immediately, concertizing this virtual dubbing. Such a reading practice falls into the musical literary practices Beate Schirrmacher theorizes as ‚musical transformation‘, an array of writing practices in which engagement with music „*transforms* literary narration and expression“ and in doing so the „aesthetic and political ideas“ that literature communicates (Schirrmacher 2024, 835). In *Yeni Yeşerenler*, we see this exemplified in how musical allusions allow the work to develop novel bonds of solidarity.

## Music in the Text

This logic of holding together multiplicity in tension is crucial to both the narrative form and politics of the work. In the narrative itself, music most explicitly plays a role in the final chapter, *After Tonight*, which narrates how Derin falls in love with a classmate and has a first positive romantic encounter with her. This chapter provides two instances of how music is conceived as an aesthetic that can structure interpersonal relationships. The chapter narrates Derin's relationship with a new student at her school and how the unnamed woman eventually invites Derin to celebrate Christmas at her parents' house.

Conflict arises when Derin must convince her mother to allow her to spend the night. Her cousin Kader convinces Derin's mother to grant her permission. Kader drives Derin to the friend's house and on the drive, they listen to the song *Aşk Hikayesi* (Love Story) by the Turkish pop singer Kayahan. „Im Auto hörten wir immer *Aşk Hikayesi* [sic] von Kayahan. ‚Bizimkisi bir aşk hikayesi. Siyah, beyaz film gibi biraz‘“ (Ours is a love story. Kind of like a black and white movie.; YY 145). Derin then goes on to explain why the song is so meaningful. „Ich hörte ihn so gern, weil ich glaubte, dass Kader Abla und ich vielleicht gleich liebten. So melodramatisch, ein bisschen lebensmüde und aufopfernd. Und weil wir vielleicht die einzigen



Frauen in unserer Familie sind, die die Normen nicht aushielten“ (YY 146). The song is both a representation of their bond but also defines its terms to Derin’s mind. Like the epigraphs to the novel itself, this song acts as an epigraph in a broader sense as it comments on Kader and Derin’s friendship.

Music, specifically a mixtape that the young woman burns on a CD for Derin, has a similar function in anticipating the terms of their future relationship. The act of gift-giving is also significant as their first encounters are structured by the small gifts of food she gives Derin. „[S]ie kam nie mit leeren Händen, wenn sie auf mich zukam“, notes Derin, suggesting that her generosity sews a seed of attraction (although Derin is initially skeptical of her motives; YY 143). At the same time, the difference between Derin and her new classmate is clearly marked throughout the story. This is partly because she is new at the school. Moreover, „die Lehrer\*innen machten den Eindruck, dass es irgendein Geheimnis um sie gäbe, das erklärte, weswegen sie die elfte Klasse wiederholt“ (YY 143). When Derin arrives at her house on Christmas Eve, the narrative repeatedly underscores that the family’s class and interpersonal relationships differ markedly from Derin’s family. Above all, Derin is struck by the relationship between the woman and her parents. „Mum. Dad. Wollen wir einfach erstmal Geschenke auspacken?“ fragte sie selbstbewusst, weil mir klar war, dass sie diese Reihenfolge festgelegt hatte und die nicht der Familientradition entsprach“ (YY 148). This scenario stands in stark contrast to the hierarchical power structures in Derin’s family, as seen in her struggle to get permission to be at the celebration in the first place. Opening the presents lays bare a clear class difference between the two. Derin’s friend gets „ein Verstärker von Marshall“, an Adele CD that has not been released, and a trip with her mother anywhere she wants. Derin is not left out, receiving „einen Hunderteurogutschein für Thomas I-Punkt [...] ein wahnsinnig teures Streetwear-Geschäft“, interpreting this gesture as, in part, an effort to include her, but one which naturally underscores the difference between the two women and their families (YY 148).

The importance of music for Derin’s love interest is also clear and serves as a more emotionally charged moment in which Derin first confronts how different they are from one another. At the very beginning of her visit, „Sie zeigte mir ihr Zimmer, ihren Computer und ihre Playlist mit Liedern, die sie via Lime-Wire heruntergeladen hatte. Sie hörte weder RnB noch HipHop, aber irgendwelche Lieder auf die wir uns einigen konnten, würden wir schon finden, dachte ich“ (YY 147). This sets up Derin’s elation when she receives „eine selbstgebrannte CD mit

selbstgemachten Cover, worauf alle Lieder waren, die ich rauf und runter hörte!“ The CD has songs by J-Kwon, Jagged Edge, Nelly, Shawn Desman, and others, and Derin is surprised at how closely the mix tape corresponds to her tastes. Most immediately, this gift is meaningful because „[w]ir hatten uns noch nie so richtig lange außerhalb der Schule gesehen und auch keine Musik zusammen gehört“ (YY 149). The mixtape thus symbolizes Derin’s investment in music as a privileged artistic form which parallels Ağal’s use of musical epigraphs. To explicate the scene in slightly different terms, it dramatizes what Schirrmacher refers to as „the transgressive potential of music both to state and to subvert conflicting categories“, with music used to both introduce and resolve the conflict in this chapter (Schirrmacher 2024, 854).

Moreover, the role of music in this chapter demonstrates how it serves to mediate between the subjective register of affect, desire, and corporeality on the one hand, and the social identities, above all the class dynamics, at play in the relationship. This capacity to mediate between subjective states and sociopolitical institutions is intensified by the twin capacity for abstraction of rhythm, melody, and tone in music and the representational capacity of lyrics. Because the former features do not rely on language, they are uniquely primed to transcend cultures. Of course, this capacity can be subverted by the specific codes that govern musical form (and taste), however, the role of global pop music, both as an aesthetic object (shared at the inter-subjective level) and as a form that circulates transnationally, suggests music is a privileged medium for cultural dubbing. The fact that Boellstorff foregrounds a specifically sonic practice (albeit one predicated on language) only underscores this argument.

## Conclusion

Creating a mixtape is an apt metaphor for creating and sustaining solidarity. Anyone who has assembled such a playlist is familiar with the difficulty of creating a meaningful whole that does not become monotonous or stray into eclecticism. This is a formulation that can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to political art and solidarity. Kornbluh’s example of the improvised choral performance underscores the audacity of attempting to form seemingly impossible bonds. Given that solidarity re-works social forms, it follows that revising aesthetic form through intermedial practices resonates with creating structures of solidarity that engender unity predicated on difference. The difficulties of creating truly novel solidarities across social boundaries are repeatedly dramatized in *Yeni Yeşerenler*. The work’s epigraphs point to the

expanded field of reference that result from racialization in Germany but also create a framework to challenge these social practices. Readers see how particular social structures are confronted through universal categories, a dynamic key to both Partridge and Boellstorff and one most readily apparent through musical allusions in the work. Moreover, it is music that allows Derin to imagine a better future for herself and to create the social bonds to realize it. Given the persistence of racism and homophobia, as foregrounded by Ađal, and, to zoom out beyond the concerns of the novel, the climate crisis and that of the imperialist world system, the broader necessity to more vigorously engage in such wagers in political and artistic practice is readily apparent.

**Duncan Gullick Lien** is a literary scholar specializing in Turkish-German literary relationships, literary multilingualism, and comparative realisms. After completing his doctorate at Pennsylvania State University in 2023, he was a Max Kade Postdoctoral Fellow in the Berlin Program for Advanced European and German Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin.

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