

Crossing Borders and Breaking Boundaries: A Comparison of the Films *Happy Together* (1997) and *The Edge of Heaven* (2007)

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Abstract—*Happy Together* (Wong Kar-Wai, 1997) and *The Edge of Heaven* (Fatih Akin, 2007) are two films that depict characters in intimate relationships that include geographical mobility. Though that is just one of the similarities they share, the two films reveal different attitudes toward life and death. *The Edge of Heaven* educates its audience through fear by portraying innocent people dying, while *Happy Together* could be interpreted more as a national allegory, given the depiction of a historical figure's death. Nonetheless, the aim of this research is to argue that the two films are similar in that they both tell tales about revealing the experiences of moving across borders and living in cosmopolitan places. Moreover, the characters in both films expect a change in the boundaries between people and wish for a new cosmopolitan world.

Index Terms—cosmopolitanism, hybridization, geographical mobility, intimacy

I. INTRODUCTION

The borders of nations between Turkey and Germany; Argentina and Brazil are highlighted in *Happy Together* (1997) and *The Edge of Heaven* (2007) because borders provide separation between characters and divide the national cultures. In *The Edge of Heaven*, the communication discrepancies between couples, father and son, mother and daughter imply the importance of the border. Borders, on the one hand, split the narratives for disjunctive times and spaces. On the brink of the border, the filmmaking including the geographical mobility enables the filmmaker to contrast the cold and dark German scenes with the hot and bright Turkish ones. In *Happy Together*, Fai and his family are separated by the ocean.

On the other hand, borders serve as the cure to improve intimate relationships. In *Happy Together*, the transnational culture activities such as the intimate tango dance, playing soccer without rules, and travelling together to Iguazu Falls on a road trip demonstrate the intimate relationships between characters. The waterfall symbolizes the intimacy between separated people and cultures. In *The Edge of Heaven*, it is borders that enhance the characters' willingness to break the boundaries between beloved ones and of cultural difference.

This paper aims to elaborate the stories concerning borders and to investigate the diasporic experience of living across borders in both films. In the beginning, the research briefly introduces the tangled storylines of the two films. In Section III, the researcher argues that the two films' geographical mobility reveals the characters' state of living and thinking beyond one nation. Afterwards, Section IV discusses the intimate relationships that bond people together and extend far beyond national boundaries. The intimate relationships between characters in these films convey that people long for close connections and are eager to find belonging. Section V explores the different ways that the two films capture both the experience of death and of living far away from home.

II. THE NARRATIVES OF THE FILMS

Before elaborating on the analyses of the specific motifs, the researcher will briefly engage the two films. Written and directed by Fatih Akin (2007), *The Edge of Heaven* is a film that portrays three families across two storylines. The first family is Nejat and his elderly father Ali Aksu; the second family is Yeter and her daughter Ayten; and the third family is Susanne Staub and her daughter Lotte. Moreover, the stories of these families intersect not only by coincidence but also through a tangled and common border separating Germany and Turkey. The separate family stories in *The Edge of Heaven* (Akin, 2007) run together into one narrative. The first storyline concerns the young professor Nejat, a Turkish immigrant living in Germany, and his elderly father, Ali Aksu. In the opening scene, Nejat stops by a gas station while his father wanders the red-light district, eventually encountering Yeter, also a Turkish immigrant, and a prostitute. Ali pays Yeter to have sex with him, and then makes her an offer to come live with him for the same amount of money she makes as a prostitute. Yeter accepts, but it turns out to be a terrible idea for all involved.

One day, Yeter tells Nejat how much she misses her daughter, Ayten. At the same time, Ali suspects that Yeter has had sex with Nejat. As a result, Ali and Yeter quarrel, and Yeter is accidentally killed during their argument. Ali is then jailed, causing Nejat much anguish, so much so that his grief compels him to travel to Istanbul to find Yeter's daughter.

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However, what Nejat doesn't know is that Ayten is active in anti-government movements in Turkey that force her to flee to Germany and look for her mother. Of course, Ayten has no idea that her mother is dead and believes her to be a keeper of a shoe shop somewhere in Germany. Indeed, Yeter's death is so hushed because she was an immigrant who could not make her voice heard.

While looking for her mother, Ayten falls in love, begins a relationship, and moves in with a German girl named Lotte, whose mother, Susanne, disapproves of their relationship. Nevertheless, when Ayten is later summoned to jail in Istanbul and forced to leave Germany, Lotte follows her back to Turkey to try and free her. There, she is tragically killed after she finds a gun hidden by Ayten, who asks her to bring the gun to her in prison. Lotte agrees, but on her way to visit Ayten, a gang of boys steals her purse. After chasing them, she finally catches up to them and demands they return the gun that the boys have found in her purse and are now inspecting. One of the boys points the gun at her and shoots her dead.

The second storyline depicts iconic German actress Hanna Schygulla, playing Susanne, the aged mother of Lotte. A German university student with idealistic beliefs, Lotte brings home Ayten, a homeless, illegal Turkish immigrant, to stay in her house, something her mother is highly opposed to. Here, the film would have the viewers believe that they are seeing a contrast between the strict, unempathetic mother and her rebellious, idealistic daughter. However, in a conversation between Lotte and Ayten, the film soon reveals that Susanne is not who we were told. Susanne was also a free spirit herself in her youth, once hitchhiking from Germany all the way to India. Thus, the audience sees a different Susanne from the one who tries to pass herself off as uptight and conservative today. Thus, the film undermines the viewers' perception in order to provide true insights.

Throughout the movie's intricate plot, Akin masterfully demonstrates just how entangled with one another these three families truly are. Nejat hopes to help Yeter look for her daughter Ayten, so he travels from Germany to Turkey. Instead of meeting Ayten, the German professor opens a bookstore in Turkey and meets Ayten's friend Lotte. Lotte dramatically becomes Nejat's tenant. The sophisticated complexity of these storylines allows viewers to enter the inner worlds of these characters.

Happy Together (Chun Guang Zha Xie) (1997) by Hong Kong filmmaker Wong Kar-wai is both his first film set outside of Asia and his first to depict homosexual relationships. *Happy Together* has three protagonists that share two narratives. The first storyline begins as the love story between a gay couple from Hong Kong, Ho Po-wing (Leslie Cheung) and Lai Yao-Fai (Tony Chiu-wai Leung).

After a recent breakup, Fai and Po want to start their relationship all over again, so they decide to visit Iguazu Falls on the Brazilian and Argentine border, as they had once promised each other they would do. However, on their way to the falls, they get lost and start arguing about the same things that they always argue about – their differing philosophies on money and life in general. As a result, they break up, continuing the cycle of separation and reconciliation that they have gone through many times before. This time, however, Fai ends up moving to Taiwan instead of returning to Hong Kong, and Po-wing, without money, is left alone in Argentina, where he becomes openly promiscuous with other men. This time, the love between Po-wing and Fai seems impossible to renew; however, like the endless waterfall, their love for one another and their desire to be together seem unstoppable.

The second storyline is between Fai and his new close friend Chang (Chang Chen), who he met while working as a cook in a restaurant that they both work at. When they are not working, they often play soccer and hang out. Chang once tells Fai about his plan to visit the southernmost lighthouse in Ushuaia, Argentina, because it is located at the end of the world. Fai is amazed by Chang's idea, and Chang eventually does leave Buenos Aires and continues his travels.

After having saved enough money, Fai goes back to Asia, stopping in Taiwan on his way back to Hong Kong. He eventually ends up traveling to Chang's hometown to visit his parents in the Liao Ning Night Market of Taipei. After stealing a picture of Chang from their food booth, Fai then reaches the "Zhong Xiao Fu Xin" (or "Revive Faith and Obedience"), and the story ends with Fai beginning the next leg of his journey.

A surface reading of *Happy Together* would tell a tangled story of the love and friendship of the three protagonists. However, compared to *The Edge of Heaven*, we can extract a much more sophisticated reading that reveals the complexity of the theme and hidden meanings beneath the surface.

III. GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY

Geographical mobility in *Happy Together* and *The Edge of Heaven* plays a crucial role in addressing the theme of crossing borders. The opening scene of *The Edge of Heaven* shows when a car drives into a gas station. This event implies mobility. A man comes out of his car and invites the gas station attendant to fill up the tank. Stepping into the gas station grocery store, he picks up a chocolate bar and shares a casual conversation with the cashier about the song playing over the loudspeakers. The cashier tells him that the singer, Kazim Koyuncu, is Muslim but, unfortunately, died of cancer caused by fallout from the 1986 Chernobyl disaster at the same age as the man. The man pays for his groceries, and the scene ends. The scene lasts two minutes and is completely mundane. This could have happened to anyone. There is no tension, twist, or conflict. It foreshadows the characters in the film, including geographical mobility.

This opening scene of the film is demonstrative of the theme throughout the rest of the movie. The same scene is replayed at the end of the movie. But the difference is that the viewers know that the gas station is in rural Turkey and the man in this gas station is the main character, Nejat. Otherwise, the two-minute scene is totally the same.

However, the meaning of the scene changes over time because the spectators know the character Nejat and his stories when they watch the same scene at the end of the movie. If the opening scene seems unexpected and meaningless, the stories in *The Edge of Heaven* enhance the audiences' understanding of the role of geographical mobility in the film. That is, the symbolic meaning of traveling and crossing borders to the character Nejat when he drives to Turkey to help Yeter find her daughter Ayten fills the same scene that echoes the open scene at the end of the film with sympathy for immigrants, a great sense of tension, and an abundance of meaning.

Happy Together is also a film about geographic mobility. It starts with a gay couple driving to Argentina to visit Iguazu Falls. Unfortunately, they get lost along the way, losing their money and having no choice but to live and work in Argentina until they can buy plane tickets to go back home. In "World Cinema Goes Digital: Looking at Europe from the Other Shore", Gokturk (2012) compares *The Edge of Heaven* with *Y Tu Mamá También* (2002), asserting that "the coproducer Andreas Thiel makes an interesting comparison on the basis of the attitude toward life and death as well as the road movie perspective on landscape and the trip to the seaside" (Gokturk, 2012, p. 210). Like *Y Tu Mamá También*, *Happy Together* is a road trip movie that features the protagonists traveling to a waterfall with the couple from the latter on their way to Iguazu Falls on the border of Argentina. Similarly, *Happy Together* and *The Edge of Heaven* share geographical mobility and border crossings as a main attribute for each plotline.

In *The Edge of Heaven*, characters cross national borders surrounding the eastern Black Sea, going back and forth between Germany and Turkey. The location of the final scene, a seaside village with green hills growing tea sitting on the eastern end of the Black Sea, is a metaphor, where the seemingly endless sea symbolizes the unreachable boundaries, the separate people, and the divergent cultures. It demands the struggle of several generations to overcome the boundaries both geographically and mentally. As Homi K. Bhabha puts it:

No single explanation for sending one back immediately to a single origin is adequate. And just as there are no simple dynastic answers, there are no simple discrete formations or social processes. If, in our traveling theory, we are alive to the metaphoricity of the peoples of imagined communities—migrant or metropolitan—then we shall find that the space of the modern nation-people is never simply horizontal. The metaphoric movement requires a kind of 'doubleness' in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a 'centered' causal logic. (Bhabha, 1990, p. 293)

The symbolic meaning of the Iguazu Falls bordering Brazil and Argentina in *Happy Together* is multi-faceted. Water not only changes over time, but it also shapes the landscapes that surround borders. That is to say, the boundary of a body of water is constantly changing. This symbolizes a potential cultural force that crosses borders and breaks boundaries. As the water has shapeless boundaries, the cultural borders of the imagined cosmopolitan community alter frequently.

The symbolic use of waterfalls in Chinese storytelling dates back to 497 BC in *Confucian Analects*. During the Qing dynasty, Confucius metaphorically uses a running stream to describe the wisdom he wants to pass on to his student: "The Master, standing by a stream, said, 'It passes on just like this, not ceasing day or night!'" (Legge, 1960). The analogy used here describes water perpetually moving just as time does.

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus also had a similar take on moving water. He suggests "*Panta Rei*", which can be translated as, "everything flows." Once, while lecturing his students, he put his foot into a river and said, "As they step into the same rivers, other and still other waters flow upon them. One cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers; it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs... The soul is an exhalation that perceives; it is different from the body, and always flowing." (Kahn, 1981, p. 79) The reason a man cannot step into the same river twice is because both he and the river are in a process of becoming and constantly changing.

In *Happy Together*, Iguazu Falls may symbolize passing time in the same way—Po-wing, Fai, and Chang represent different eras in Hong Kong. Po-wing represents the past of Hong Kong that was colonized, while Fai represents the transformative period, and Chang represents the future of Hong Kong when it recovered from the colonized trauma and overcame its nostalgia. Like the waterfalls in *Happy Together*, the three men move on and continue to transform and are constantly changing all the while.

IV. HYBRIDITY AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Two other important themes of both *Happy Together* and *The Edge of Heaven* are globalized multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. Indeed, it is a cultural identity that crosses borders and breaks the national boundaries, while it also highlights the diasporic experience of living across borders and the feeling of confronting unfamiliar cultures that bonds people together.

The Edge of Heaven's original title in German is *Auf der Anderen Seite*, meaning "on the other side," fittingly reminding the audience that politically constructed boundaries divide people into two groups. *The Edge of Heaven* painfully depicts alienation in diaspora felt by the former Turks now living in Germany and later the German girl Lotte in Turkey. There is also Ayten's political dissent, leaving her feeling alienated in her own country. Moreover, there is also this generational conflict between the father and son and the mother and daughter.

The intimate relationships between the characters of the two films demonstrate that people are longing for close connections and are eager to belong to a new cosmopolitan world. In *The Edge of Heaven*, the intimate relationship between Ayten and Lotte is exemplary of their longing for a close connection and belonging to the cosmopolitan identity.

However, *The Edge of Heaven* is also filled with other intimate relationships, such as that between the Turkish-German professor, Nejat, and his father, Ali, who are a hybrid between Turkish and German culture. Then there is the intimate relationship between Ali and Yeter that reveals Ali's inner desire to connect with someone from his motherland. Likewise, in *Happy Together*, it is Iguazu Falls, the waterfall lamp, and the tango dance that symbolize the desire to be intimate with other people and other cultures.

Lotte and Ayten's intimate relationship is brave and idealistic. Their meeting is accidental, but they are attracted to and loyal to one another. The two make out in a bar, and later, Lotte then follows Ayten to Turkey when she is sent to jail in Turkey. Lotte even reads Turkish law to try to help Ayten out. After Lotte's death, Lotte's mother comes to Turkey and is willing to make Lotte's wish come true to help free Ayten, thus proving the idea that intimate relationships bond people together even beyond national boundaries. Indeed, the intimate relationships between the films' characters convey that people are longing for close connections and are eager to belong to something. As Hall says:

The first position defines cultural identity in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective one true self, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes that provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging, and continuous frames of reference and meaning beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. The oneness underlying all the other more superficial differences is the truth, the essence, of Caribbeanness, of the black experience. It is this identity that a Caribbean or black diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light, and express through cinematic representation. (Hall, 1990, p. 223)

The film indicates that Ali starts an intimate relationship with Yeter because Ali shares the same cultural identity and national identity as Yeter. The diasporic experience ties the two characters in *The Edge of Heaven* together. However, the intimacy between Lotte and Ayten is different in that the two women do not share the same history and ancestry. Lotte helps Ayten after their accidental encounter, goes out of her way to bring Ayten to her house, and loves her. What is the explanation for this intimate relationship? For the answer, we once again refer to Hall:

There is, however, a second, related but different view of cultural identity. This second position recognizes that as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference that constitute what we really are, or rather – since history has intervened – what we have become. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about one experience, one identity... Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of becoming as well as of being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere and have histories. But like everything that is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (Hall, 1990, p. 225)

Though they are significantly different from their national identities, the two young girls are attracted to each other because they are both at critical points in their lives. Meanwhile, because of their many similarities concerning their care and love for one another, they have a tendency to share a new cultural identity. That is, it is a cosmopolitan cultural identity that is "a matter of becoming as well as of being" that breaks the national boundaries and crosses borders.

In *Happy Together*, Iguazu Falls, the destination that the couple planned to go to, along with the waterfall lamp, both symbolize this cosmopolitan cultural identity and the desire to be intimate with others. That is because waterfalls are rivers that drop off a cliff into another river and coalesce with one another.

The background of the story in *Happy Together* is about the historical immigration of Asians to Argentina from during the middle and late 1990s, creating what is now a Chinese diaspora in Buenos Aires. By setting the film in Buenos Aires, about as far away from Hong Kong as one can get, Wong demonstrates that this is the best place for Hong Kongers to discover their identity. "In Argentina, because there are few Chinese communities in Argentina, especially in Buenos Aires, so I think these two guys have to live in a place with a lot of Argentinians, so this is the background of the story" (Kar-wai, 2008).

Looking at a world map, Argentina and China are separated by the Pacific Ocean and on the opposite sides of the Earth from one another. The film indicates that cultural hybridization, internalization, and repulsion happen in this geographical location. For example, Fai had trouble sleeping when he returned to Asia from Argentina. He says, "Watching TV, I realized that Hong Kong and Argentina are on the opposite sides of the Earth from one another. I wonder if Hong Kong looks upside down from the perspective of opposite sides of the world that alienate Hong Kong. The lives in Argentina for Hong Kong people are opposite" (Ltd., 1997). Here, he imagines Hong Kong from Argentina's perspective. The ridiculous and fantastic images he describes seemingly imply that it is difficult for Eastern and Western cultures to negotiate with each other. These feelings and the lifestyle of exposure to other cultures are common experiences for those who were exiled to other countries.

This new cosmopolitan cultural identity and cultural forms emerged from the hybridization of globalized multiculturalism. Taken from Edward Said's work, Homi K. Bhabha interprets this term in his own work. It is also known as cosmopolitanism, a desire to belong to the world. As Homi Bhabha states:

I have lived that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gatherings of exiles and emigres and refugees, gathering on the edge of foreign cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centers; gathering on the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language; gathering the signs of

approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, and disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present; and also the gathering of the people in the diaspora. (Bhabha, 1990, p. 291)

The gatherings of exiles, emigres, and refugees on the edge of foreign cultures form a new cosmopolitan culture. As we can see in *Happy Together*, the diaspora of Hong Kongers and Taiwanese living in Argentina enables them to cultivate a seemingly private but inclusive identity to belong to, as the waterfall lamp, the tango dance, and the soccer games symbolize this new cultural identity and cultural hybridization.

Po-wing teaches Fai how to tango dance. Their dance is very odd because they approach each other so closely and intimately that Po-wing's head leans on Fai's shoulder, in contrast to Po-wing and an Argentinian dancer at the end of the film. This addresses the intimacy between Po-wing and Fai. From the moment they are born, people start to look for their identity and long for belonging, no matter if what they are looking for is a person or their motherland. Although it is impossible for two people to converge into one, Po-wing and Fai in *Happy Together* are irreversibly and inevitably willing to make efforts to get together.

After he leaves Po-wing, Fai frequently hangs out with Chang, and the two often play soccer with their coworkers. However, they play casually and without rules. Sometimes they kick the ball, while other times they grab the ball with their hands. Fai also happens to play Mahjong a lot with his co-workers, so Chang knows where to easily find him.

Interestingly, the tango originated in Argentina, and records of soccer go back more than 2000 years to ancient China; however, today the sport is far more popular in Argentina than it is in China. Fai migrates to Argentina and lives within an Asian community. He is welcomed in the community when he takes up popular local activities. However, the ways they dance the tango and play soccer are hybridized, just as playing Mahjong in South America is.

Even though uprooting oneself to a totally different place is extremely difficult, it is still possible for people to get closer to understanding their past. The propensity for cosmopolitanism is revealed in the film. Art and culture are mobile. Although language is relatively still, like the river, art is always traveling, always changing.

V. ATTITUDE TOWARDS LIFE AND DEATH

The emotional impact on viewers heavily underlies *The Edge of Heaven* and *Happy Together* because these films make statements about both life and death. *The Edge of Heaven* influences viewers' lives by taking a constructive stance on coincidental and complicated relationships, while *Happy Together* emphasizes jumbled and entangled space and time. In both films, death indicates a new start. A historical figure's death as the background of *Happy Together* implies that this is a new start for the intimacy between Po-wing and Fai, representing the end of the colonial history of Hong Kong. The deaths of Yeter and Lotte in *The Edge of Heaven* happen in foreign countries, thus illustrating the invisible effects of borders and the desire to shed new light on hybridization and cosmopolitanism.

Contingencies and coincidences frame the actions in *The Edge of Heaven*. Those actions are not irreplaceable since they are random. What happens in the film does not necessarily occur because the plotline relies on chance encounters and intersections between people and places. However, coincidental relationships and incidents lead to unexpected situations. For example, Ayten happens to encounter the German police, and she is summoned to jail in Istanbul. Yeter and Lotte could have survived their accidents. Also, Nejat could have met Ayten because Lotte happens to be his tenant in Turkey. This randomness highlights the possibility of sorrowful accidents befalling characters who live outside of their homelands.

The Edge of Heaven educates viewers through fear. Death in the film is hushed as immigrants seem invisible and cannot make their voices heard. For instance, both Yeter and Lotte's deaths both take place outside of their homelands, and both are killed unexpectedly and instantly. As immigrants, they risk their lives and make their own voices muted.

Sad events and the destruction of innocent people simultaneously bring fear and education to the audience. Yeter's death and Lotte's are very tragic because they are innocent immigrants without support from their compatriots. However, neither of these deaths is the result of themselves. The film leaves us to think for a moment, "Who is to blame?" After all, Lotte's death is not her own fault, nor is Ayten or her mother Susanne to blame. It is the same with the death of Yeter. Nobody was responsible for her death. Everyone is innocent here, but who kills Yeter and Lotte? The researcher argues that the invisible boundary between people and the two nations is what kills them. Contingency in the film showcases the necessity of breaking this boundary between couples and family members through tragedy. From the perspective of philosophy, death is relative. It is just the death of the body, but the spirit is immortal. Even though Yeter and Lotte died in the film, their spirits, from the perspective of philosophy, are immortal in real life. This is the power of tragedy.

Although *The Edge of Heaven* and *Happy Together* share the themes of life and death, *Happy Together* focuses on the transformative age of Hong Kong and how Hong Kong people perceive it. People have built their lives through space and time. However, space and time are entangled and jumbled in *Happy Together*. For example, the opposite of the Earth, the southernmost lighthouse, and upside-down Hong Kong. By moving away from their home countries, Po-wing, Fai, and Chang have tried to exile themselves from having a strong desire to go back home.

Meanwhile, time in this film is also disordered and discrete in addressing the geographical mobility. Before Chang returned to Taiwan from Argentina, he imagined the time gap between the two places: "The day is beginning as I leave. It might be night in Taipei now. I wonder if the Liao Ning night market has started" (*Happy Together*, 1997). Fai finds it hard to sleep after changing time zones back to the opposite side of the world.

However, when he gets to Argentina, he also cannot adapt to the local time zone and wishes to go back to Hong Kong time: “To boost my income, I’ve started working in a slaughterhouse. The pay’s much better, and the hours suit me fine. Work all night. Sleep all day. I’m back on Hong Kong time” (*Happy Together*, 1997). This sleep inversion is Fai’s individual experience of exchanging diurnal habits for nocturnal habits, but it also represents a collective experience of a seriously nerve-wracking time disorder for people who live outside of their homelands. Days and nights are reversed for Hong Kong people who live in Argentina because they feel like they do not belong, and they are adjusting to the local culture.

On the other hand, the main characters do not die in *Happy Together*. The only death shown comes from a television report on the death of Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping; yet, his death is an important clue implying that *Happy Together* is a national allegory. The three main characters in *Happy Together* represent China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, respectively. Notably, it was very important for the time period that the film was made. From Deng Xiaoping’s death, we can discern that the film takes place before Britain’s handover of Hong Kong to China on February 20, 1997. This scene appears at the end of *Happy Together* while Fai was back in Taipei, Taiwan. The historical event made Fai feel like he was waking up from a long sleep.

It is easy to figure out that, underlying Wong’s statement, this film is related to historical events. The emotional gap between Fai and Po-wing is symbolic of British colonialism imposing inevitable and unexpected consequences on Hong Kong, thus leaving an inevitable scar between mainland China and Hong Kong. By opening up about the intimacy between Fai and Po-wing, Wong is willing to reveal the desire of Hong Kongers to search for their identities by closing the gap between them and China. The impossible love of Po-wing and Fai in this film demonstrates that Hong Kong and mainland China both wish to “start over,” but the scar of the colonial past is hard to erase. As Wong interprets *Happy Together*: “In a way, I don’t have an answer about what happened after 1997 in [Hong Kong], but somehow at the end of this film I realized we have at least provided a wish, not an answer – that is *Happy Together*” (Kar-wai, 2008).

Wong insinuates the relations between Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan by addressing the intimacy between characters in the film, reflecting an individual’s difficulty in connecting with others and exploring whether there is a suitable way to get along well together between two men or two places. Hong Kong has first-hand experience with the “one country, two systems” policy and, hopefully, can provide more understanding about dealing with its postcolonial and diasporic experiences.

The Edge of Heaven uses the power of tragedy and educates viewers through the fear of watching innocent people die. On the contrary, in *Happy Together*, death represents a historical event and implies a national allegory. The experience of living outside of homelands and death in both films suggest a desire to improve the living condition of diasporas and to establish a new cosmopolitan world.

VI. CONCLUSION

By comparing *The Edge of Heaven* (Fatih Akin, 2007) and *Happy Together* (Wong Kar-Wai, 1997), this paper attempted to find where and how each film differed from one another and where the similarities lied. By examining the two films, this paper argued that both films include geographical mobility and intimate relationships between characters. However, each film revealed different attitudes about life and death; thus, the study delved deeper into the themes of each of these films and analyzed the symbolic meanings of water as well.

Throughout each film, there were surprisingly unexpected revelations that challenged the expectations and perceptions of viewers, forcing the researcher to look at it from a new perspective. A surface reading of *Happy Together* reveals a story about three protagonists tangled up in love and friendship. However, compared with *The Edge of Heaven*, *Happy Together* is much more sophisticated. In Section III, by revealing complex themes and hidden meanings beneath the surface, the researcher posited that geographical mobility in the two films reveals the status of living and thinking beyond one nation. In Section IV, the researcher argued that the intimate relationships that bond people together go beyond national boundaries. That is, the intimate relationships between characters in two films convey a longing for close connections and the eagerness to belong to something bigger than themselves. Finally, in Section V, the researcher explored each film’s differing attitude towards life and death.

In sum, art is not for art’s sake but for life’s sake. *The Edge of Heaven* and *Happy Together* reveal new experiences of moving across borders and living in a cosmopolitan place. Both films put an emphasis on breaking the agonistic boundaries between characters in intimate relationships and hoping for establishing a cosmopolitan new world.

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