MIGRATION, DISLOCATION AND MOVEMENT ON SCREEN

Edited by Ruxandra Trandafoiu

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berghahn
NEW YORK • OXFORD
www.berghahnbooks.com

First published in 2024 by
Berghahn Books
www.berghahnbooks.com

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Contents

Introduction

Ruxandra Trandafoiu

This volume proposes a variegated exploration of migration on screen, mostly focused on feature films, although there are inevitable and occasional incursions into television drama and documentary. This edited collection arises from the conviction that migration, mobility, movement, displacement, dislocation, border crossing, transit, departure, arrival and in-betweenness, have not only become common and shared experiences for most of us, but they have also been turned into highly politicized and contentious issues. How cinema represents them, for represent them it must, is a necessary question. Consequently, an array of possible answers to this fundamental question is explored in all the eight chapters constituting this volume. While migration and mobility have been normalized by universal practices and lifestyles over the last few decades, they have also been stifled, contained and highly regulated by not only political decision, but also global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In only the last few years, Europe has seen at least two key moments (the 2015 so-called 'refugee crisis' spurred by the Syrian civil war and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022) that offered plenty of opportunities to pay attention to at least the plight of war refugees within the much larger context of global migration and dislocation. The Mediterranean region, Australia's waters and the US-Mexican border have also received consideration as spaces of multiplying rhizomic movements but, also significantly, of obstruction, interruption and stuckness. We would not imbue movement with so much significance – indeed, we all engage in it readily and willingly – if movement flowed unimpeded. The reason filmmakers and audiences alike are interested in the theme of migration on screen is because mobility is, in today's world, problematic, often rendered illegal and therefore dangerous, often contested, stopped or curtailed, often the site of

inequality, human rights infringements, tragedy and death. Migration can, literally, kill you.

For centuries migration has been a key source of good stories that mythology, literature and, more recently, film have told and retold. Human mobility can indeed tell some damn interesting stories, with good but mostly bad endings. As audiences, we are transfixed and moved, we empathize and we often cry, we become migrants through the experiences we identify with on screen and in everyday life. How migration is represented on screen matters therefore a great deal, from political, economic, ethical and industry perspectives. It matters even more now, when this ancient human pursuit has become the object of so much contestation, hate and rejection. This is a crucial moral moment for humanity and cinema is right at the crux of the most crucial debates arising right now, right here. By projecting 'small', often individualized and confessional stories, cinema is once again telling us the bigger story. As Campanioni makes clear in the first chapter of this volume, film is firmly implicated in the critique of the present. It becomes, as Anisimovich too asserts, a contestation device, a site of resistance. This dissident quality is echoed in the chapters authored by Hudelist, Raj and Sreekumar, and Peruzzi, Bruno and Massa, and is also dissected in director El Hagar's reflections of his own professional approaches in the final chapter of this volume.

The volume moves away from the temptation to categorize the films, television series and documentaries analysed within. If we adopt the accepted classification of first (Hollywood) cinema, second (European art house) cinema, third (anticolonial, 'Third World') cinema, fourth (indigenous) cinema and fifth (refugee) cinema, we quickly spot that some of the films showcased fall in between categories, even before we attempt to classify TV series like *Years and Years* or discuss Andrea Segre's documentary work (both featured in the book). They get us, to paraphrase Ponzanesi (2012), to a 'non-place'. However, we could say that the films analysed are *engagé* (committed and participative); they are defined by resistance, disruption, subversion and social action (Kaur and Grassilli 2019: 3); they claim visibility and voice for those usually unseen and unheard. They provide, in other words, a counter-narrative (Kaur and Grassilli 2019: 4), not that dissimilar from 'accented cinema' (Naficy 2001), in their striving for self-presentation and self-representation. They are *doppelt* or doubled (Berghahn and Stenberg 2010a: 5). Inherently, they are therefore political and activist.

What political, activist and critical approaches achieve via screens large and small is the development of a better alternative. Cinema reminds us that there is

another way, that we are human, and that means that we are social, communitarian, moral and compassionate. In the film work scrutinized by Campanioni, Evans, Kocatürk, Hudelist, Raj and Sreekumar, and Peruzzi, Bruno and Massa, we have a clear exploration of the ethical outcomes of witnessing sacrifice, injustice and trauma. As Evans explains, reimagining the national imaginary to make it more inclusive and to bring into reality a more cosmopolitan outlook must be one of the main impacts of films about migrants and migration. However, as Kocatürk, and Raj and Sreekumar observe, films can also miss this opportunity and (self) reterritorialization and self-imposed immobility can often raise their ugly heads again, in the analysis provided by Andreas Hudelist in his chapter. Cinema is 'imperfect', as Campanioni asserts.

Within the context of ethics, we could argue that an important achievement of this ever-increasing body of films, television series and documentaries about migration is the re-elaboration of the theme of otherness or strangeness. It offers the opportunity to talk in detail about strategies of othering (see Anisimovich's chapter in this volume), but more importantly, it allows 'strangers' to tell their own stories, as screen writers, directors and actors, or simply as people with a camera (see the chapters authored by Hudelist, Peruzzi, Bruno and Massa, and Trandafoiu and Shannon, in particular). This allows audiences to move away from parochial, nationalistic and ideologized storytelling and adopt multiple perspectives. We become 'us' and 'them' at the same time, we feel what foreigners feel as they are gazed upon and, similarly, we adopt the critical gaze of the stranger seeing things anew. Accordingly, films about migration are films of 'ambivalence', to adopt a term dear to Malini Guha (2015: 26). They adopt difference as a philosophical inquiry but, at the same time, they normalize difference, they transform it into a way of living with difference, while being different. They adopt a pendulum or seesaw approach, refashioning exterior experiences into interior ones, shifting perspectives, allowing viewers the freedom to appropriate or reject them, or even sew them into the quilt of their own lived experiences. And yet, in the same movement, they may perpetuate the troubling association between 'strangeness' or 'difference' and 'anomaly', as Campanioni explains in his chapter. While empathy plays a big part in seeing the lives of distant others, we are never far away from compassion fatigue (see Evans in this volume).

These screened migration stories are inevitably not without ambiguity, because of the complexity of contrary standpoints (see again Campanioni in this volume). The present is shaped by both past trauma and future projection, as evidenced by

the analysis provided by Raj and Sreekumar in this volume. Both remembering and forgetting outline memory and nostalgia. The colonizer is constantly reminded of the existence of the colonized, while the colonized never escapes the inheritance of doubleness, for, as Bhabha contends, 'the English weather also revives memories of its daemonic double: the heat and dust of India; the dark emptiness of Africa; the tropical chaos that was deemed despotic and ungovernable and therefore worthy of the civilizing mission' (Bhabha 1990: 320). Cinematic narratives become political because of their disruptive and contesting double nature. Films about migration are necessarily contrapuntal, to use a term much favoured by Edward Said (1993) because the contrapuntal 'speaks to the inevitable, continuous and significant juxtaposition of elements and threads in a life, a text, a history . . . the presence in a single discourse of more than one voice' (Silverstone 2006: 85). As already mentioned, the 'bigger story' is the canvass that foregrounds the 'small' individual narratives. This view comes across strongly in the ongoing discussion between producer Roger Shannon and director Khaled El Hagar that is available in the Postscript to the volume. On screen the link between history, event, and reality on the one hand, and their fictional representation and visualization on the other, is often interrupted and problematic (see Raj and Sreekumar, and Trandafoiu and Shannon in this volume). There is often an ambiguity, a slippage. This makes for interesting viewing. Equally, it raises some important questions for cinema, and particularly European cinemas, often guilty of colonial hangovers that perpetuate hierarchies of power and practices of inclusion–exclusion.

In order to avoid the dangers of slipping back into inherited forms of representation, the volume engages more directly with the work of filmmakers who are migrants themselves and therefore dislocated culturally, ideologically and professionally. Simply applying the label 'diasporic' to their work would be reductive. We could argue that any filmmaker is dislocated, as artists can only produce something original if they acquire a new perspective, they shift their position and their vision away from what is already known, understood and accepted. Nonetheless, some of the filmmakers featured in this book are both physically displaced and symbolically dislocated, thus allowing for a more acute awareness of migration experiences: Rafi Pitts is an Iranian who lives in France and England, while Khaled El Hagar has lived in-between two homes (Birmingham and Cairo) for decades. They see the world, to quote another famously dislocated artist, in 'broken mirrors' (Rushdie 1982). Dislocated filmmakers are in the unique but ambiguous position of being both close enough and distanced enough from

their multiple realities to acquire clarity and reflexivity – what Khaled El Hagar calls in this volume a 'third eye,' a third brain, a third perspective. The dislocated filmmaker never goes blind, on the contrary, their acuity increases with every new experience, whether that is the experience of going forward or that of being stuck. Rushdie might be right to deplore the loss of several shards in the 'broken mirror' of his diasporic existence, but he is also realistic in his insistence that the 'double perspective' of being 'at one and the same time insiders and outsiders' cultivates a 'stereoscopic vision' (Rushdie 1982). Dislocated filmmakers see beyond the surface and the immediate event. They make the jump from linearity to elasticity. They purposefully confuse the state of stasis and that of flow. They make the familiar unfamiliar and vice versa. They show us the absurd (see Anisimovich's chapter) in order to make us understand our own racial prejudices.

Dislocation reconfigures place and space. Geography becomes symbolic but also politically problematic. While trajectories of mobility are often defined by the move from rural to urban and periphery to centre, with the city as the predilect destination of migration (see Guha 2015), the symbolic geography emerging from the chapters featured in this volume often takes us away from capitals and into various locations as far as Egypt, India, Mexico, Norway or Turkey. Moreover, the chapters zoom in on borders, spaces of transit and non-places, all of them locations that encourage potential transgression and resistance. Despite obsessive rebordering and containment attempts, borderlands are mostly defined by interstitial, temporary or nowhere spaces. They, once again, tell the story of migration effectively, albeit rather pessimistically. Migration is not just about departures and arrivals or landings, but also about returns, transits, limbos, journeys going no place, mobile bodies temporarily traversing in-between unstable spatial configurations, bodies drowning with no name attached to them. The local and the global are constantly reinterpreted through both motion and fixity. And yet these interstitial spaces, that are constantly conquered and lost through movement, can become purgatories leading to hell, not paradise (see Hudelist's compelling analysis of *Soy Nero* in this volume).

Once optimistic in terms of cinema's potential to subvert hierarchies of power and create something new and exciting out of sometimes grim experiences, films on migration nowadays transition to a more pessimistic position. The focus shifts towards impenetrable borders, immobility, feelings of being stuck, and fear. The migrant is often associated with danger and terrorism, in order to be controlled through regulation, censorship, dispossession and homelessness. The paradox of

migration is that the search for new moorings, for desired anchoring at destination, is often replaced by stuckness, by physical and symbolic immobility, by inequality. The theme of violence, often symbolic and systemic, thus permeates much of the work scrutinized in this volume (see Campanioni, Kocatürk, Hudelist, Raj and Sreekumar). In a world in which people move more than ever, border crossings are only available to some, but not others. This pessimistic conclusion is reiterated by the engaged cinema (Schrader and Wrinkler 2013: 8) of migration. Both filmmakers and film researchers attempt to navigate an ethical path of cosmopolitan responsibility aiming thus to address inequality and repropose diversity and acceptance. The complexity of the films showcased in this volume may defy classification, which is why most authors in this volume simply refer to them as films about migration, but their political engagement and moral concern is never in doubt.

The Chapters

The chapters included in this volume span a number of countries and cinemas – Bulgaria, Cuba, Egypt, Germany, India, Italy, Mexico, Norway, Turkey, the UK and the USA – to outline how cinema represents migrants and migration in different geographic, historic and industry contexts. The films and fimmakers analysed here traverse several decades of film output and paint a rich picture of movement, colonialism, glocalism, cosmopolitanism, transnationalism, borders and (re) bordering, epistemic violence and space reconfiguration. In the process of moving from one reality to the next, we witness how film is able to produce a disruptive counterdiscourse to the more established discourses permeating popular culture. However, the authors are not afraid to point out, when required, that sometimes the scope and achievements of the films analysed can be limited in their ideological, social or cultural relevance and endeavour. Some of the chapters focus mainly on one film (see Anisimovich or Hudelist), albeit contextualized culturally, historically and politically, while other chapters rely on a large body of work (see Campanioni, Evans, Raj and Sreekumar, and especially Kocatürk and Peruzzi, Bruno and Massa) that comparatively paint a full picture of how different societies and their film industries have approached the theme of migration. This diversity speaks again to the power of the big migration story, one of the most compelling narratives of our time, often able to stand on its own and become an archetype,

but also seamlessly spilling into other stories, conjoining the voices of other narrators.

The book's structure primarily highlights processes of migration and dislocation. While movement and mobility link all eight chapters, chapters in 'Part I: Migration' are concerned with the more practical outcomes of mobility (departures, travel, arrival, identity remaking), while chapters in 'Part II: Dislocation' focus on the more symbolic aspects of movement (the moral crisis and ethical outcomes of migration). Once mobility is in process and migration becomes lived experience, with clearly delineated parameters and contrasting representations, as highlighted by the work of Campanioni, Anisimovich, Evans and Kocatürk, it was imperative to delve further into questions of loss, transition, in-betweenness and nowhere spaces, as evidenced by the work of Hudelist, Raj and Sreekumar, Peruzzi, Bruno and Massa, Trandafoiu and Shannon. The book thus moves from a focus on physical, spatial and temporal displacement, towards ideological dislocation, rebordering and immobility or stuckness. While the displacement of migration suggests a physical separation from place, dislocation engages more profoundly with cultural, ideological and moral rupture, interruption and inevitable but traumatic change. As the reader moves from the first to the second part of the book, the political commentary also becomes more incisive, highlighting clear inequalities both at the level of society and at the level of the film industry itself and thus reiterating structural contraints curtailing the fair representation of migrants and migration more generally.

The main themes of 'Part I: Migration' include practices of mobility, identity making, transnationalism, border crossing and intercultural negotiation. Campanioni's opening chapter discusses diverse forms of mobility, understood as an important tool in the remaking of space. The non-linear nature of migration results in amorphous and therefore anomalous spaces. These spaces become indicators of a perceived migration 'crisis' that, in Campanioni's view, results from neoliberalism, disaster capitalism and ecological insecurity. In bringing together *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (Cuba, 1968), *Transit* (Germany, 2018), *Beforeigners* (Norway, 2019) and *Years and Years* (United Kingdom, 2019), Campanioni combines narratives of exile, escape, passage and asylum, produced in different social and political contexts. He shows how they all use 'anomaly' to invite the audience's empathy through a discourse that condemns practices of surveillance and the tendency to ignore the plight of the displaced body. They therefore serve as 'necessary counter documents' that give visibility to those displaced, stateless

or exiled. They disrupt colonial legacies and reimagine sites of systemic violence. Campanioni's preoccupation with who is being watched and who gazes upon others leads him to conclude that the 'difference between the ones watching and the ones being looked at is very often as arbitrary'. The power relationship can easily be reversed and reimagined. Campanioni is right to observe that film becomes a useful tool in critiquing the present and his chapter begins to unpack the moral dimension of representing migrants and migration in the current period.

In the chapter that follows, Anisimovich explores East-West migration through one of the most iconic post-communist Bulgarian films, *Mission London* (Mitovski 2010). She further elaborates on the issue of power, already present in the previous chapter, by arguing that the act of border crossing becomes a 'transgressive' act that reveals the 'excessiveness and artificiality of the constructed imaginary spaces of East and West'. Border crossing therefore complicates strategies of othering. The migrants' hybridity, acquired in the process of crossing real and symbolic borders, challenges othering tendencies at destination. At the same time, the themes of migration and hybridization are used to explore post-communist anxieties in Bulgarian society, such as refashioning national identity, while concomitantly being engaged in processes of transnationalization. Consequently, often it is not quite clear who 'the other' is or may be at any given time. The postcolonial legacies of Eastern European societies become a point of reference, with Anisimovich engaged in a challenging discussion about the East-West dichotomy seen through both the ballast of Soviet colonialism and contemporary enforced Westernization. Anisimovich appropriates the concept of 'border thinking' to discuss ideological replacement and theorize cinema's role in 'dialogical, vernacular acts of border crossing'. Anisimovich thus contends that *Mission London*, through its use of satire and absurdism, becomes part of the 'cinema of intercultural negotiation', represented here through the interplay between emigration and immigration. Her contribution is also relevant in highlighting processes that define postcoloniality without race.

Evans's work also plays upon the notion of border (reaching it, crossing it, pushing it further) to argue that representations of migration in German films such as *Lichter/Distant Lights* (Schmid, 2003), *Gold* (Arslan, 2013) and *Western* (Grisebach, 2017) contribute to a new cinema of intercultural dialogue. Evans appropriates Alison Landsberg's notion of 'prosthetic cinema' (2003) to show how the films under his lens challenge the inhospitable migratory regime in Europe by inviting the audience's empathy. By assuming the role of the American 'Other' in

the Karl May Westerns, German economic migrants become a metaphor for any migrant caught between mobility and stasis, agency and lack of, successful and unsuccessful settlement. Well contextualized with regards to current migratory flows in Europe and also recalling the frontier mobilities of classic American Westerns, the chapter raises important questions about the role of cinema in exploring migration from a political standpoint. It also problematizes notions of national identity, cosmopolitanism and transnationalism. The chapter thus reiterates the themes of power, agency and hierarchy already present in Campanioni and Anisimovich's chapters and continues to champion the role of cinema in fostering a cosmopolitan outlook in our relationship with distant others.

Ali H. Kocatürk's chapter surveys a vast array of Turkish films, from the 1960s to the 1990s, that engage with the theme of internal migration, to argue that they provide essential sociological and political insights, before the advent of the 'new Turkish cinema'. The analysis reveals that the films are largely divided into didactic and descriptive, thus providing extensive coverage of the social phenomenon of internal migration in Turkey, yet their scope is rather limited, through a classic approach that includes repetitive themes, melodramatic structure and elements of social realism. Their moral teachings are therefore circumscribed by narrative parables that limit, rather than encourage, social transgression and radical change. It is a missed opportunity, since, as Kocatürk concludes, the 'presentation of diverse problems, the criticism of the malfunctioning system and deteriorating society is used as the context for the stories, but the context itself is not developed further to overtly create a discussion on a social problem'. Kocatürk explains these limitations by alluding to financial difficulties, censorship and lack of creative vision characterizing Turkish cinema at the time. Like Anisimovich, Kocatürk circumscribes the film corpus analysed within Turkey's historical developments, with cinema reflecting migration as part of its social duty. As in Bulgaria, the body of work analysed in this chapter emerges because migration becomes a defining and remaking moment for a whole generation.

'Part II: Dislocation' builds on the themes of the first part to take a closer look at well-established outcomes of movement, seen in spatial, temporal and symbolic or ideological terms. This part therefore focuses more clearly on dislocation as a process that results in in-betweenness, transit areas and 'third' spaces, but also elicits practices of rebordering and encourages stuckness and immobility. In this part, authors delve into the philosophical dimension of cinematic representations of migration to reflect on loss, border trouble, the 'phantom' nomad and the

outcomes of being delegitimized. Trauma, violence and victimhood thus permeate more clearly chapters in this part of the book.

Hudelist's detailed analysis of *Soy Nero* (Pitts 2016) is a philosophical commentary of the role forced dislocation and relocation plays on migrants' sense of identity. Starting with the case of the Green Card Soldiers system in the USA, it explores the role of citizenship and of enforced borders in the erasure of a great number of people, delegitimized by dislocation and mobility. The 'No Man's Land' Hudelist refers to thus acquires new and varied significance and meanings. By slowly progressing through diverse aspects of mobility, as represented in the film, Hudelist maps out 'rhizomatic' connections, disconnections and reconnections, in relation to 'the fluid construction of the self', which is typical of the migrant. Vacillating between moments of normalization and moments of differentiation, the analysis highlights the process of symbolically and legally deleting vast numbers of people, caught in-between legal systems of assigning nationhood, citizenship and ultimately identity. Hierarchies of rights are a reminder of the subaltern position of the immigrant, often subject to both symbolic and real violence, dished out haphazardly, without rule or reason. The phantomatic presence of the perpetual nomad is a reminder of the accidental nature of the way families and communities are configured and the illogical nature of borders.

Raj and Sreekumar provide a further study of dislocation and border change by questioning the nation-building and therefore political role of cinema, in relation to the Indian Partition of 1947 and resulting mass population movement. Their choice of films is carefully curated and includes MS Sathyu's debut feature film *Garm Hava* (1973), Bhisham Sahni's novel based film *Tamas* (1988), Deepa Mehta's trilogy film *Earth* (1998), Kushwant Singh's classic postcolonial novel based film *Train to Pakistan* (1998) and a Canadian co-production filmed in both British Columbia and on-location in India, *Partition* (2007). Their analysis highlights the traumatic legacy of the Partition evident in memory loss, a culturally ambivalent heritage, and the large-scale displacement of bodies. It also focuses on Bollywood's ambiguous representation of Muslims on screen, the challenges faced by Indian cinema to come to terms with a violent historical past, and its attempts to contribute to mainly Hindu-based nation building. The resulting cinematic canvass projects a nation reconfigured through processes of remembering and forgetting, in which the border acts as a separating but also reaffirming device (as in Simon Lewis's account of 'border trouble', 2019). Travel, border crossing and

resettlement become defined by violence. The body of the Muslim thus becomes enmeshed in a process of contesting Bollywood's unifying and family-related tropes. Politics takes centre stage through a process of unfairly legitimizing and delegitimizing migrants and refugees, based on religious identification. Raj and Sreekumar argue that Bollywood's 'trivialization of the plot with a deliberate intention to ameliorate the rivalry among the communities and to escape the horrors of censorship does little good in addressing the real issue of the mass mobilization and displacement of the population during the Partition.' Inescapably, processes of violent dislocation invoked by the films analysed lead to a sense of irretrievable loss. The postcolonial theme represented in this chapter is also reflected in the last chapter in the volume.

Peruzzi, Bruno and Massa's chapter argues that cinematographic representations of migrations are sociologically meaningful, particularly in the context of migrants' journeys and their landings in Italy. With reference to a large corpus of Italian films that represent this topic from 2012 to 2020, they show how cinema uses storytelling which combines reason and pathos to open up in-between spaces of liminal existence, through which viewers can share migrant experiences and empathize with the condition of the immigrant. In order to achieve this, the films vacillate between the inside perspective of the migrant protagonist and the outside gaze of the filmmaker. The research corpus has been chosen with this in mind, but also because of the focus on the journey, on transit, movement, 'interruptions and reorganization of trajectories', through which the journey transcends physical parameters into existential realms. The Mediterranean Sea is 'a space of passage, a place of transition', that preannounces the emotional dislocation of the migrant, despite the eventual arrival, punctuated by the iconic presence of the maritime and coastal setting. It is the crossing, rather than the landing that lends meaning to the life of the migrant. However, the landing brings political dissonance to the presence of the migrant. The 'law of the sea' also continues to deny those in transit aspirations of safety and security. The chapter interrogates the outcomes of the political interplay between the global and the local, which redefines both notions of civil society and family. In addition, Peruzzi, Bruno and Massa's exploration of over 100 films and documentaries about migration over the last two decades in Italy makes important contributions to our understanding of the role of filmmakers in representing a complex cultural, sociological and political issue. Their project also aptly explores the representation on screen of the seismic shift in the Italian collective psychic from being a country

of emigration to becoming a country of immigration, so far not sufficiently studied with reference to film and documentary.

Trandafoiu and Shannon's chapter focuses on the work of Egyptian-British filmmaker Khaled El Hagar and uses an industry-based approach to the relationship between migration and cinema. The chapter argues that engaged filmmaking comes in different forms and that diasporic filmmakers working in-between aesthetic and cultural traditions develop a 'third eye' acuity that is a source of much needed innovation and perspectivism. Through the voice and film work of El Hagar, Trandafoiu and Shannon explore European cinema's colonial legacy, and the impact of dislocation on double consciousness, difference, hybridity, citizenship and memory. Finally, the Postscript offer readers the opportunity to read in full the transcript of the two interviews conducted by Roger Shannon with Egyptian-British filmmaker Khaled El Hagar. They allow El Hagar to express, in his own voice, issues related to the relationship between European and non-European cinemas in the current postcolonial context, the film industry's inescapable racism, nationhood, cinematic legacies and using the 'third' optic to reflexively tackle contemporary cultural and social issues.

The chapters gathered in this volume spell out the current politics of migrations, movements and journeys on screen. They subvert public and political discourse and, at times, industry practices and conventions, to visualize and lay bare not just migrants' lack of agency, but the absence of social and political responsibility, with a devastating impact on personal and collective trajectories, identities of place, and our often-idealized imaginary of a together world. The volume opens a new conversation about what screen representations can do to contribute more fully to a much-needed public debate about the current significance of migration, mobility, border crossing and dislocation, to our sense of identity and being in the world. Movement defines contemporary human experiences and is increasingly captured, mediated and reflected on screen. Media facilitate mobility and displacement, connections and disconnections, and thus contemporary screen industries have become a primary site for representing the resulting processes of transnationalization, hybridization and cosmopolitanization. They contribute significantly to enabling, directly or indirectly, a political commentary on the outcomes of migration and dislocation. The chapters gathered in this book offer therefore a deeper understanding of the relationship between media, power and agency in a world still defined by power imbalances, in which the marginalized are finding new ways of making their voices heard. However, this aspect also raises a question about the

limits of mediatization. While movement gains centrality and those involved in it are awarded some visibility, equal engagements with the world under the banner of cosmopolitanism remain an unfulfilled desire. The collection aims to chart the transition to a place beyond borders enabled by the screen industries. It is part of a journey that must continue, in search of that elusive happy ending.

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PART I

Migration

Houses in Motion

The Reimagining of Time and Space as Anomalous in Representations of Mobility

Chris Campanioni

On 29 March 2020, five days after India had closed its own state and district borders, migrant workers defied lockdown and took to the road, gathering at the Paippad town centre to demand the right to leave their labour camps and return home. The migrants, who work in construction, plywood making, hospitality, fishing, laterite mining, apparel manufacturing, and farming, had been, at the time, contributing to two-thirds of India's state domestic product.

'We cannot allow them to travel', a district collector told the media on the same day. 'We have already promised them free food and accommodation during the lockdown period' (Onmanorama 2020). Without work, without any means of transport, evicted from temporary shelters, migrant workers began to travel on foot, walking hundreds of miles in sweltering heat. They carried their small children and their spare belongings. Some were beaten by civilians; others were hosed down with disinfectants and forcefully sterilized.

The migrant in this case, as elsewhere, can be read as anomalous, as bearer of anomaly: the migrant body as that which unsettles the body politic by revealing the logistical assembly of raw materials that in turn assemble the vast swath of free citizens' lives. As indispensable labour to the organization of the global supply chain for retail conglomerates and as silenced phantom in the social-economic-political organization of life, the migrant worker relates our moment's unsustainable (and paradoxical) tenets of 'transnational flow' and 'national borders'. To return the migrant worker to visibility thus converges not only the inside/outside (and, more specifically, the inclusion/exclusion of national or supranational memberships) but also the East and West, colonialism and imperialism, global capitalist processes (accumulation, extraction) and governmentality (sovereignty, law).

A related question that arises is: what happens when the anomaly becomes standardized as the norm? Mieke Bal, in her theorization of the 'double movement' of migratory aesthetics, refers to the phenomenon of heterochrony – 'the variation of temporal density between moments in a time frame' (Bal 2008: 61) – an experience that is re-routed by memory, an unsettling present and an unpredictable future; tempos of movement whose durations, as unsustainable, can only be gleaned in flashes. Returning to the multiple and heterogeneous to parse the actuality of movement and its fluid reception – the hospitality of the viewer-reader, which enacts another double movement – I want to insist that the central feature shared by diverse representations of mobility is their staging of time and space as non-linear and plural, manipulated and amorphous; in short, as anomalous. This chapter is an attempt to theorize a common aesthetic manoeuvre across different generational fabrics, to understand mobility as a remaking of space, and, in doing so, to suggest that such creative strategies can serve, also, as a paradigm for broader structural shifts within digital discourse, informing what I have elsewhere called Post Internet culture: the mode of self-publication and circulation, the ways in which media is exchanged and capital is produced.

In bringing together these specific texts – *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (Cuba, 1968), *Transit* (Germany, 2018), *Beforeigners* (Norway, 2019), and *Years and Years* (United Kingdom, 2019) – I am interested in converging narratives of exile, escape, passage, and asylum from seemingly disparate moments (times, spaces) to limn the interconnections between the interwar era, the Cold War, and our contemporary 'migration crisis' brought about by global neoliberalism and disaster capitalism, the rise of floating labour populations and special economic zones, alongside increasing temperatures and ecological insecurity: in sum, brought about by the geopolitical strategies of the last century. In approaching the representation of mobilities on screen by jointly tracing a trajectory of today's displacement, my aim, also, is to show how these texts, produced for different mediums, in different contexts, and in response to different political and social situations, all apply anomalous or incongruous juxtapositions to provoke the viewer-reader towards a radical empathy rooted in imagination, interaction, and displacement (for further discussion on empathy, see Evans in this volume). Each film, in fact, proposes a reinterpretation of narrative framework, and they do so by moving beyond recognition and the terms of representation, beyond the desire to see and to grasp. At a moment in which knowledge and information too often disconnect and discredit, when visibility reveals only debasement and

celebrification, these texts thus serve as necessary counter-documents of mobility, works that have forecast but also reshaped new media practices and digital norms.

Exile as Episodic and Unreliable: *Memories of Underdevelopment* as an 'Imperfect Cinema'

Memorias del Subdesarrollo (Memories of Underdevelopment), a 1968 film adaptation of Edmundo Desnoes's 1965 novel, *Inconsolable Memories*, presents exile as nothing if not repetitive and history as nothing more, and nothing less, than a collage of highly-mediated renderings of the past – shown here to be still ongoing and, as such, highly susceptible to trespass. Director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's episodic narrative advances through flashbacks, fantasies, and hallucinations, employing a scrapbook aesthetic that merges the amateur and the official, 'subjective' memory and the 'objective' reality of found footage and news reports. In holding up, and harnessing, the inherent fictions of documentary, *Memories* also becomes an expression of Cuban syncretism, the advancement of Cuban modernism to the realm of the screen, where both the individual experimentalism of the West and the social realism of the East could be simultaneously employed and subverted.

After its credit-laden, mambo-inflected introductory sequence – a frenetic account of a carnival: dancing, drumming, gunshots, a political assassination; the beat goes on – the first scene of *Memories*' exposition occurs in the airport, as passports are checked and exit visas stamped. The film's plot, organized episodically, begins here, as a white-lettered caption confirms: 'La Habana 1961, Numeros Personas Abandonaron El Pais.' The camera pans across several dozen women – mothers, daughters – crying or holding back tears, faces and palms pressed up against the glass wall separating those leaving – abandoning the country – from those who have decided to remain. Among them is *Memories of Underdevelopment*'s protagonist, Sergio Carmona: a thirty-eight-year-old unpublished writer, whose first observation as a bachelor – 'For years I've said that if I had the time, I'd write a book of stories or keep a diary. Now I'll find out if I have anything to say' – as he bids farewell to his parents and his wife, Laura, provides an early indication of Sergio's moral turpitude and existential angst, alongside the film's use of juxtaposition as thematic motif and organizing principle.

On the way home from Rancho-Boyeros Airport, as Sergio rides the jitney back into the city, the camera continues to cut back, intermittently, to the moment of

departure and of spousal parting. We, too, re-encounter his last (inaudible) words to his wife, but this time from his perspective, as if to show viewers how Sergio himself repeats, and thereby attempts to restage, the immediate past with his arrested present, displacing the objective logic of the camera for the subjectivity of memory. As Sergio retrieves the recently-presented past, we no longer see him but see what he sees. In his memorial re-vision, audiences are finally granted a glimpse of his wife's face, her distress a marked departure from his cool detachment. This moment, one of four 'double-takes' in the film, produces a critical image[1] that can only be achieved through collaging imagination, observation, and memory, a manoeuvre in which viewers are forced to negotiate a range of mobile (and movable) subjectivities with an ostensibly objective and 'fixed' reality. This early disturbance, which occurs, revealingly, in the liminal moment of pre-departure, pre-passage, will serve as a model for the rest of the film's hybrid, multimodal, metatextual structure, and its function for empathic engagement.

Upon returning home, Sergio realizes that the texture of the city, not in spite but because of its relentless stagnancy, has changed. Havana had become, in the interval between morning and afternoon, artificial, plastic. 'Nothing has changed. Everything's just the same. All of a sudden', he says, abruptly contradicting himself, 'it looks like a set, a cardboard city.' Returning from his balcony, from the telescope he will wield throughout the film as aspiring author and incessant voyeur, Sergio confronts the past once again, this time in a reproduced conversation between himself and his absent wife, which he mechanically rewinds and plays back. As the frivolous discussion grows tumultuous, Sergio, by contrast, studies his wife's wardrobe methodically, each object he touches disrupting the temporal frame as Laura, in various choreographed situations – back turned to the viewer, stepping into the shower; legs crossed and reading atop her bed, looking up from her book to meet her observer's gaze – flashes into view. Sergio's fascination for form concludes in his own ornamentation. As their voices echo across the bedroom, he begins to put on her fur scarves, and pearl necklaces, and tights, and finally, her lipstick, which he uses to sketch a face in the vanity mirror: a copy to cover his own reflection.

'You realize everything you said is on tape? . . . Every single word', Sergio hears himself saying, after she calls him a monster while he stretches his wife's tights over his head, as if suffocating on the present, or presence, of the mediated past, while confirming the truth of her statement, the truth of his own psychological

condition: an inability – an impossibility – to forget. 'It'll be funny', he tells Laura, 'when you listen later.' (Here he pauses the tape.) And yet the occasion for listening, in this early scene, is not humorous at all but horrific: Sergio attempting to drape himself with the luxuries of the past – material residues of Batista's Cuba – to merge with his estranged wife, to redact himself from the capital city, where everyone – and he too – feels like a cardboard mannequin, an actor doomed to recite only the lines and gestures already written for them.

Sergio's inner workings – the discontinuous rhythms of his internal exile – are repeated, reflected, by the structure and arrangement of the film itself. Gutiérrez Alea's direction, alongside Nelson Rodriguez's editing and Ramon F. Saurez's camerawork, depict the 'present' – an interval stretching from the Bay of Pigs Invasion in April of 1961 to the fraught days leading up to the Crisis de Octubre in 1962 – as an improvised[2] criss-crossing between court testimonies, archival footage, handheld filming on the streets, fictional footage shot on location, without extras and without preliminary preparations, and Free Cinema-style footage: fictional footage meant to appear, in a narrative set five years before its production, as archival. This constellation of media mimics how we, too, as viewer-readers, process experience – our ability to remember, which is to say our ability to defer and displace – while heightening the specific alienation experienced by Sergio, for whom history, as either cultural revolution or state resistance, is always occurring elsewhere, in the background and on the literal stage of reportage, or else ventriloquized in the regular and regulated narration of others: a history that is not his own and which he cannot join.

As archival footage continues to penetrate the frame of Sergio's day-to-day activities, aspects of subjectivity also intensify. With his characteristic self-awareness, Sergio redirects his gaze from the women walking along Calle 23 to meet the gaze of the audience, inviting our attention to his early observation – 'most people are exhibitionists' – so that we can locate ourselves, too, among the many subjects of his voyeurism. *Memories of Underdevelopment*'s explicit mobilization of documentary – the art par excellence of social realism, of the statement of record, of reproduction by (and of) the state[3] – should be treated in the film, not as nationalist gesture nor as counterrevolutionary praxis, but as a structural critique about representation and power, the politics of visuality, the ways in which people and subjects and the events they contain or are contained by become invisible or, alternatively, only visible *as such*: a critique on representation as false consciousness.

The roving camera meanwhile follows Sergio along the city streets, mimicking his own wandering eye (the camera's eyes serving as his own, and then ours, as he comes into view as character, as we shift from seeing what he sees to seeing him looking), diegesis informed in flashes of documentary footage – the 1961 arson attack on El Encanto, Cuba's largest department store, for instance; first-hand experience and incidental observations inextricable and unravelable from the time of memory and imagination, the time of consciousness or the continuous present, as Sergio narrates: 'Havana's like a provincial town ever since El Encanto burned down. People used to call it the Paris of the Caribbean.' And yet, nostalgia for Western decadence and a pre-Castro mob-run oasis is juxtaposed with the very next scene, when Sergio is in the passenger seat, discussing politics with longtime (and off and on) friend Pablo, as Pablo steers them toward a mechanic in the hopes of repairing his car. Sergio's internal narration, as he leans on the car's hood and yawns – 'He says the only thing Cubans can't endure is hunger. With all the hunger here since the Spaniards came. In Latin America, four children die every minute from diseases caused by malnutrition. Over ten years, that's 20 million children . . . the same number of deaths as in World War II' – is overlaid with a series of photographs depicting starving children, men with protruding ribs, forlorn mothers on the street, on their knees, surrounded by possible sons and daughters. Why does Sergio stay? Like the viewer, he stays so he can keep watching. Yet *Memories of Underdevelopment*, in its frequent intertextual commentary and double takes, in the ways in which Gutiérrez Alea counterpoints narration with a critique of representation that undermines the narrative frame, activates an experience of looking that resembles the spectator consciousness[4] so integral to any critical examination of the material of the past and its manipulation in the present.

Sergio's role as hyper-vigilant observer emulates the film's appreciation for trembling close-ups and hidden shooting positions, borrowed segments from other narrative films and other documentaries and other news reports, a transparent découpage which asks viewers to make meaning from relationships and counterpoints, as when Sergio, as spectator, becomes spectacle and subject of observation, interrogated first by state housing officials and later, by court judges, or ultimately, in the film's final scene, when Sergio's restlessness and inaction – a montage of the protagonist alone, fruitlessly pacing his apartment, flicking a lighter, rotating the tap on and off, without wetting his palms – is cross-cut with footage displaying the militarization occurring just outside: tanks being

unrolled onto the Malecón. To be both in the aftermath of ruin and also on the edge of (another) annihilation: what is exile except for this enduring absence, which is unforgettable?

Indeed, Sergio's central dilemma is not that he has forgotten the past or the people within it but that he remembers too much. Internally exiled, neither a revolutionary nor a counterrevolutionary – 'Nothing', his young lover Elena will later tell him, 'you're nothing' – Sergio's memories enter through autonomic and automated intrusion, literally imported by (US) technology. The 'Yanqui Invasion' may have been subdued or conquered, as a state-produced commercial that blares across the screen will attest to, but the spectre of capitalism and its influence endures, even and especially for those Cubans who remain on the island. If the past is malleable, its relation as epiphany is also momentary, legible only in the spare moments when reproductions (technological, organic) are played against each other. Much later, in the form of flashback, we too return to the moment we'd previously only heard. Instead of listening to disembodied voices, we witness the aggressive physicality accompanying Sergio's criticisms, a tirade that continues past the point where Sergio previously turned off the tape: Laura thrashing about, falling to the floor, and finally, sobbing atop the bed. It is not funny the second time we encounter it, not for Laura, nor Sergio, nor us. Déjà vu, and a style of editing akin to a reprise, in which the same moment, whenever it repeats, is never shown as identical, immerses the audience in the impassable experience of exile, in which both 'home' and the 'origin,' or original, can neither be recovered nor forgotten.

'Everything comes too early', Sergio narrates in the next scene, 'or too late for me.' And yet, moments after, Sergio will ask Elena, upon her first visit to his lavish apartment, to try on his wife's dresses, and he will linger there, standing behind her, the two looking at one another in the mirror, as if to testify to the futility of attempting to disguise the present as the past. The film, too, can only represent mobility – or its absence within exile – by confusing past and present, fiction and history, revolving, as memory does, without warning. When we return to these scenes-already-seen, audiences are given back their own critical gaze. Neither version cancels out or replaces the other but, in contradistinction, each – held together – create the unresolvable indeterminacy so necessary to the labour of empathy.

The work *Memories* does to inform a genre that mediates between documentary and narrative fiction, a corpus of media I've earlier called a 'migratory text' (Campanioni 2021, 2022), should be examined in context with Cuba's other foreign

interventions – not, this time, by its northern neighbour but through the postwar Western influence of the French La Nouvelle Vague and Cinema Verité, Italian Neorealismo and British Free Cinema, a range of political aesthetics that had been circulating within Havana's numerous filmmaking workshops prior to Castro's rise to power, and which would coalesce, a year after this film's release, to inaugurate Cuba's own 'imperfect cinema.' In his 1969 essay, Julio García Espinosa hypothesized an art form that would marry advances of science with the cultivation of politics, in which the evolution of film technology would eventually create the conditions for the democratization of art – 'the possibility for everyone to make films' – while calling into question the notion of 'taste' and the nature of 'specialization,' a response that is also a recovery: 'the true meaning of artistic activity' (García Espinosa 1979: 24–26). In contradistinction to the dramatization and glamorization of Hollywood cinema, which concealed, within its illusions, the means of its production while relegating the viewer to passive consumption, the imperfect cinema, in García Espinosa's theorization, depended on its audience and our ability to critically evaluate the several registers of 'truth' within a specific environment (relations between Cuba and the United States in 1962, for instance) and among a broader global culture (consumer capitalism, the mainstreaming of television and personal cameras), in which everything that exists exists to be recorded and, moreover, transmediated – redacted or resignified. Elsewhere (Campanioni 2023), I've suggested that the links of connectivity formed through today's transmedial production – as seen in the simultaneous resignification of a work in alternate formats across the Internet – could both reveal the faulty lens of a narrative-historical timeline and create an alternative system of order and representation based on aesthetic performativity: copy, paste, combine, find all, record, screenshot, transfer, *transmit* (Campanioni 2023: 89). For Gutiérrez Alea, cinema's function for 'social realism' is a vehicle from which to carry or convey a new reality: the choreographed trance or trace that can only arise through the documentation of performance and the performance of documentary.

Pertinent to this analysis of transmedia production is the afterlife of Desnoes's novel, which he revised during the release of Gutiérrez Alea's film, integrating bits from his book's own adaptation, and republished as *Memories of Underdevelopment.* Which comes first? As the book adopts its own adaptation's title, the doubling subverts the trajectory of original and translation while producing a third text, one marked by coincidence and collaboration. Within this true-to-life mise en abyme, both Desnoes and Gutiérrez Alea appear in the film as themselves, and no

exchange of dialogue is as hyper-aware as Sergio's brief encounter with his director in the hallway of the Cuban Film Institute, after the pair screen a series of semi-pornographic film cuts. 'What are you going to do with them?', Sergio asks. 'It'll be a collage', Gutiérrez Alea responds, 'that'll have a little bit of everything.'

Womanizing, condescending, egotistical, judgmental, complacent, politically impotent – on the surface, viewers are naturally inclined to feel disdain for Sergio. Yet Gutiérrez Alea's film, its insistence in showing the plurality of (im)mobility (passage, internment) – a little bit of everything, time and space as multiple, as multiply displacing, and moreover, to expose itself as a form of labour, revelling in the processes of its own mediation, relates its protagonist's alienation in a way that diegesis or mimesis alone cannot achieve. Exile is not presented in *Memories of Underdevelopment* so much as it is performed, conveying an experience of repetition only so that it, too, might be reproduced, in our emotive response, in the film's requirements for our interaction and identification. No longer do we serve as observers but as participants: to sift through, as Sergio does, the various and conflicting strands of reality – remnants of a revolution, of a life that is no longer and yet lingers.

Escape as Adaptation: The Alternate Dimensions of *Transit*

Christian Petzold's 2018 film adaptation of Anna Seghers's autobiographical novel, published in 1944 and set during the waning days of 1939 – as persons across Nazi-occupied northern France, Seghers among them, desperately fled south – is not quite a modern update of its source material, nor does it conform to the World War II setting of its original's composition and plot. As if Petzold were working through superimposition and not adaptation, *Transit* presents Vichy France as a hallucination of the present in the past. Viewers are asked to consider the slippage on screen with(in) our larger cultural narrative of historical silences: this world resembles our own – the world of World War II, or the atrocities it endured and oversaw, are still happening. In the film, twenty-first-century clothing, cars, and cops serve as props for a vaguely historical plot involving the sealing off of Paris and the city's escalating occupation by German forces. The first sounds we hear, in fact, are police sirens. Our protagonist, Georg, encounters another man at a bar who mentions his danger visa: 'a visa', he describes, 'for people in great jeopardy. They're building camps in Aix and Cassis', he explains, as more sirens blare in the

background. 'The cleaning will begin.' 'Your papers', a French-speaking, heavily-uniformed, automatic rifle-clad officer demands in the next scene, grabbing Georg from behind. There are discussions of the requirement of registering all aliens. The 'occupation' is suggested; people are shown informing on their neighbours. 'They've set up camp at the Vélodrome', a friend tells Georg as he returns to the Paris apartment that he shares with another family, having narrowly escaped the police. 'They're scouring the district. They call it spring cleaning.'

Such pedestrian conversations remind viewers that we may be out of place, or out of time, but that the alternative dimension of *Transit* is not unlike the experience of déjà vu: unrecognizable and yet entirely familiar. Was it that long ago when France was rounding up its own citizens in football stadiums? Two years after the conversion of the first of fifteen occupation camps across the Occupied Zone, the French police conducted a mass arrest of Parisian Jews in an operation called Opération Vent Printanier (Operation Spring Breeze). After being taken to the Vélodrome d'Hiver, an indoor cycle racing track and stadium located near the Eiffel Tower, almost 14,000 persons were deported on 16 July 1942 to Auschwitz. Or less than two decades later, when Algerians were sent to detention centres throughout Paris, while others were beaten by French police on the streets of the City of Lights before being thrown to their deaths in the Seine. When Georg arrives safely in Marseilles, stowed in the shipping compartment of a freight train, it is not coincidental, I think, that he befriends another pair of illegals: a mother and son who had emigrated to France, we learn, from the Maghreb. History is revealed to be a nightmare, linearity its great catastrophe. How to relate generational trauma, cultural amnesia, and the bigotry of both institutional classifications of migrancy and liberal humanist ideas about 'refugees worthy of our protection,' except through bringing viewers closer to our present moment by manufacturing distance? Whereas the original novel relies on the trope of impersonation – a survival tactic premised on misidentification – the film adds the conceit of mistaking the historical past as static and immutable. The anomalous setting's 'shock value' relies on the audience's ability to identify, if not the film's source material, then the genocides of the twentieth century; to connect the events leading up to and extending past World War II with today's conditions of drift and dispersal, the largest human displacement since the interwar era.

In situating his film in an indeterminate temporal space, overlapping the present with the past, or vice versa, Petzold achieves the 'double exposure' so common in early cinema, an effect used to frame the sleeping body and waking

body, to contain both or conflate them, to commingle, to contradict or coincide. In an interview, Petzold described the experience of adapting the book to the screen as a procedure of memory, or forgetting.[5] '[W]ith *Transit* I wrote down what I could remember from the book, what was important to me, without reading Anna Seghers's work again' (Weston 2018). Indeed, the film moves with the muted stillness and gauzy vision of a dream, an impression heightened by Petzold's use of long takes, his absence of establishing shots, both of which magnify Georg's drift, his wandering and idleness, the vastness, and waste, of bureaucratic paperwork, our protagonist literally retracing another's steps, or only walking in circles: a rehearsal for a transit that never comes. Years ago, Polish exile Zygmunt Bauman suggested that 'the meaning of the "underclass identity"' speaking about the class of people – the stateless, 'the non-territorials' – who are denied the right to claim an identity different from the one they have been ascribed, 'is an *absence of identity*; the effacement or denial of individuality, of "face"' (Bauman 2004: 39; emphasis in the original). Such persons, Bauman wrote, are denied the right to a physical presence, 'except in specially designed "non-places"' (Bauman 2004: 40). How else might we characterize the sets of *Transit* except as a series of 'specially designed "non-places"' – modernity's liminal zones: the space of the traveller, of haste and waiting, cafés, trains, freight cars, hotels, consulates (the waiting rooms of conditional hospitality), 'spaces', as Marc Augé has theorized, 'in which neither identity, nor relations, nor history really make sense' (Augé 1995: 70).

When he first paces in Marseilles' le Panier, Georg is shown to viewers via surveillance footage. We are reminded of his status as illegal and of the state's securitizing gaze, but also of the film's intermixing of technologies from vastly different periods. No mobile phones, laptops, or even digital cameras are shown throughout the film's 102 minutes. Halfway through, Georg, a self-taught technician, repairs his young friend's transistor radio through a complicated procedure involving a spoon, a lit candle, a screwdriver, and a pair of scissors. When, travelling under the identity of the dead writer Weidel, he is interviewed during his many meetings with various consuls, he is accused of writing an article for a communist newspaper. In another critical revision of the novel, Petzold updates the original scene's reference to the Spanish Civil War's Badajoz massacre to redirect our attention to the CIA-backed shooting of unionists in Almería, the Spanish district dubbed 'El mar de plástico' (the sea of plastic), today responsible for Europe's largest production of fruits and vegetables, a site of transnational and temporary low-paid and dangerous labour by Moroccan migrant workers.

The 'migrant crisis,' so often magnified – brought closer, dramatized – and, alternately, truncated – distanced, distorted – on our touchscreens, is shown here to be the product of various and mutually constitutive processes involving national and international polities, technical system and software designers, manufacturers, distributors, retail conglomerates, local markets, and consumers. Borders have expanded and also vanished, receding into digital infrastructures of arrest and detainment, the invisible and algorithmic violence of biometrics. Georg, too, who performs in Petzold's adaptation as both character and storyteller, frequently melts the divisions between the event of narration and the narrative event. When he arrives at a hotel in Paris at the film's opening, tasked with delivering a letter to Weidel, he sees the days-old blood of the dead writer sprayed across the bathtub. Before he exits with Weidel's passport, his gaze catches a manuscript on the table. 'Die Entronnenen' (The Escaped), announces the underlined title. Yet as the camera lingers on Georg's fingers, as he gradually flips the pages, viewers familiar with Anna Seghers's novel notice that 'Die Entronnenen' is in fact the film's source material, *Transit*, transmediated here and typeset in her native German: 'Die 'Montréal' soll untergeganen sein zwischen Dakar und Martinique', reads the first line. (They're saying that the *Montréal* went down between Dakar and Martinique.) The *Montréal*, of course, is the same ship that Georg, in the film's finale, will intend to board, before abandoning all plans for escape. He is reading his own story – a what-if future – a present found and then forged, or vice versa.

Recall Elena, in *Memories of Underdevelopment*, and her assessment, upon being asked, that Sergio is 'nothing.' It is exactly because of this voided identity – to be made illegal, the fact of one's inability to be anything (other than who they are) – that invites viewers to empathize with each character, an empathy premised on identification and resemblance: to be nothing is also to be *like anyone*. Georg, who speaks French with a German accent, is coded as an outsider from the film's opening scene. Such is the plight of the foreigner, or *l'étranger,* signalling both stranger and foreigner in the French that Georg has adopted or had imposed on him, the plight of the foreigner who, as Jacques Derrida knew well, always 'has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 15). Because he understood that hospitality is not individual so much as ancestral – given on the conditions of one's proper name, the basis of family or filial fidelity – Derrida knew that unconditional hospitality required moving beyond identification, toward the non-legible or non-linguistic, toward murmur, toward a silence: the right to a consensual opacity.

Georg's failure to both integrate into the local community and actualize his own self-identity is contrasted, in the end, by his ascension to the role of anonymous storyteller, who tells his story to the bartender – another person unnamed – from whose mouth we hear the story (of the story) unfold. In passing on his story, which isn't his, to a community of listeners within the diegetic space – the bartender's café, the hearth of the kitchen's pizza oven (a commonplace, if not classical site from which to kindle a chronicle) – we, too, become implicated in the events from which these intertextual stories derive, each of us a witness and an accomplice to the knitted rhythm of history, from which 'destiny' is no longer or never solitary but collective.

In the film's closing moments, Georg leaves the bartender the manuscript he'd retrieved back in Paris – the movie's source material – as Walter Benjamin once did, passing off his seminal 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' to Hannah Arendt, who brought it in her baggage when she herself passed through Provence and into Portbou, months after Benjamin died. As if to punctuate the film's leitmotif of immobility, 'Road to Nowhere' by Talking Heads heralds the closing credits, consummating a mostly-muted movie with the strident croon of David Byrne, but not before Georg looks up one last time from his seat at the bar, at someone unseen, someone unshown: us.

In placing *Transit* alongside *Memories of Underdevelopment*, I can't help but linger exactly here: the moment of apprehension, a look briefly held before vanishing, the way a sight asks to be forgotten in the memory of its gaze. This up-close encounter with the viewer, which opens *Memories*' diegetic space, is used here to close *Transit*'s alternate dimensions. Instead of the abrupt confrontation of an unknown woman's face, struck with panic and agitation, paused in a freeze frame to which we will and won't return, we are assailed, in this finale, by *Transit*'s own protagonist, by Georg's imploring eyes. And whereas Sergio confidently remarks, while strolling through the streets of Vedado, 'here women look at your eyes, as if your gaze could touch them. This happens nowhere else in the world', Georg's first impression of Marseilles underscores the dehumanizing flipside of every viewer-voyeur's scopic pastime, as if to corroborate Sergio's value judgment, the entitlement or undesirability of certain bodies: 'He was tired, no one looked at him. That's the terrible thing. Not that they stare at you, your dirty, tired face, your torn clothing. The terrible thing is: they don't see you. You don't exist in their world.' The migrant, the displaced, the stateless, the exiled, the absolute other is the body subject to omnipresent surveillance and utterly ignored. In beginning,

and ending, on the gaze, we, too, take up the experience of each film's protagonist – arrested, unsettled – we are forced, not only to look but to look back, to become aware of our own complicity, and complacency, of watching.

'The people in *Transit*', Petzold has said, 'long to be taken by the stream, the breeze, put into motion. They long for a story of their own and to discover the fragment of a novel left behind by an author, the fragment of a narrative about flight, love, guilt, and loyalty' (Petzold 2019). Of course, these people – suddenly mobilized by a found and fragmentary narrative in which they've inserted themselves – include us, who take in, and pass on, the story as an act of experience and memory.

Passage and Asylum in the Leap (of) Years

Set in contemporary Oslo, HBO's *Beforeigners* opens on the bright lights of a posh waterfront district at night. Teenaged friends dare one another to jump into the harbour as the camera continues to cut to a view underwater, bubbles rising to the surface. Blue flashes shriek somewhere else, in the distance. 'There's something in the water', one teen says. 'But what?' A man bursts from the depths, shouting in a dialect that remains untranslated. A woman's face emerges into focus soon after. Then three others. Meanwhile, Lars – the series' police officer protagonist – and his wife are shown walking onto a balcony, admiring the view from their soon-to-be apartment, as a broker strolls behind them, readying the contract. 'Oh my god', Lars sighs, putting his arm around his wife. 'Yeah, it's nice', she returns, laughing, 'It's incredible.' The camera swerves back to the frenzied action below, as bare bodies jostle for breath, while the curious crowd of teenagers debate whether to continue swimming toward the strangers – to come to their aid, to rescue them – or, fearful, to swim away. The borders between the lavish lifestyle of urban elites and the panic of arriving refugees – their unrecognizable plea for hospitality – have melted, at a real estate viewing no less.

'They're definitely not Icelandic', a translator says, moments later, turning to Lars, who has been called in to assess the situation. 'They speak some sort of Old Norse. I don't understand all of it. But they appear to think that they're from the past.' As Lars laughs, placing a call to the psychiatric emergency unit, we see the footage blaring on the news breaking before him: a video revealing the 'largest marine operation in history.' 'People', as one newscaster announces in English, 'are

appearing in the ocean. Reports seem to confirm that this is happening all over the world.'

Fast-forward nearly two decades: Lars is divorced; his wife is living, complete with a new nineteenth-century husband, as a neo-Victorian. The flashes accompanying time migration are routine, not extraordinary. We learn, through a montage of news reports, that 13,000 'temporal refugees' have arrived in Norway each year. (Compare this fictional figure to Norway's current annual quota of UNHCR resettlement: 1,200 refugees.) These 'beforeigners' all seem to have originally belonged to three periods: the Stone Age, the Norse era, and the nineteenth century. Although time migrants don't have any memory of actual passage, viewers gradually discover the reason why migration across disparate periods is becoming increasingly more common: time, as it is reorganized in our current moment, moves too fast. 'The sense of coming both after and before history', I've written elsewhere. 'We have become so fully integrated into the machine as to become its greatest development: a living snapshot, through which memories are made before they become experienced' (Campanioni 2019: 220–72).

The jointly-produced (HBO and BBC) limited series *Years and Years,* whose story coincides with the premiere's original air date (14 May 2019), before jumping, as its title suggests, years and years into the future at the outset of every episode, concretizes this sensorial paradox brought about by technology. Creator and writer Russell T Davies's serial time-leaps are revealed, telecast-style, through the detachment and rapidity of scrolling news sidebars and soundbites, including a brief series of press conferences announcing domestic (British, nationalistic) public policy and the broader world's geopolitical strategies of the day. And yet the series' plot points are grounded in migration. When Viktor, the Ukrainian refugee fleeing homophobic torture,[6] moves, so does the story. And Viktor, after a brief detainment in Manchester – where he falls in love with Daniel, the youngest sibling of the show's central family who works in government housing – will move often: deportation to Ukraine; escape from Kiev, via container truck, through Poland, Germany, and France; political asylum in Spain; and, ultimately, a last-ditch effort to return to Britain, this time with his lover, across the English Channel. 'How many times have police knocked on the door?' Daniel responds, to a sibling who has questioned the rescue-mission logistics, while also considering the status of Viktor as officially illegal in an increasingly xenophobic and hyper-securitized Britain. 'They don't come here. Not to people like us.'

This conversation, which occurs just before Daniel travels to Spain to retrieve Viktor, to smuggle him across France, foregrounds the show's nuanced exploration of the privileges of citizenship, and moreover, the inequality that citizenship obscures: equal rights for all, administered unequally. When, by the end of the episode, surrounded by so many other bodies in an overcrowded dinghy, Daniel drowns and Viktor washes ashore, back in England, the culturally-specific Western construct of 'migrant' and the mass-produced perception of the multitudes of anonymous bodies – dead upon arrival, or disappeared off the face of the earth – is inverted; the show's unexpected climax, in which the protagonist/Western citizen dies trying to return to his own home while the deuteragonist/foreigner survives, turns migration into an Anglicized act. Western viewers are forced to confront our own ideas about 'deserving refugees' – Viktor, white, classically attractive, perseveres, while several dozen of the black and brown passengers perish – and moreover, given the shock and anger expressed by fans throughout the United Kingdom when *Years and Years* first aired (McHenry, 2019), we are forced to examine our rationale about who deserves to survive in fictional-visual representations of migration and passage.

In his series of seminars conducted in Paris in 1996 that would become *Of Hospitality*, Derrida wanted to show the reversibility between host and guest, guest and host. Indeed, the host becomes the hostage, the guest becomes the host, a mutability revealed by the word's roots from Late Latin *hospes*, from Old Church Slavic *gospodǐ*, from Indo-European *gost-i*: outsider, guest. Such is the inversion performed by *Beforeigners'* cast of characters; can one be construed as 'illegal' – or even as an arriving guest – if one has never actually left one's land? 'So the question returns', Derrida asks. 'What is a foreigner?' 'Usually', he responds, pages later, 'the foreigner, the foreign citizen, the foreigner to the family or the nation, is defined on the basis of birth: whether citizenship is given or refused on the basis of territorial law or the law of blood relationship, the foreigner is a foreigner by birth, is a born foreigner' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 73–87). And yet, these time migrants undo the dialectic of self and absolute other, belonging and exclusion, which the performance of citizenship and the reproduction of state sovereignty equally rely upon. As the migrants are torn between assimilating to their new time and preserving their original era's way of life, so are Norway's modern subjects divided between those who advocate for 'temporal diversity' and those who, as in the world outside *Beforeigners* (a time and space like and unlike this one), incite xenophobic and anti-migrant rhetoric and practices.

After all, one cannot watch the series' six episodes without returning to the current discourse of immigration in Norway and its neighbouring countries. Despite their tradition of social welfare, and the emergence of organizations like the RFSL (Sweden) and the LGBT Asylum group (Denmark), once-hospitable Scandinavian governments are becoming increasingly more and more right-wing, less and less welcoming to migrants. When *Beforeigners* was still in production, Denmark had already resolved, in the final days of 2018, to move 'unwanted' migrants to a remote uninhabited island used, in the past, for holding contagious animals (Selsoe Sorensen 2018). It is not just that the repressed spectre of colonialism haunts our neoliberal present – as unprotected guest worker, as undocumented migrant – but that sites of violence and industrial capital – Berlin's Tempelhof camp; Paris's Centre Humanitaire – have ghosted the twenty-first century as municipal spaces of mobility and detainment. In *Beforeigners,* the contradictions of liberal democracies and democratic capitalism are literally held up for the audience to witness and recognize. 'Norway for Nowaday People!' one sign reads, in a later episode, as Oslo's modern residents stage another rally. 'We were here before you!' another one announces. Incongruity and paradox return here as satire. Such resident vitriol is countered by the fostering of corporatized 'trans-temporal communities', where people are urged to look deeply within themselves, to consider the question, or slogan: 'Born in the Wrong Millennium?'

I can't watch *Beforeigners,* or any of this study's texts, without thinking of Édouard Glissant, who links the experience of exile to an awareness that is contrapuntal, 'an awareness of simultaneous dimensions' (Glissant 1997: 148). Pages earlier, in his *Poetics of Relation*, he surmises that 'the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened . . . an outcast in the place he has newly set an anchor . . . forced into impossible attempts to reconcile his former and his present belonging' (Glissant 1997: 143). Back on screen, we soon learn that Lars is addicted to 'temproxat', an eye-drop medication used to wean migrants from their old sense of time – in effect, to slow time down, temporarily – so as not to be overwhelmed by the sensations of the present. And Lars' new partner, Alfhidr, a former shield-maiden from the Viking era, hailed as the precinct's first employee with a multi-temporal background – the plot's rendition of a diversity hire – is revealed to be, by the first season's finale, not a time migrant but on the contrary, a person born in the twenty-first century who'd abruptly disappeared into the past, as an infant, before returning via time flash, as an adult, to the present. The accumulation of plot reveals and periodic reversals

are framed by the show's conceit: series creators Eilif Skodvin and Anne Bjørnstad, in cross-dressing contemporary Norway with an array of historical details from diverse periods – distinct dialects; fragments of national history and legend sitting, side-by-side at the bar – provoke viewers into reconsidering our own internal beliefs and inherent biases, not just about moral reasoning – what is right or ethical – but about foundational mythologies of the individual and the collective to which we belong. We know that the continuity of filiation, genetic or pre-Biblical, anoints a kind of ownership: possession on the basis of birth. Such is the legacy of every self-sanctioned colonization: the ordinary extension of one's ordained land, when foundational mythologies flow into 'the consciousness of History' (Glissant 2020: 121), a slippage that is not spatial-temporal so much as epistemic.[7]

We know that national origin stories are premised on migration (in Norway's case – not unlike today's impetus for migration – the narrative thread includes climate change and rising temperatures), yet in the speculative fiction of *Beforeigners*, citizen-subjects are faced with their origins in the flesh and they can no longer assimilate its narrative stream nor its material residue; the transmission of creation myth or its site of nativity is repelled, rejected. Nostalgia for the past – a common call of today's far right movement in Europe as across the Americas – meets a critique of the present. This collision, this moment of impact, requires viewers to not look away. In that refusal, which is an opening up, we identify the plight of the migrant – the internal exile, the refugee, the displaced and stateless – harboured in the show's title: to 'be' a foreigner in our culture is neither to assume the experience nor impose the terms of the absolute other, but on the contrary, to unlearn strangeness as a form of incarceration – detainment, control – to take strangeness as one's guiding principle, to be guided by an appreciation for one's own unfamiliarity – to be unfamiliar, unknown, indeterminate, even to one's self – while embracing another's. It is, above all, to be 'for' another: a response-ability toward the exigencies of our current moment, which is not timeless so much as recurrent, not linear so much as elastic, a time and space that is no longer the rule but an anomaly. Rather than objectify the migrant – with a reliance on long close-ups and images of impoverishment, trauma, and suffering – or pity the migrant – with a narrative rooted in sentimentalism and the heroism or altruism of Western aid and intervention – these representations of migration, dislocation, and movement on screen respond to the all-too-common gaze of the culture industry by reminding viewers

that the only difference between the ones watching and the ones being looked at is very often as arbitrary as a time and a place, each of which becomes, for these media, tenuous, reversible, and reimagined.

Chris Campanioni's research on regimes of surveillance, queer migration, and the auto-archival practices of people moving across transnational spaces has been published in *Diacritics, Social Identities, Life Writing,* and the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*. His essays, poetry, and fiction have been translated into Spanish and Portuguese and have been awarded the International Latino Book Award, the Academy of American Poets College Prize, and the Pushcart Prize. His multimedia work has been exhibited at the New York Academy of Art, and the film adaptation of his poem 'This body's long (& I'm still loading)' was in the official selection of the Canadian International Film Festival in 2017. His recent books include *A and B and Also Nothing* (Unbound Edition, 2023), a re-writing of Henry James's *The American* and Gertrude Stein's 'Americans' that merges theory, fiction, and autobiography, and *VHS* (CLASH Books, 2025), a novel about a child's attempts to recast his parents' exiles onto interconnected videocassettes.

Notes

1. For a more elaborate discussion of the 'critical image' that both enacts and interrogates the terms of its own representation, see Butler (2004).
2. Notes from the original continuity script reveal that many sequences in the film's final cut were in fact unscripted.
3. As I write this line, I think of Achille Mbembe's discussion of the state's inherent chronophagy, or its insistent (and paradoxical) act of eating time: 'On the one hand, there is no state without archives – without its archives. On the other hand, the very existence of the archive constitutes a constant threat to the state.' See Mbembe 2002.
4. For a more elaborate discussion of the 'spectator consciousness' activated by audience members, see Freedman 1991.
5. Compare Christian Petzold's strategy for adaptation to the one used by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, in *Memories of Underdevelopment*: 'We did not attempt to "translate" the novel into cinema. For me it turned out to be much easier, but for [Edmundo] Desnoes it perhaps demanded a much higher level of violence against his own work and against himself, because at a certain point his novel was to be betrayed, negated, transformed into something else. He was fully conscious of this and worked over his novel as if it were raw material, not like something already fully achieved which was going to be "translated" into cinema.' See Burton 1990.
6. At the time of writing, same-sex relationships are currently criminalized in seventy-one

countries, eight of which punish offenders with death. Additionally, fifteen jurisdictions criminalize the gender identity and expression of transgender persons.

7.   Netflix's *Messiah* (USA, 2020) counts border-crossings, environmental instability and disaster, extraordinary rendition, and numberless refugees stranded and starving between the disputed territories of Israel, Syria, and Palestine among its story's various backdrops; the crux of the plot – Isa's (Jesus, in Arabic) return in the form of an illusionist and/or Russian-backed psyops social disruptor – guides viewers' attentions to the farce of filial consecration for geopolitical conquest.

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Hybridity in *Mission London*
Challenging the Othering Discourse

Antonina Anisimovich

After the fall of communism of 1989 and the subsequent restructuring of the political, social, economic, and cultural spheres, Bulgarian national identity faced a major challenge. Post-1989 transformations were particularly traumatic for Bulgaria, a nation that is obsessed with history, as it is often claimed (Liotta 2001; Roudometof 2002; Todorova 2010). It can be argued that this obsession was once again reactivated by the marginal position of Bulgaria in the European Union. Being on the margins of Europe and often viewed as the Other of the West, Bulgarians began associating themselves with European values even more, as a means of resistance. I suggest that in response to this, the new Bulgarian cinema provided a platform for negotiating national identity and challenging the othering discourse through hybridity.

In many ways, the post-1989 transition in Bulgaria initiated a coexistence and overlapping of multiple ideologies, inviting and encouraging multiple acts of border crossing (Koobak and Marling 2014: 334). Drawing on the work of Marotta, who suggests that boundaries are essential to 'the very constitution' (2008: 301) of the hybrid subject, in this chapter I define hybridity as a process of border crossing, a vernacular and transgressive act. In particular, the case-study film *Mission London* deals with the topic of migration and the hybrid nature of those who left Bulgaria, highlighting the subversive potential of hybridity in challenging the discourses of othering.

The negotiation of national identity on screen should always be seen as an ideological and political process (for further discussion of this aspect in the German context, see Evans in this volume). Applying further the idea that culture is always viewed as a site of 'consent' and 'resistance' (Hall 1981), I would suggest that it is precisely through these elements of contestation and consensus that we

can see the shifting boundaries of a nation most clearly. This role of cinema seems particularly relevant in the Bulgarian case, where the official platforms for debating the communist past have been limited. As of 2024, there is no historical museum of communism in Bulgaria. The only official museum of the socialist legacy is the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia, opened in 2011, and the curators of the exhibition underline the apolitical nature of the museum, stating that the displays' aim is only to preserve the pieces of art that would be lost and decayed otherwise. It may be the case that the absence of official interpretations of history is facilitating the emergence of multiple grassroots initiatives that sometimes can be even more effective than the official ones. For example, virtual museums in Bulgaria seem to fulfil the need for alternative remembering institutions. As Gospodinov (2005) and Kazalarska (2018) note, alternative modes of remembering in Bulgaria emerge from the narrative tropes of a lack, void, concealment, and delay.

It is, of course, this combination of the political, economic, and historical 'unevenness' (Dimitrov 2001) of the post-communist transition that leads to some obvious difficulties in coming to terms with the past in Bulgaria. In between the economic crises, the political instability, the delayed processes of decommunization, it is not surprising that informal modes (such as cinema) of negotiating the past have gained momentum. Cinema has the power to reflect and represent the anxieties existing in Bulgarian society, particularly important in the context of the consistent use of contested memories about the fall of communism in the current political scene in Bulgaria (Vukov 2008). I argue that Bulgarian national cinema reflects on the transformations of Bulgarian national identity on screen, rethinking the shifting limits of the nation but also engaging in a transnational dialogue through reflecting on the role of the Other as an external reference point.

By combining textual film analysis and focus group discussions with Bulgarians of different age groups facilitated by film extracts, this chapter focuses on the dialogue between 'us' and 'them' and the subversive potential of hybridity as an act of border crossing giving voice to the cinema audiences. Overall, six focus groups were conducted to obtain diverse information from various demographic groups, including four focus groups in Sofia (the capital city), one focus group in the village of Knyazhevo in the suburbs of Sofia, and one focus group in the small town Gorna Oryahovitsa. Each group was constructed to represent a particular (but broad) age group, including one group with young people under the age of 25,

two groups with a more varied mix of participants (ages varying from 28 to 44), and three groups with more senior participants aged from 60 to 78.

For the wider proposes of the research, six film extracts have been selected based on the time of release and production (films produced after 2008), subject (films about the post-communist transition), and recognition (popularity on the domestic market and international acknowledgement). *Mission London* was initially eliminated from the sample as a film based on contemporary events. Nevertheless, after the first focus group, it became clear that *Mission London* plays a vital role in the debates about new Bulgarian cinema and the transition, while also being one of the most popular and successful new Bulgarian films. Its plot tackles phenomena that play a significant role in the debate around lustration and the post-communist transition. These include post-1989 emigration to the West, corruption, and lack of lustration (former members of the communist party still being in power and, more specifically, the heavy presence of former communists among Bulgarian diplomats), as well as national stereotypes and refashioning national identity in the new European context.

As Dimitrov suggests, in Bulgaria, the ambiguity of the post-1989 political transformations resulted in a 'high level of distrust in the political parties, and a level of electoral volatility much higher than those seen in established democracies' (2001: 66). While on the surface, the primary essential characteristics of democracy are present (separation of power, a system of checks and balances, and free elections), several factors remain problematic. The general discontent of the public led to the recent political crisis in Bulgaria, when the country faced five elections between April 2021 and April 2023. These events suggest that, even though *Mission London* was released over a decade ago, the themes reflecting on the major flaws of the Bulgarian transition, such as corruption and the continuity of political elites (Crampton 2007), remain relevant.

Bulgarian Cinema Post-1989

Even though Bulgarian cinematography emerged long before the accession of the communists to power, it was completely transformed and expanded between 1945 and 1989 (Garbolevsky 2011). During the Cold War era, cinema in Bulgaria became a domain of special attention, and an instrument of ideology. At the same time, compared to some countries of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, Bulgaria

experienced significantly less oppression and censorship in the cultural sphere (Garbolevsky 2011). Todor Zhivkov, the Bulgarian leader from 1954 and until the fall of communism, tried to stay neutral both in the domains of politics, resuming diplomatic relations with the USA and keeping good relations with the USSR, and culture, declaring that, although art should continue to be an instrument of ideology, communist and Western ideology could coexist peacefully (Garbolevsky 2011). As a result, it is somewhat difficult to define Bulgarian cinema production in terms of dissident or mainstream culture, as quite often the criticism of the regime was articulated on screen through personal stories, subjective existential struggles or in the sublime forms of satire, allegories, surrealism, and poetics (Portuges 1992: 535).

In 1989, the fall of communism and the transition brought a dramatic transformation to the film industry in the post-communist countries. As the Iron Curtain no longer separated the East from the Western world, the film industry of the region was facing not only ideological but also economic problems. After 1990, the government practically stopped financing films, causing unemployment and drastic changes in film distribution. Film production dropped, and state financial subsidy could only provide funds for one or two films a year (Iordanova 2008). This radical decline in the industry continued up until the late 2000s. However, since 2007/2008, the Bulgarian film industry has been showing some signs of a gradual revival, as the number of Bulgarian films has increased overall, as well as the number of cinemas and cinemagoers (Iordanova 2008).

Despite the post-transitional turmoil, new Bulgarian cinema shows a certain tendency towards establishing continuity with pre-1989 national filmmaking. One of the examples of this continuity in the film industry is the tradition of subversive political filmmaking. Building on the movement of politically subversive cinema during communist rule, many of the new Bulgarian films are now also challenging the status quo. In line with the pre-1989 Bulgarian film tradition, films dealing with the recent history and its aftermath expose the inconsistencies and fragmentations of history through absurdism and satire.

Mission London (2010)

Misiya London (*Mission London*, 2010), directed by Dimitar Mitovski, is a comedy based on a novel of the same name by Alek Popov. It is a European co-production

with the United Kingdom, Hungary, the Republic of North Macedonia and Sweden. Mitovski started his career in directing music videos and commercials. His breakthrough was a video for the Bulgarian progressive rock band FSB (Formation Studio Balkaton), whose song *High* was awarded Best Bulgarian Music Video of the Year in 1997. Mitovski's major fiction film recognition came in 2005 when his short film *Get the Rabbit Back* (a surrealist thriller co-directed with Kamen Kalev) was nominated for the Critics' Week at the Cannes Film Festival. *Mission London* is Mitovski's first feature film that, at the time of its release in 2010, topped the Bulgarian box office, becoming the highest grossing 2D film in post-1989 Bulgaria.

The plot develops in the Bulgarian embassy in London, where the newly appointed ambassador Varadin Dimitrov receives a particularly important task from the Bulgarian president's wife Devorina Selyanska to do everything in his power to invite the British queen to the concert organized to celebrate Bulgaria's accession to the EU. Varadin encounters several corrupt clerks, the Russian mafia, Scotland Yard detectives and other charismatic personas while trying to make sense of the anarchy that rules in the embassy. Varadin's only chance to contact the queen emerges when at a party he is introduced to a director of the agency with contacts in the highest circles. However, as it turns out, he is a director of a doppelganger agency that provided celebrity lookalikes for parties and, privately, to fulfil rich people's fantasies of sleeping with someone famous.

This chapter focuses on the textual analysis of *Mission London* and the focus group discussions facilitated particularly by extracts from this film.

National Identity Negotiation in Post-1989 Bulgaria through a Postcolonial Lens

After 1989, the nationalist discourse in many of the post-socialist countries was built around the idea of 'a return to Europe', as a return to civilization, democracy, and true cultural identity, rather than the rejected values of the USSR (European Commission 2005). With some caution, postcolonial theory might therefore be a useful analytical device when we talk about the re-building of national identity in Bulgaria post-1989. Veličković suggests that the potential of such analysis lies in the historical rethinking of the legacies of communism and the role that it plays in the reconstructing of history to serve modern needs (2012). As she notes, 'a long

overdue critical engagement with this discourse of "the return to Europe" as well as with the various "self-colonizing" practices in eastern Europe is much needed' (2012: 168).

As Baker argues in her critique of postcoloniality without race, the discourses of race have long been ignored in the academic debates about the Balkans. Baker adds that while the concepts of postcoloniality were effectively applied to enhance the understanding of the 'racialisation *of* the Balkans', the 'racialisation *in* the Balkans' remained largely unstudied (2018: 11). Instead, a postcolonial approach with race should foreground 'the position of racialized minorities (as well as the ethnic-majority nations who have been racialized as white) in the region's demographic history' (2018: 9).

In a similar vein, Ivan Calmar (2021) argues that the migration crisis of 2016 exposed the already existing tensions between the Western members of the European Union and the 'new' Eastern members. Kalmar suggests that there is an evident correlation between the negative attitude towards Eastern Europeans (described by Calmar as 'white but not quite') in the West and the racism by Eastern Europeans directed at other ethnic minorities (including Roma and refugees from the Middle East).

The challenge, but also the potential strength, of the postcolonial approach to the post-socialist territories lies in the diversity and multiplicity of the possible intersections of race, class, gender, and other hierarchical society systems. Such an approach could help challenge the binary hierarchical framework demonizing the East or the West, and, instead, offer an analytical tool that Tlostanova (2023) calls a feminist border thinking – an approach where special attention is given to the areas characterized by ambiguity and in-betweenness. As Kassabova notes in the preface to her book *Border: A Journey to the Edge of Europe*, the borders are always involving: 'Once near a border, it is impossible not to become involved, not to want to exorcise or transgress something. Just by being there, the border is an invitation' (2017: xv).

The Balkan region, and Bulgaria in particular, seems to be an appropriate place to apply the methodology of border thinking, since the post-1989 transition in the countries of the region was not a simple replacement of ideologies. Instead, it initiated a coexistence and overlapping of multiple ideologies, inviting, and encouraging multiple acts of border crossing. As Boatcă argues, in the periphery, ideological and political models like conservatism, socialism and even liberalism can take 'forms that often retained nothing of the original model but the name'

(Boatcă 2006: 322). Considering this, it is particularly important to explore these transformations and to see the post-communist countries as an example of semi-periphery.

Self-Colonization and Othering

Self-colonization (Kiossev 1995) or self-exoticism is present in many post-communist Bulgarian films and could be seen as a manifestation of a profound need to be accepted. In his theory of self-colonizing cultures, Kiossev argues that the difference in power between the less modernized cultures and the 'Great Nations' results in the reframing of the nation in the context of a lack, or loss of something (Kiossev 1995: 1). Kiossev notes that self-colonization is different from colonization, because it means a different kind and level of 'backwardness'; while these cultures are 'not central enough, not timely and big enough' if compared to the core, they are at the same time 'insufficiently alien, insufficiently distant and insufficiently backward', leaving the self-colonizing cultures in 'the space of a generative doubt: We are European, although perhaps not to a real extent' (1995: 3).

Kiossev suggests a multilevel model of 'rationalizations' that lead to self-colonizing impulses, and most of them can be applied to the Bulgarian case. For example, the first rationalization suggested by Kiossev is the idea of a rebirth or revival of the nation, which means a return to some version of a glorious past before the traumatic moment in the recent past (1989), in order to 'self-convince such a culture that its own historical time has not started at the traumatic point but has been continuous from some honourable Past towards the glorious Future of the Nation' (Kiossev 1995: 5). A second rationalization is explained as a necessity of two competing ideologies – Westernization (Europeanization) and nativism. The former is constructed as a linear progressive movement in the traditions of modernity, while the latter, according to Kiossev, 'looks for and often finds (i.e. invents) the lost "authentic substance" of the Nation, before it has been corrupted by aliens, and then idealises it in a bucolic manner' (1995: 6). The doctrine of nativism, thus, holds a dangerous potential of overindulging in the discourses of Othering, because all new influences are impossible, or at least difficult, to incorporate into an ideology based entirely on the distant past and inherent perennial characteristics.

Self-exoticism in world cinema was described by Elsaesser as a process where 'the ethnic, the local or the regional expose themselves under the guise of self-expression, to the gaze of the benevolent other' (Elsaesser 2005: 510). Self-exoticism and self-colonization are present in in some post-communist Bulgarian films such as *Operation Shmenti Capelli* (Mitov 2011) or *The World is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner* (Komandarev 2008), to some extent fuelled and conditioned by the controlling gaze of the Western Other that is perceived as more civilized and progressive. I argue that, while still present, in *Mission London* these processes are being mocked as they become a source of absurdist comic relief.

Challenging the Othering Discourse: The Possibility of Hybridity

Both forms of modernity that existed and influenced the processes of national identity formation in Bulgaria – the socialist (before) and the capitalist (now) – resulted in a deeply rooted acceptance of the binary approach to national identity. I argue that there is a potential for alternative dialogic ties in the more hybrid and fluid national identity representations in cinema. The following section will explore how in the case study film, hybrid identities are negotiated in more complex and non-binary terms, deconstructing the discourses of othering, and challenging the status quo.

Hybridity, hybrid identities, and border crossing are crucial concepts to use in the attempts to understand any society in transition. There has been an ongoing debate surrounding the notion of hybridity, and Pieterse describes the subsequent critique as the 'anti-hybridity backlash' (2001: 219). Marotta, for instance, argues that boundaries between societies are still unavoidable, despite the claims of the overbearing fluidity and mobility of the postmodern world (2008: 309). Drawing on the work of Marotta, who suggests that boundaries are essential to 'the very constitution' (2008: 301) of the hybrid subject, in the present research I define hybridity as a process of border crossing, most likely a vernacular and transgressive act; for this to happen the existence of boundaries is a necessary condition. At the same time, I refuse to see boundaries as stable entities with fixed meaning that cannot be affected by the dynamic of the border crossing. Instead, as Pieterse argues, hybridity and boundaries coexist in a state of negotiation, highlighting the vital ability of hybridity to problematize boundaries (2001: 220). Hybridity cannot

be restrained to just national, ethnic boundaries, and it could also mean transcending the boundaries of time or heteronormativity. As Berghahn notes, hybridity provides a problematization and critique of normativity by offering an alternative to the hegemony ruled by the dichotomies of 'us' and 'them' (2012: 133).

I also suggest that hybridity and hybrids are more than just a liminal space. Instead, Burns, for example, proposes viewing hybridity as an alternative rather than liminal space: 'the notion of being trapped "between two cultures" is rejected in favour of marking out a "third space" of cultural hybridity that holds out the promise of a more liberated society' (2007: 11). I would argue that this approach applies to the Bulgarian case, as it proposes a critique of the claim that Bulgaria is still stuck in transition, remaining forever in the liminal space in-between.

As Neuburger states, no hybridity is accepted by the Western version of modernity. Nevertheless, this does not eliminate hybridity, and, in some cases, hybridity can present an alternative to the hegemonic colonial discourse (2004). Morozov and Rumelli add that othering can be a positive, constructive practice, which can even be considered 'a hybridising practice involving both positive and negative representations' (2012: 32). It is clear, however, that within the East/West dichotomy, this practice is asymmetrical.

Hybridity and Cinema of Intercultural Negotiation

I am using the idea of interculturality in my study, because, as Marks notes, 'intercultural' refers to the role of cinema as a mediator, suggesting fluidity and possibility of change manifested through a 'movement between one culture and another' and implies that the dominant culture is not a static background for the unfolding of the cultural minorities – it is all seen as a fluidity and dynamic dialogue (2000: 30). At the same time, my focus on the negotiational aspect of cinema provides an opportunity to view the encounters mediated by cinema as dialogical, vernacular acts of border crossing. Intercultural cinema theory (see also Evans in this volume) presupposes an equal dialogue, while the idea of negotiation is more suitable to reflect that the dialogues between Bulgaria, its perceived core (Europe and the symbolic West), and the Other within are not equal. The concept of negotiation, therefore, emphasizes the focus on the numerous unequal relationships of power, influenced not only by economic but also political and cultural factors.

Mission London Film Analysis

This section looks at the case study film through the previously mentioned lenses of self-colonization, othering and hybridity. *Mission London* follows some of the patterns of self-colonizing cultures suggested by Kiossev (1995). For example, the first two rationalizations proposed by Kiossev, namely the idea of a rebirth of a nation and a return to the once lost pre-traumatic times, are present in *Mission London*, even if they are used ironically. The fact that the Bulgarian President's wife, Selyanska,[1] is determined to invite the queen to the event at the embassy exacerbates the absurdity of the plot and highlights the tendency of self-deprecation. At the climax of the film, during the celebratory dinner at the embassy, the over-the-top show illuminates the anxieties and the inferiority complex that are central to the Bulgarian tendency of self-colonization.

The show relies heavily on the long-lost Bulgarian golden eras – first, the proto-Bulgarians, and then, the already mentioned National Revival after the liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire. Initially, the exaggerated fire show was meant to impress the British Royal Family, while also proving to them that Bulgarians are part of the European 'family'. As the president's wife Selyanska says in her speech before the dinner: 'You will become convinced yourself that we all belong to one and the same cultural motherland called Europe'. The choice of these two scenes from Bulgarian history to prove that Bulgarians are, indeed, Europeans, is not accidental. Both episodes represent the glorious times when Bulgaria still shared a common path with Europe, before the traumatic event of the communist coup in 1944 that disrupted the natural flow of history. Using Kiossev's terminology, the self-colonization through a return to these particular idealized times in history allows Bulgarian national identity to return to its lost 'authentic substance' (1995: 6) and, thus, respond to the expected critique from the colonizing West.

The failure is, nevertheless, unavoidable: the concert goes wrong, and the fireworks to celebrate 'the victory of the Bulgarian soldiers' on-stage result in an explosion and fire in the embassy hall. As the guests, including the fake queen, leave the room, the absurdity of the situation becomes even more obvious. The image of the fire in the embassy is the peak of absurdity in the film's narrative: there is a very extravagant dinner served, the decorations are very pompous and classic, but the fire destroys everything, and the aftermath of the disaster looks fake and ridiculous. The fear of embarrassment becomes a reality, as a Scotland

Yard detective arrives and, shocked that something like that could happen in an embassy, exclaims: 'What is going on here? These people are barbarians!'.

Indeed, 'these people', the Bulgarians, are finally mocked for their constant desire to prove themselves as truly European. I would argue, however, that the film goes beyond simply following a certain self-colonizing pattern. *Mission London*, in its satirical manner, offers a glimpse into the absurdity of this pattern and reflects critically on the inferiority complexes rooted in the overbearing sense of always remaining stuck in the in-between state of 'not European enough'.

The use of satire in *Mission London* seems to be directed at everyone, except for the ambassador, Varadin, who remains the only distanced and somewhat rational character. His position as an observer is highlighted when he tries to cope with the absurdity around him by watching a hypnotherapy video and then desperately trying to relax by using counting techniques. By slowly counting down from one hundred to one, Varadin maintains his calm distant position to the rest of the world, however disturbing and frustrating it becomes.

The following scene from *Mission London* offers another interesting perspective on the way that the Eastern gaze can be reversed through cinematic narratives. The first time we see Varadin, he is arriving in London in a black cab, looking at Westminster and Big Ben through the window, unaware that he is simultaneously being watched by Mr Carver – the Minister of Defence. The hierarchy is quite apparent in this scene, as Mr Carver is literally above everyone else, hiding behind a curtain in the parliament building and looking down, while Varadin is in the car down below. The dynamic is reversed after the already mentioned European summit when Mr Carver takes the ambassador to his home and talks to him while also getting drunk. Varadin is the one who is trying to use the other for his own interests, while the minister appears to be the more naïve one. Meanwhile, Varadin appears to be Westernized and looks like a stereotypical English gentleman, wearing a Burberry scarf and a coat.

Although Varadin had to obey the president and his wife, the audience could identify with him as the main character and also view the surroundings from this slightly distanced and, therefore, more critical and self-reflective perspective. This perspective is reinforced by the fact that Varadin remains sober in the scene with Carver, while the supposedly more civilized minister is drunk and falls asleep.

It can be argued that Varadin subverts the stereotypical image of the Bulgarian abroad – instead of embarrassing himself in front of the more civilized foreigners, Varadin is an idealized model of a genuinely European Bulgarian who does not

have to trick the Westerners in order to become equal to them. Furthermore, Varadin is the only 'sane' character through whom we get to witness the madness of his world. He is already more civilized and rational than some of the members of both sides of the world: he is calm, in control, and distanced, conforming to the stereotype about a typical Westerner. This allows him to be an observer rather than a hybrid. The film, therefore, opposes self-exoticism by presenting the tropes of unification, the universalization of experience and humanization through its satirical take, demonstrating the similarities and coherences, rather than differences and extremities (Easthope 1988). It is suggested that national ideas are indeed nothing more than complexes of inferiority, a struggle for power, and a manifestation of political interest. The national identity construction is depicted as something artificial, politicized, and imposed from above so that we can see the similarities between 'not-there' Bulgaria and the 'true-Europe' Britain more than their differences.

The exaggerated absurdist humour is crucial in the film – it not only highlights some traumatic conflict points of national negotiation but also makes their needlessness obvious. The absurd events at the embassy dinner once again highlight the excessiveness and artificiality of the constructed imaginary spaces of East and West. The entire process of adaptation and catching up with the West becomes the object of parody, especially when highlighted by the way that the Western characters themselves behave. Adaptation, thus, it is not depicted as something necessary; on the contrary, since everyone is a part of this absurd game, then perhaps the need to catch up is also artificially imposed.

Nevertheless, this contrast of power and the desire of Bulgaria to be recognized as truly European is continuously ridiculed in the film. When Varadin first meets the representative of the agency 'Famous Connections' at the embassy, they are being served sandwiches that look like a stereotypical image from the popular Soviet cookbook, *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* (1952). The representative makes a striking comment about the food: 'I'm afraid that these sandwiches prove that you have a *long way to go to catch up with the rest of Europe*. I am not a snob, but as far as sandwiches are concerned there are certain sacred standards for this country'. This comment is particularly ironic coming from an agent who locates celebrity lookalikes to satisfy his clients' erotic fantasies. Nevertheless, it also exposes some complexes that Bulgarians have: the ambassador asks his cook to 'do some research' and make 'proper sandwiches' to avoid embarrassment next time. On the other hand, the absurdity of this comment and its irony could be seen

as a critique of the acceptance of the perceived artificial standards imposed on Bulgaria from the outside. The irrationality of these imposed demands is challenged through the satirical appeal of the scene and, thus, the subversive potential of the absurdist humour is fulfilled.

Another humorous commentary on the Bulgarians, or rather, all post-communist countries, is expressed later in the film by the same agents, who state: 'They are really damaged over there, *they've got no taboos left after the collapse of the Berlin Wall'*. This seems to be a reflective and critical view of the East on itself through an imagined, mediated Western gaze, taken to the extreme. At the same time, the subversive power of both scenes lies in the satirical approach – both times the criticism of the East is voiced by characters who do not hold much power or legitimacy themselves. On the contrary, their own moral stance is questionable and, thus, their judgement cannot be considered authoritative or competent.

Both comments on the ridiculous standards that are felt to be imposed on Bulgaria by the West, or the 'true' Europe, suggest a sharp critique of the 'catching up' discourse. The attempts of the Bulgarian characters to adapt to and comply with the demands are ridiculed rather than really admired. The decolonial potential of *Mission London*, thus, lies in its subversive, satirical depiction of the negotiation dynamic between the older and the newer European Union states. The deidentification and universalization power in the film is also realized through the tools of absurdist humour, which challenge and question the rigid borders of the East/West divide.

Mission London Focus Group Discussions

Mission London offers a refreshingly complex and nuanced picture, exposing the overlapping and ambiguous essence of the constructed ideas of Europeanness, Balkanness, and Bulgarianness. However, the potential of the common experience of postcolonialism and the Western gaze does not guarantee a feeling of solidarity between semi-periphery and periphery. It is not enough for Bulgarian cinema to look back at the West; it is also necessary for it to look at those on whom they are projecting their Otherness. The question of who the actual Other is, if Bulgarians are indeed European, remains too complex and problematic to answer.

Not surprisingly, a discourse of blame was common in the focus group

discussion in relation to the Roma (an important but highly racialized and discriminated against ethnic minority in Bulgaria), particularly when talking about the 'un-European' and 'non-civilized' behaviour abroad. Referring to an episode from *Mission London*, one participant stated that the people abroad are so different that they cannot even imagine stealing a duck from the park and selling it, while the Bulgarians and the Roma take advantage of such naivety:

> *They cannot imagine why you would have to kill the ducks, sell them to the Chinese or whatever. This would never even cross their mind. Think of all the problems they have with their social services and the Bulgarians who abuse their benefits system. Whether they are of Roma origin, or not . . . (Participant 3, 40)*[2]

When discussing *Mission London*, the participants reacted most obviously to the typical Bulgarian national trait – the desire to outsmart everybody else and to earn money without working. Interestingly, this is simultaneously the feature that they criticized in the Roma:

> – *I think there are many other factors in Bulgaria that make a wrong impression abroad. The Gypsies,*[3] *for example. (Participant 4, 31)*
> – *Yes, the Gypsies. (Participant 2, 28)*
> – *When they are caught stealing, no one says 'I am a Gypsy', they say 'I am Bulgarian'. (Participant 4, 31)*
> – *This is making a wrong impression. (Participant 2, 28)*
> – *I see this in myself sometimes . . . It is the same when we think of Kosovo, about Albania. I can remember how we perceived them, as if we were expecting to see some cannibals there. (Participant 4, 31)*

Similar projections are evident in this dialogue where the participant admits his condescending attitudes towards the neighbours who are perceived as more 'balkanized':

> – *We all have a similar mentality in the Balkans. (Participant 12, 43)*
> – *I mean, all countries from* this *part of the Balkans. Slovenia and Croatia are different. Their mentality is different; they have a more civil society. I would say that Bulgaria is closer to the Balkans anyway. (Participant 9, 47)*

Interestingly, although the participants were aware of their own views towards the other Balkan states, their deprecating view of the Roma was not included in this self-reflective narrative. Nevertheless, I argue that there is a potential for alternative dialogic ties in the more hybrid and fluid national identity representations in *Mission London*.

A more nuanced discussion becomes possible where there is space for a more critical account of the Europe/East dynamic. Some of the focus groups gradually revealed a level of reflection on fluidity in Bulgaria's place in the European terrain, thus revealing the film's capacity to inspire dialogue and self-reflection. Some reflected that the reason behind the pronounced necessity to steal is economic:

> *I think that the problem with us is that the Bulgarian is poor, basically. And when a Bulgarian is poor, he can think of so many mischiefs, it's unbelievable. I think if people were more . . . If they lived more normally, had better income and a more normal standard of living, maybe they would not think how to trick England and France. (Participant 2, 28)*

Participants were also quite critical about the outcomes of emigration to Western Europe. Almost in every group, the idea of the happy future in the West was challenged by the participants, who stated that 'When we go to the West, we work at the lowest levels' (Participant 7, 23) and 'I think that it does not come naturally to Bulgarians to live in other countries; they always want to return home. [wherever you go, Bulgarians are looking for the Bulgarian]' (Participant 15, 62).

Not surprisingly, in the focus group discussions, some participants defensively pointed out that the West 'underestimates' Bulgarians. They also noted that they are being made to believe that Bulgarians are lazy, because they are just being paid less and, therefore, exploited:

> *This is all part of some plan; they are trying to convince us that we are lazy. In Europe, they are getting big salaries because they work hard, and we do not work hard enough. The truth is just the opposite – we're working and we're working very hard! When they come from Europe to work here, we see the difference. They work ten times less than us, have their requirements, and if anything goes wrong, they refuse to work. While we work without any complaints. (Participant 15, 62)*

It is clear in the discussions above that in these more critical reflections, the audience refuses to automatically accept the natural logic of othering, where Europe is always at the top of the hierarchy. Portraying the process of national identity negotiation through a satirical lens, *Mission London* highlights the absurdity of some of the claims imposed by the East/West inequality and helps the audience to challenge the logic of the 'catching up' discourse and question the stigmatizing of the Balkans as the margins of Europe.

In *Mission London,* the characters are hybrid, ambiguous and avoiding the obvious binaries while making them excessive and visible. Ambassador Varadin is a pragmatic figure, a balanced character who is relatable without the need to be ridiculed. Satire is not used to devalue the character but instead exposes the inconsistencies and the structural inequalities. As a hybrid, Varadin does not take on the role of a trickster. Instead, he offers an alternative type of 'a figure on the boundaries' (Tlostanova 2007) that does not require a marginalized or ironic status, but still can be a vehicle of border thinking. Thus, border thinking is adopted in *Mission London* through exploring the boundaries of Europeanness, the Bulgarian desire to be accepted as European, the fluidity of borders between Bulgaria and other Balkan or Eastern European countries.

The subversive potential of the film is realized in its tendency of unification: no one is safe. Perhaps, what is highlighted most is that there is no need to adapt – everyone is similar anyway: the British characters are just as ridiculous in their agency of celebrities as are the embassy clerks who show their ability to outsmart the system. The absurdity of the standards that the characters of the film are struggling to follow challenges the self-colonizing and self-deprecating image of the Bulgarian. Furthermore, the very stereotype about the insurmountable difference between the East and the West is challenged. It can be argued, therefore, that *Mission London* is a part of the cinema of intercultural negotiation. Using satire and absurdism, the film shows the interchangeable perceptions of the East and the West who both demonstrate the tendency to exoticize the Other in their differences. Nevertheless, because of the excessive amount of absurdity, the idea of the East/West divide is challenged.

Conclusion

In this chapter I viewed and analysed the national negotiation process in Bulgaria through the postcolonial lens, the discourses of inclusion and exclusion, and the subsequent process of othering. An interesting exchange between the symbolical core, semi-periphery and periphery emerged as a result. On the one hand, cinema encourages, mediates, and facilitates the exchange between these symbolical entities. The case study film produces multiple diverse representations of national identity that are not limited or homogenous in their treatment of the Other, providing fertile ground for hybridity and intercultural negotiation in the context of the transition from communism. The non-inclusive discourses of Otherness are criticized through the means of absurdism and satire and a more universalizing perspective, which focuses on the intercultural similarities rather than the differences. I argue that, despite being a comedy and a commercial blockbuster, *Mission London* has the potential to challenge the mainstream discourse of projected othering in Bulgaria.

Previously criticized for a lack of hybridity (Trifonova 2011), new Bulgarian cinema is shifting to express a more universal appeal in recent years. Some films focus on class struggle, poverty, and corruption, such as *Glory* (Grozeva and Valchanov 2016), *Directions* (Komandarev 2017), *Rounds* (Komandarev 2019), *Blaga's Lessons* (Komandarev 2023); others reflect on the experiences of women in the largely conservative Bulgarian society, such as *Mother* (Zornitsa Sofia 2022), *Women Do Cry* (Mileva and Kazakova 2020).

Since the release of *Mission London* in 2010, a number of films have continued to use the theme of migration to reflect on the complex marginalized role of Bulgaria in Europe and to express anxieties and insecurities about the place of Bulgaria within a broader European context. *Cat in the Wall* (Mileva and Kazakova 2019) takes place in a block of flats in London and follows an unfolding conflict between Bulgarian migrants and their British working-class neighbours. The documentary *The Good Postman* (Hristov 2016), its fiction feature version *The Good Driver* (Hristov 2023), *The Judgement* (Komandarev 2014), and *Fear* (Hristov 2020) address the topics of migration and the refugee crisis, specifically focusing on the literal and metaphorical acts of border-crossing. In *The Judgement*, the main character Mityo accepts a job smuggling migrants over the border into Bulgaria, and gradually realizes that this work reminds him of his military service as a

Bulgarian border guard where, ironically, his task was to prevent people from leaving the Eastern Bloc.

The negotiation of national identity cannot be seen in isolation from the political frameworks. For example, in *The Judgement* mentioned above, the refugees are not given their own voice, and they continue to be represented through the lens of Bulgarian characters and are, therefore, further dehumanized. One character, for instance, describes the (presumably Syrian) refugees as 'Gypsies, Arabs, and blacks'. It is evident, therefore, that the building of national identity in cinema is still constructed primarily through the processes of exclusion and inclusion. Cinema exposes these points of negotiation, facilitating a symbolic conversation between the imagined core (the abstract idea of Europe and the West) and the periphery (Bulgaria), but also between the semi-periphery (Bulgaria) and the periphery including its multiple Others (Roma, refugees, migrants).

As the discussions in the focus groups show, it is not enough to assume the engagement of the audiences to challenge the already existing hegemonic structures of projected othering. Projected othering seems to be accepted quite uncritically, which shows the continuity and rootedness of these practices. Even though, as the analysis shows, *Mission London* provides examples of universalism and hybridity, this is not always enough: most of the focus groups still included divisive comments and strong binary oppositions. Moreover, the cinema which negotiates the position of the less privileged and more vulnerable minority groups (created by these groups themselves and from their perspective) in Bulgaria is yet to be produced.

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Notes

1. Selyanska's name is translated literally as *Peasant*; this word has a negative connotation and is often used to contrast urban and progressive with rural and backward.
2. Participant number, participant age.
3. The participant used the derogatory term *tsigani* instead of Romi, Roma.

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Just Like Us

Migration and the 'Prosthetic Western' in Contemporary German Cinema

Owen Evans

The coronavirus pandemic has brought a new, and wholly unexpected, dimension to notions of borders and restricted freedom of movement with countries the world over imposing lockdowns, tiers, red lists and vaccination passports to attempt to control and monitor mobility internally, as well as internationally. But for all that COVID-19 has preoccupied so many of us for so long, there has been no respite for those who have been forced to flee for their lives or to seek a better way of life during, and since, the pandemic. The ongoing tragic loss of life of refugees in the English Channel, the Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea, as well as events on the Poland-Belarus border in the winter of 2021, and even more disturbingly, the ongoing nightmare in Ukraine, have all brought the plight of refugees back to the fore with disturbing media images. The political wrangling about responsibility between the states implicated in these situations has been accompanied by loud calls for humanitarian, yet measured, responses to them. As an editorial in *Der Spiegel* remarks: 'There is a political majority in Germany and many countries in Europe for a controlled immigration policy, which is based upon economic and humanitarian criteria, but not for open borders. Fences do not contradict a humane immigration policy; they simply establish the prerequisites for it' (Neukirch 2021: 6).[1] In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, which prompted a raft of new public health measures across many countries, and compounded by the subsequent cost of living crisis and the squeeze on energy supplies stemming from the Ukrainian war, the risk is understandably acute that the plight of refugees might be lost again to extreme 'compassion fatigue' (Moeller 1999). Perhaps now, more than at any other time, the potential of cinema, as Maria Rovisco argues, to 'provoke contemplation, increase sensitivity, inspire a debate and further understanding of distant others' (2013: 152) has never been more

desperately needed (see a similar argument being made by Peruzzi, Bruno and Massa in this volume).

The focus of the present chapter is on exploring cinema's ability to inspire empathy in audiences for the plight of migrants by analysing three twenty-first-century German films with migration as their primary focus. Of particular interest is the way in which the films each adapt the genre of the Western, either literally or metaphorically, to tell their tales. Arguably the oldest of the popular genres, the Western lends itself as an effective medium for such explorations with its traditional focus on 'pacifying and settling the frontier' and the 'encounter between civilization and untamed, sometimes, savage nature' (Langford 2005: 63). Langford describes the mythic and metaphorical importance of the genre in forging American identity, indicating that the wild 'frontier acted as a "safety valve" for potentially explosive class conflicts by allowing marginalized social elements . . . to start afresh and forge their own destinies' (2005: 63). The traditional American Western generally deviates little from this more positive reading, depicting the opportunities afforded those pioneers or migrants who seek their fortunes out west. Exemplified by films such as *How the West Was Won* (Marshall, Hathaway, Ford, 1962), more often than not these films conclude with the protagonists' success in building new lives, albeit after overcoming violence or lawlessness, or struggles with nature. Its adaptation in our case studies, however, shifts the focus squarely onto the often insurmountable or fateful challenges posed by the inhospitable environments in which the migrants find themselves, and where their futures remain resolutely uncertain.

In the particular context of the three case study films, by embedding their narratives in the framework of the Western, a genre familiar to European audiences on account of the so-called Euro-Westerns, which during the 1960s and early 1970s were produced 'in such numbers that . . . they often exceeded Hollywood's own yearly Western production count' (Broughton 2016: 2), these German films are more accessible than the typically auteur-driven productions of accented, or cosmopolitan, cinema. Indeed, German audiences have a particularly strong affinity with the genre as evinced by a long tradition of film adaptations in the 1960s of German author Karl May's stories of the Wild West, most often starring Hollywood actor Lex Barker as Old Shatterhand. West German Westerns such as *Der Schatz im Silbersee/The Treasure of Silver Lake* (Reinl, 1962) and *Winnetou/Apache Gold* (Reinl, 1963) were popular in both Germanies, and were themselves spoofed by Michael 'Bully' Herbig's *Der Schuh des Manitou/Manitou's Shoe* (2001).

As Lee Broughton argues very persuasively, the European Westerns as a whole were significant adaptations of the American examples in offering 'consistently positive and progressive representations of racial and gendered Others' (2016: 3). In particular, the German Westerns presented positive depictions of Native Americans, most obviously the character of Winnetou, with whom Barker's Old Shatterhand, 'a hero cast in an obviously German mould' (Broughton 2016: 47), becomes a blood brother. In the context of the 1960s, and specifically the trial of Adolf Eichmann in the early years of the decade, Broughton posits that the racial harmony depicted in the films 'can be understood to overwrite and replace the wholly immoral actions of the Nazis' (2016: 47). Irrespective of how successful that replacement process proved to be in a broader socio-political context – the decade of violent terrorism in the Federal Republic from 1967 to 1977 suggests it was relatively ineffective – the present chapter posits that by adapting the Western more broadly, and earlier German adaptations of the genre more specifically, the potential to 'generat[e] empathy and articulat[e] an ethical relation to the other' (Landsberg 2003: 149) is enhanced by the audience's familiarity with these films and their associations with racial harmony. Moreover, by then presenting the Germans as economic migrants, thereby assuming the role of the Native American 'Other' in the Karl May Westerns, the films offer a prosthetic means for audiences to better understand the migrant perspective in Germany at a time when xenophobia has become, and remains, alarmingly more overt and prevalent, especially in the wake of the war in Ukraine. As such they might also be seen to contribute to a new German cinema of intercultural dialogue (for a discussion of intercultural cinema within the Bulgarian context, see Anisimovich in this volume), which attempts to build bridges between communities at the local level and thereby ease tensions by seeking common ground for a more cosmopolitan understanding of different subject positions (Evans 2018).

In exploring the representation of refugees and migration in German cinema and written in the aftermath of the so-called 'refugee crisis' of 2015, Malte Hagener dismisses the popular misconception of these events as 'unprecedented', underlining how '(forced) migration and the displacement of larger groups of population have a long history in most countries of the world. Consequently, the cinema, ever since it existed, has addressed many aspects surrounding the realities and imaginations of the issue' (2018: 110). Unprecedented such events may not be, but that so many films in the twenty-first century have increasingly focused on migration, forced or otherwise, underscores the scale of the problem the world now

faces, especially since 9/11. As a consequence, there has been a commensurate, and significant, increase in scholarly interest in such films (e.g. Berghahn and Sternberg 2010; Grassili 2008; Hake and Mennel 2012; Loshitzky 2010; Ponzanesi 2012; Rings 2016) with a specific focus on the European experience of migration through various lenses. The present chapter will contribute to this body of work by exploring three German case study films, namely *Lichter/Distant Lights* (Schmid, 2003), *Gold* (Arslan, 2013), and *Western* (Grisebach, 2017). In particular, it will elucidate the ways in which the filmmakers actively seek to evoke empathy by deploying what we might call 'prosthetic affect', since each either equates experiences of German characters directly to those of refugees or migrants, as in *Lichter*, or specifically reimagines the German characters as economic migrants, thereby rendering them 'Other', in the cases of *Gold* and *Western* (see Anisimovich in this volume for further discussion of othering and reversing othering in the context of Bulgarian cinema). German, and by extension Western European, viewers are therefore brought closer affectively to the migrant perspective to such an extent that they might more readily see themselves in the characters in question. Each film thus endeavours to stimulate the contemplation and sensitivity Rovisco hopes for. But these German films cannot be ascribed to 'accented cinema' (Naficy 2001) or what Rovisco calls 'cosmopolitan cinema'. Significantly, the films are not 'screening strangers' (Loshitzky 2010), but Germans, just like the domestic audience.

Hagener asserts that cinema can serve as 'a kind of laboratory in which different scenarios could be played through, different situations could be experienced, and different (subject) positions might be occupied', and thus in that capacity it can contribute to a 'wider social debate' on the topic of migration (2018: 110). Rovisco broadly concurs, though in introducing the notion of cosmopolitan cinema, she goes further by arguing that 'as a mode of production [it] invites structures of feeling (i.e. care, compassion and empathy) that enable new affective and intellectual engagements of the audience with "others" whose access to cultural dialogue is severely limited' (2012: 154). More precisely, she defines cosmopolitan cinema as one that 'plays out experiences and representations of borders and mobilities' (2012: 149). As *Lichter* makes clear, it is in such locations that the hierarchies of power are fully exposed, in terms of those able to penetrate the frontier with ease and who can avail themselves of agency and networks available to them, and those for whom it is impermeable and who lack both.

With its setting on the border between Germany and Poland, at the time of the film's production an accession country to the EU, *Lichter* sensitively captures this

tension between flow and stasis, with its multi-stranded narrative following seven discrete groups of characters comprising Germans, Poles, and Ukrainian refugees. The action takes place specifically in the twin locales of Frankfurt an der Oder and Słubice. Once united before the Versailles Treaty redrew the national boundaries in 1919, the two towns now face each other over the forbidding Oder River, a far more overt, physical barrier than the boundary policed by the German border guards on the bridge linking the two conurbations, a reality underlined when one of the desperate refugees loses his life while attempting to traverse this natural, wild frontier.

Cinematically, from the outset, with his deliberate violation of the 180-degree rule, Schmid reunites the two towns once again, conflating them around the border, in order to highlight the arbitrary nature of this frontier and the resultant inequalities of mobility much more starkly. For the Ukrainian refugees we see at the start of the film, being told by the amoral traffickers that the distant lights of Słubice are, in fact, the outskirts of Berlin, the border proves all but impenetrable, while for a number of German characters, who can move unhindered, it is as if the division of the towns had never occurred. Nevertheless, Schmid carefully ensures that freedom of movement does not automatically equate to a better quality of life. The German characters are all flawed, morally or emotionally, and the material despair of hapless Eastern German businessman Ingo Mehrtens specifically is directly comparable to that of the migrants, who have travelled to Germany in the hopes of achieving the kind of life, and prosperity, that eludes him. Thus, the cinematic conflation of the two locales, with the action passing seamlessly from one side to the other without obvious visual signposting at times, reflects the shared, and interconnected, experiences of all the characters, be they migrant or indigenous.

Lichter presents a series of ethical and humanitarian challenges for the viewer, relating to German historical responsibilities to its neighbours, with Schmid intimating that the Federal Republic has wilfully turned its back on Eastern Europe, even as, at the time of the film's production, the EU was on the cusp of expansion in that direction.[2] It is just such an ethico-political dimension that Rovisco highlights as a key component of cosmopolitan cinema, which seeks to generate debates about 'issues of human dignity and their violation and, ultimately achieve a shared understanding of what constitutes a human being in the contemporary world' (2012: 153). The challenge is to represent these concerns in nuanced ways cinematically that invite empathy, but without exploiting the suffering as mere

spectacle. In this respect, Rovisco's concern with a form of cinema that can generate empathy and ethical responses in the viewer recalls Alison Landsberg's notion of 'prosthetic cinema' (2003).

Although Landsberg's specific theoretical focus is on the history film, it is the shared concern in how stimulating empathy in the viewer can strengthen cinema's impact that interests us here. For, as Rovisco underlines:

> *If the suffering of the distant other is beyond comprehension, audiences can easily claim distance or strangeness as a reason for not understanding. Thus, one of the key challenges for those involved in the making of cosmopolitan cinema is how to articulate the dignity of the lives of suffering 'others' – not as objects of pity – but as fully fledged subjects in the specificity of their culture, history and place. (2012: 155)*

The mere representation of the migrant experience alone is not enough, as it might generate sympathy, which, as Landsberg points out, can reinforce the victimhood of the other and thus create an unwanted hierarchy: 'sympathy implies condescension, for the sympathizer looks down on his/her object, and in the process reaffirms his/her superiority' (2003: 147). By contrast, she argues, 'the experience of empathy . . . is not purely emotional but has a crucial cognitive component' (Landsberg 2003: 147). Drawing on Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin, Landsberg posits the 'technologies of reproduction' as 'particularly powerful conduits for the generation of empathy' (2003: 148) and argues that cinema's capacity to facilitate 'a sensuous engagement with the past' (2003: 149) allows memories conveyed on screen in an historical context to be grafted onto those watching 'like an artificial limb' (2003: 149): 'I call these memories prosthetic to underscore their usefulness; because they feel real, they help to condition how an individual thinks about the world, and might be instrumental in generating empathy and articulating an ethical relation to the other' (2003: 149). Although Landsberg is looking primarily at cinematic mediations of the past, it is axiomatic how films that focus on the migrant point-of-view might similarly evoke sensuous responses in the viewer. For if memories can be grafted onto the viewer through commodified images, then so too can experiences.

By portraying the migrant characters as either challenged or trapped by the demanding, even perilous, circumstances they find themselves in, each of the case study films evokes what German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder identifies as

the affective power of Douglas Sirk's classic Hollywood melodramas. With particular emphasis on Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959), an exemplar of the ways in which melodrama shapes its narrative around characters confined by the social structures they inhabit, Fassbinder notes: 'Both [characters] are right and no one will ever be able to help either of them. Unless, of course, we change the world. We all cried over the movie. Because it's so hard to change the world' (Fassbinder 1992: 89). The cinematic grafting of migrant experiences onto the audience operates in the same way, generating an 'authenticity of affect' (Evans 2010: 11) and thereby creating a connection with these characters. We are affected by the same fervent desire to change the world for these people, people just like us. So, in the case of *Lichter*, by directly juxtaposing the material despair of Ingo with that of the Ukrainian couple, Dimitri and Anna, in particular, whose futile efforts with their tiny baby to wade across the river with impecunious, if well-meaning, Polish taxi driver Antoni nearly end in tragedy, the film's prosthetic dimension is visible. Whereas the refugees are defeated by a literally insurmountable obstacle, the German is unable to overcome figurative barriers in the same place. By bringing the audience close to both perspectives and equating them cinematically, not only by conflating the space between them but also by means of the tight handheld camerawork, common to both narrative strands, that brings us in greater proximity literally to the characters' point-of-view, the 'sensuous engagement' with their fates is reinforced. We are not detached observers; we are directly implicated in their lives in quite visceral ways. We are moved emotionally by their, and our, inability to 'change the world'.

What Landsberg does not take fully into consideration is the important role that genre tropes might play in accentuating the prosthetic process. It seems plausible that the potential impact of such images and motifs might be enhanced all the more when the generic framework of a film is both popular and familiar, such as in the Western. In all three case studies, the decision to adapt the Western with a very specific German focus might be seen as an attempt to mitigate the risk of audiences becoming desensitized to images of migration and refugees. Not only has the German Western traditionally identified closely with the Native American character in the Winnetou films, as Broughton maintains, highlighting the kinship between the (imagined) German protagonist and the racial 'Other', but these contemporary reworkings and reimaginings of the Western in a German context also present the migrant 'Other' in a fresh way, especially at a time when the issue has remained a vexed political topic in Germany, in particular since 9/11. Following

the refugee summer of 2015, it has become ever more marked in the country both by the rise of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), the right-wing political party initially formed to militate against the euro bailouts in the wake of the economic crisis in Europe but latterly morphing into an alliance of, often extreme, far-right views, and symptomatic of a resurgent xenophobia within German society at large (Neufeld 2017). Moreover, by shaping or inflecting their narratives of migration around a German point-of-view, and presenting their protagonists as, or equating them to, migrants, the films seek to counter that disinterest prosthetically.

Films about migration are often automatically, and understandably, associated with transnationalism, and scholars such as Steven Vertovec feel the concept is apposite for studying migration. In underlining how it captures the specific experience and consequences of migration, he finds Caroline Brettel's definition particularly insightful:

> As a theoretical construct about immigrant life and identity, transnationalism aptly suits the study of population movements in a world where improved modes of transportation as well as the images that are transmitted by means of modern telecommunications have shortened the social distance between sending and receiving countries. (Brettel in Vertovec 2003: 642)

Nevertheless, a broader tendency exists to frame transnationalism as an always positive dynamic, especially when used without appropriate contextualization (e.g. Halle 2008). Rovisco for one objects to the concept for the way cinematic representations thereof appear to posit 'an increasingly borderless world' (2013: 148). As is underscored by the events of 2015, and their direct impact upon the 2017 German Election, the shortening of social distance between countries in and of itself is not always unproblematic, nor does it render borders redundant. The tragic events on the border between Poland and Belarus, for example, and the ongoing tensions within the EU about how to tackle the refugee situation continue to cast a long shadow, complicated all the more now by Brexit, the coronavirus pandemic and the increasingly bitter war in Ukraine.

Some of these conceptual problems can be overcome by deploying the notion of translocalism instead. Often linked to transnationalism as Greiner and Sakdapolrak underline, translocalism tends instead to focus on '"place" as the setting of grounded movements' (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013: 377). If the transnational focuses on the greater ease of movement, and the reduction of

social distance between countries, whilst interrogating the national, the translocal might perhaps invite us to explore more closely what happens after that initial process of mobility has been completed, and focus on the issues arising from adaptation to, and integration into, the receiving communities at the local level. Doreen Massey has argued passionately for an understanding of place as inherently dynamic, 'as the sphere of coexistence of a multiplicity of trajectories' (2005: 63), which chimes with translocalism's focus on '"what flows through places" and "what is in them"' (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013: 377). In this way, the suitability of the Western as a medium for exploring migration is reinforced, as a genre in which space, movement and settlement within the nation play key roles, literally and figuratively, throughout the genre's long history. Moreover, as David Lusted argues, 'Westerns appear to provide a fictional space to consider one's own identity in terms of racial and ethnic difference' (2003: 9), which underscores the genre's fruitfulness for exploring the translocal dynamic within communities affected by migration.

Arslan's *Gold* follows seven German migrants seeking their fortune in the British Columbian Gold Rush of the late 1890s, which, as Mareike Hermann notes, is a powerful commentary on the 'economic, emotional and material realities of immigration' in the twenty-first century (2019: 82). The German fortune-seekers all immigrated to North America some time before the narrative present, although that has neither brought them happiness or economic stability nor prepared them for the challenges they will face in the wilds of British Columbia for this second translocal migration. It is the hopes they pin on finding gold in this desolate region that drive them, and consequently expose them to life-threatening risks. No matter that they might have the experience of transnational mobility behind them, their very obvious otherness in this locale, which Herrmann's New Materialist reading of the film elucidates convincingly, highlights the material despair that has driven each of them to undertake this perilous quest. When one of the locals they encounter along the way learns of their plans to reach Dawson, a settlement hundreds of miles away, by a dangerous inland route, he remarks: 'Really expect to get there?'. It exposes not only how migration has not fulfilled their aspirations hitherto and merely exacerbated their sense of despair, but also their incredible naivety about the nature of their perilous journey into the wilderness, as well as an arrogant unwillingness to listen to local wisdom. What is striking in *Gold* is how each member of the group lacks any sense of nostalgic longing for *Heimat*. They seem not to be at home anywhere, afflicted by an

out-of-placeness that forces them to keep moving in restless pursuit of a potentially impossible dream.

A similar out-of-placeness afflicts the German construction workers in *Western* in modern-day Bulgaria, albeit that Grisebach also draws heavily on the tropes of the genre as her title intimates. The Germans talk disparagingly about their Bulgarian hosts, for whose benefit they are building the hydro-electric plant, and chauvinistically hoist a German flag above their compound. It is a regrettably deliberate evocation of the German presence in this region during World War II, as if this were a little piece of home away from home, conquered from the locals. The sudden mysterious theft of the flag, and the discovery that people have been prowling around the camp – recalling 'clichéd scenes in countless films of cowboys and settlers menaced by shadowy "Indians"' (Guest 2018: 32) – reflect how ill-at-ease the men feel in this strange new environment, reminiscent of Arslan's fortune-hunters who appear to stumble blindly from one problem to the next. The construction workers are ultimately unable to remain disconnected from the village, but also unable to integrate there either. And yet, to remain at home in Germany would mean long-term unemployment; in Bulgaria they are effectively economic migrants like their counterparts in *Gold*.

Just like the traditional American Western, *Gold* and *Western* both conjure up symbolic geographies to highlight the tensions between the German migrants and the indigenous population, focusing in particular on the peril or violence that ensues. Superficially, *Lichter* deploys fewer obviously Western tropes, and yet its evocation of 'the darker metaphors of contested territory and imperialist empire' (Guest 2018: 32) so typical of the genre, as well as the questions it poses about identity as Lusted indicates, similarly shape the action of Schmid's film. As a consequence of her guilt about the privileges her nationality bestows upon her, Sonja, the interpreter for the German border police, assists the Ukrainian refugee Kolja in his efforts to reach Berlin. The only migrant who achieves his goal, Kolja is smuggled across the border in the boot of Sonja's car. For German characters, such as Sonja, or Marco, the smuggler, and Wilke, the building magnate, the border with Poland is porous. Although Sonja's motives are genuinely humanitarian, in the case of the latter two, this freedom allows them to extract economic gain from the national identity.

Marco regularly traverses the border by train with contraband cigarettes, which he tosses out of the window to his waiting accomplice on the outskirts of Frankfurt. Wilke, although on the face of it engaged in less overtly criminal activity, has

bought land outside Słubice, with the intention of building a factory. Though clearly a potentially positive investment in the local economy, especially in the context of Poland's imminent accession to the EU, the project empowers Wilke to act like a neo-imperialist, recalling the period of Prussian hegemony over this particular region, but also any number of villainous landowners or outlaws in the Western who 'run' the town.[3] This unwholesome impression is compounded still further when Wilke buys the company of Beate, a Polish student and interpreter, and her friend Monika, for a party he throws for a potential investor, with the overt intention of sleeping with her. That she complies with his unsavoury wishes, to the chagrin of Philip, her idealistic ex-boyfriend and one of Wilke's architects, merely underlines the gulf between the haves and have-nots in post-communist Europe. For the pragmatic Beate, this transaction represents an opportunity too good to refuse, and echoes the desperation of the Ukrainian refugees hiding in the town, who attempt to wade across the perilous river, the wildest of frontiers.

The Polish and Ukrainian characters in *Lichter* are united by a lack of power and social capital, which forces them to behave in ways that appear risky, demeaning or immoral. As such their desperate actions mirror those of Ingo Mehrtens on the other side of the river in Frankfurt, who goes to extreme lengths to try to save his floundering business, when unable to secure the credit he needs. His tale is a cautionary one, reflecting the hollowness of promises of 'blühende Landschaften' (flourishing landscapes) made to East Germans during the *Wende* period by then-Chancellor Helmut Kohl. While some such as Wilke, one imagines, did benefit from the socio-political changes, others such as Ingo and his associate Simone have not flourished. The former solicits help from some of the 20 per cent unemployed in the region, including the latter, to distribute leaflets advertising his mattress shop, in the misguided belief that those without work spend time in bed and thus require new mattresses. He gambles everything on this flawed business model, but, already unable to pay his Polish secretary, Antoni's wife Milena, or any of those who help him, he ultimately has his stock repossessed to pay off his debts. When Simone, who sticks by him out of sympathy, suggests they open a food stand, he breaks down telling her he is bankrupt; his haplessness and poor business sense are symbolized by his literal short-sightedness and thick spectacles, and the heart-rending performance of Devid Striesow. Juxtaposed alongside the despair that drives the Ukrainians, such as Dimitri and Anna, to risk wading across the Oder, Ingo's fate underscores the migrants' mistakenly idealized impression of life on the other side and the specious promise of economic wellbeing Germany

offers. For the likes of Ingo and Simone, Berlin is as unreachable as it is for the refugees; Kolja, the exception proving the rule, only fulfils his dream of reaching Potsdamer Platz due to Sonja's guilt-fuelled intervention.

The German migrants in *Gold* and *Western* similarly lack social capital and networks of sufficient quality for a successful integration into the host country. This fundamental problem is aggravated still further by the mutual suspicion, even outright hostility, that exists within the two groups, in ways that recall the tense social dynamic in John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), in which the eponymous vehicle contains a microcosm of post-Civil War America, riven with ideological and class divisions between North and South, rich and poor. Whereas these tensions are overcome harmoniously in this classic Western, evincing the myth-making elements of the genre, in which fortunes are made, solidarity prevails in extremis, justice is done, and vengeance is justified, they remain unresolved in the German adaptations here, further highlighting the existential vulnerability of the characters and the greater potential for nuance in European Westerns.

In *Gold,* Laser is the leader of the group simply by virtue of the fact that he is in possession of a childishly rudimentary map of where gold might be found. The fact that he possesses some nuggets, reputedly from the Klondike, convinces the group that he knows what he is doing, although it is the flimsiest of justification for their trust. It quickly transpires that he is as unfamiliar with the terrain as they are, and the others' suspicions about his ulterior motives quickly mount. When he is caught trying to abscond with the group's money, the majority decide that he should hang, rather belatedly concluding that he is simply an embezzler, akin to the traffickers in *Lichter*; it is Emily who releases him out of compassion. Yet, when Emily initially joins the group of prospectors, she is viewed with suspicion herself by Maria Dietz, the wife of the cook, Otto, as a single woman in a group of men. In reality, she keeps herself to herself as much as possible, fending off the gauche romantic overtures of Müller, the journalist, on several occasions. Gradually, however, she becomes closer to Boehmer, the eastern European 'packer', whom the others treat simply as a lackey and with the same arrogant disdain that they display towards the Native Americans they encounter along the way. In this regard then, *Gold* deviates somewhat from the racial harmony of the Karl May Westerns from the 1960s, while simultaneously recalling the same apparent disdain for those from Eastern Europe that motivated Schmid to produce *Lichter*.

That Emily and Boehmer survive the longest on the quest does intimate the importance of social capital in such a situation, in that they forge an initially more

pragmatic, then later intimate, bond in contrast to the rest of the dysfunctional group. Tellingly perhaps, they are also the most tolerant of the indigenous people they encounter. Nevertheless, Boehmer is killed, as his violent past catches up with him – Arslan's apparently ironic reversal of the conclusion of *Stagecoach* – and Emily stubbornly decides to continue her quest alone; the fragility of such capital is thereby reinforced starkly. The film ends uncertainly with the lone mounted figure riding off into the distance, another thousand kilometres to go. As much as she appears to be the moral centre of the film at certain moments, and thereby represents the primary identification figure in the Western, even Emily ultimately disregards the locals' wisdom. By the same token however, she, like myriad refugees seeking a new life in Europe, clearly has nothing left to lose, driven by the desire to change the world for the better.

Similar suspicions to those directed at Emily confront Meinhard, the taciturn loner who joins the construction workers in *Western*. He too prefers his own company to that of his colleagues. Doubts surround his background – ostensibly he is a former legionnaire who has seen active service, although there are hints that this might be a myth he does little to dispel like the classic Western protagonist – and the foreman, Vincent, in particular dislikes him. When Meinhard tames a wild horse on one of his lone rambles in the sunbaked mountainous wilderness around the construction site, Vincent is openly envious. After the horse, tellingly called Tornado, is fatally injured in an accident when Vincent tries to ride it himself, the two men then become rivals for the affection of Viara, one of the women in the village. But the group of Germans as a whole spend their evenings drinking, smoking and sparring with each other in ways that reflect the enforced necessity of being together in Bulgaria for work, closed off from the village nearby, but without developing any genuine solidarity with each other either.

It is while riding that Meinhard finds his way into the remote village, the first of the Germans to do so, and where he subsequently, and understandably, prefers to spend his time after work. Rather than disparage the local population like his colleagues, he forges a genuine bond with some of the villagers, deepening the mistrust of his workmates, most especially Vincent. The horse reputedly belongs to one of the prominent villagers, Adrian, the de facto chief of the tribe whom he later befriends although neither speaks the other's language; they literally become blood brothers, like Old Shatterhand and Winnetou, although their bond is rather an exception proving a rule. For a man who does not readily seek conversation, the

language barrier is a blessing. Meinhard subsequently moonlights as a bodyguard for Adrian, some of whose associates in this remote region appear to be engaged in decidedly nefarious activities, but superficially at least, he is able to build a modicum of the social capital his colleagues lack. Nevertheless, far from home, this capital proves as fragile as that in *Gold*; first the horse is killed, then a villager who lost money to Meinhard in a poker game exacts his revenge by ambushing the drunken German at night. Despite the apparent warmth and sincerity of their relationship, Adrian's patronage is insufficient to protect Meinhard and *Western* ends as openly as *Gold*, with the protagonist's future path uncertain. Having spoken of buying a property in the village, it is unclear whether Meinhard will either be welcome, or able, so to do.

Just as the Oder in *Lichter* presents a perilous obstacle for the migrants, the representation of the remote landscapes in both *Gold* and *Western* accentuates the challenges, and dangers, facing the German migrants. Despite the seemingly idyllic settings in both cases – the wilds of British Columbia in *Gold* and the Rhodope Mountains, close to the border with Greece, in *Western*, which are frequently captured in long shot – these are locations so redolent of the classic Hollywood Western, be it the Texan desert wastes or Monument Valley, in which the landscape assumes literal, metaphorical and often mythical qualities in narratives predicated on the difficulties of eking out existence in these often contested, inhospitable and hostile spaces. In both films, danger lurks in these isolated landscapes, whether it be the wild terrain itself, which takes its fateful toll on horses in both films, or the hidden animal trap that Müller steps in, at the cost first of his foot, and then his life in *Gold*. In the absence of any genuine sense of solidarity within the group, combined with a disparaging attitude towards the locals – the Native Americans in particular are seen as primitive by the Germans – the characters in *Gold* repeatedly take the wrong option, or choose the wrong path literally, despite being given advice by those with local knowledge. As a consequence, the group is whittled down inexorably until only Emily remains. As Hermann notes, '[Arslan] emphasizes the ominous consequences that the dangerous and destructive journey has on prospectors and on the world around them' (2019: 80).

Although the workers in *Western* may not be prey to comparable perils, nature still presents them with a series of morale-sapping obstacles to overcome. Their initial arrival on site is hindered by fallen trees, and the river on the construction site itself presents a series of logistical challenges. Indeed, water is the most

precious commodity in the region, as evidenced by the way it needs to be shared between two communities but is now also required by the Germans. Rather than seeking some sort of mutual accommodation to solve the problem, it becomes a competition. In this remote region of Bulgaria, the Germans' arrogant self-perception as the dominant group is exposed, further alienating those whose help and cooperation they require. Their condescension towards the locals, echoing the prospectors' attitude to the Native Americans in *Gold*, is reinforced both by Vincent's disparaging comments about the village existing in a time warp, so backward, it seems, compared to Germany, and his crass jokes about reoccupying Bulgaria again after seventy years. The possibilities of intercultural dialogue evolving, and succeeding, in this locale seem as remote as in *Gold*.

The German migrants might all be seen as 'translocal subjectivities' to a degree, which, as Conradson and McKay posit, emerge 'through both geographical mobility and multiple forms of ongoing emplacement' (2007: 168). Superficially, the term seems to have positive connotations, characterized as it might be by 'the fidelity and commitment that most transnational migrants continue to feel towards family, friends and community in particular locations' (Conradson and McKay 2007: 168). However, the case study films each, in their way, expose how 'the maintenance of these affiliations may be emotionally and materially intensive' (Conradson and McKay 2007: 168), especially when the sense of emplacement is so clearly problematized in each instance. In truth, the migrants' affiliations with their families, friends or *Heimat* all seem fragile at best. Moreover, their social interactions, with each other and the indigenous population, and their engagement with the environment in general, are abrasive and result broadly in negative, even destructive, experiences, either by virtue of their inability to adapt to their surroundings, or their condescension and prejudices towards the host nation. As such then, the films evince the potentially damaging 'emotional and affective states that accompany mobility' (Conradson and McKay 2007: 169), which in all cases accentuate the lack of emplacement most of the characters feel. It is the films' 'sensuous engagement' (Landsberg 2003: 149) with the migrant experience, deploying the generic tropes of the Western to elucidate an out-of-placeness, which might prosthetically 'generat[e] empathy and articulat[e] an ethical relation to the other' (Landsberg 2003: 149). In their different ways, they draw the viewers into identifying with the characters, most especially the protagonists and their fates, ultimately because they are just like them; they are not 'Other' in the manner of migrant representations in the cosmopolitan cinema posited by Rovisco.

Although there is no obvious protagonist in *Lichter* with its seven narrative threads, Schmid's film interweaves, and juxtaposes, the fates of all characters in the cinematically conflated town Frankfurt/Słubice, carefully avoiding any crude representational dichotomies. Thereby, *Lichter,* more overtly than the other two films, reflects structurally how 'by addressing flows and circulations of ideas, symbols, knowledge', translocality 'offers a stimulating perspective from which to engage with subjects such as the impact of a globalizing world on non-migrants' (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013: 380), as well as the affective impact of mobility on the migrants, perhaps best evidenced with the Ingo/Milena/Antoni/Dimitri/Anna constellation.

In *Gold* and *Western*, the fact that neither protagonist reveals much about their past intimates a complete lack of any significant affiliation with home; they have left everything behind because there is nothing to leave behind. We learn merely that Emily left Bremen for Chicago, one of circa six million Germans to emigrate to the United States between 1830 and 1900, and has come to the Klondike to escape divorce and drudgery as a maid earning a dollar a day.[4] The strong, determined, but emotionally scarred woman who continues her quest alone at the end of the film is very different from the hopeful prospector who arrives by train at the start. Irrespective of the veracity of his presumed experience as a foreign legionnaire, the impression still pertains that Meinhard is running away from his past. In a rare, ephemeral demonstration of emotion, he betrays grief for the loss of his brother to Adrian, which appears to deepen their bond. Although he talks of settling in the village, when asked by Vincent why he is in Bulgaria, he indicates that his motives are as mercenary as his work colleagues', a fact reinforced by his stubborn refusal to reimburse the villager after the poker game.

Despite their primary focus on the protagonists, both films provide fleeting glimpses of other characters' stories to explain their presence so far from home and expose their equally fragile affiliations. Like Emily and Meinhard, they are all motivated by the hope of finding financial security. Some, such as Vincent, are driven by a deeper despair. The boorish foreman is overheard at one point on the telephone to his partner in Germany, confronting the disintegration of his relationship because of his enforced absence for work. It renders his flirtations with Viara, and his manner in general, as macho attempts to mask how demoralized and lonely he feels, and perhaps envious of Meinhard's silent stoicism. Rather than cast Vincent as the traditional Western villain to Meinhard's lone hero, Grisebach,

like Schmid, eschews the crude dichotomies of the genre and depicts the affective impact of migration on both men realistically and sympathetically.

Similarly, in *Gold*, Arslan grants each character the opportunity to reveal something of their life story. Like Emily, all are hopeful that finding gold will change their fortunes, although it is Joseph Rossmann who seems the most desperate figure, and the most deserving of empathy. His inability to cope mirrors that of Ingo in *Lichter*, a wretched figure with whom he has much in common. He is driven by a desire to provide for his family, a picture of whom he is poignantly shown gazing at. Like Emily he has hitherto failed to find what he was hoping for in America, but unlike the protagonist, he feels an additional weight of responsibility on his shoulders because of his family's dependence upon him. He appears the least robust emotionally and psychologically for the quest, and his mental health progressively deteriorates with each attritional twist of fate for the migrants. Following the death of Müller, with whom Rossmann was closest, the three remaining Germans discover a suicide hanging from a tree. His desperate suicide note reads: 'Bury me here where I failed and send this letter to my family. My beloved wife, my beautiful children. I didn't make it. Forgive me.' This clear-cut echo of Rossmann's own situation accelerates his mental disintegration, reflected with pathetic starkness in the way he strips naked and disappears, running into the lonely woods to an uncertain fate in the wilderness. The scene powerfully encapsulates both the desperation that inspires migration, and the debilitating, potentially destructive, impact it can have on individuals, such as those migrants who have risked their lives to cross the Mediterranean or to escape from conflict zones in the Middle East to reach Europe in the summer of 2015, and beyond.

That films of this kind might have been needed in Germany either side of the refugee crisis summer of 2015 was evidenced starkly by *Spiegel* journalist, Dialika Neufeld, in 2017, when she highlighted an alarming rise in racially motivated crimes targeting those from ethnic minority backgrounds:

> *1190 of these criminal acts related to incidents of racially motivated violence, grievous bodily harm, arson, and deprivation of liberty, which represented a rise of 300 per cent compared to 2010. In 2016 a third of Germans believed the country to be in danger of losing its national identity due to the rise in the immigrant population. 12 per cent were of the opinion that Germans were naturally superior to other nationalities, according to a study conducted by the University of Leipzig, which surveys political views across the country at regular*

intervals. That makes me nervous. It reminds me of how things used to be. (Neufeld 2017: 59)

The rise of the AfD in Germany after 2015, and its continued significance as a political force in the Eastern German regions in the 2021 election, underlines the extent to which hostility towards migrants, and any perceived as Other, remains a thorny issue in the country. It is a problem that the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have simply exacerbated. In a world still reeling from these events, there remains a need to reflect with humanity on the impact of migration, be it economic or political. As Ralf Neukirch notes in *Der Spiegel*, reflecting on the crisis at the Belarusian border:

Fences are only acceptable if they have gates. People in need must be allowed ways to reach Europe by legal means. One possibility would be the so-called resettlement of refugees from the country where they have sought protection into another in the EU. Because, in the first instance, only very few member states would participate in such a process, a country like Germany must lead the way. (2021: 6)

With their particular focus on what happens after migration at the local level, the films by Schmid, Arslan and Grisebach highlight the problems facing migrants in new spaces and places that are so challenging for those who lack agency, or the networks often associated with successful transnational mobility. The stories they tell recall those in the classical Hollywood Westerns about characters who venture out in search of a place to settle down. Where *Lichter, Gold* and *Western* come into their own as prosthetic Westerns is by creating stories that render the migrant Other as people just like us, which, of course, they are.

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Notes

1. All translations from the original German are the author's own.
2. It is interesting in this context to note Poland's formal demand in October 2022 for €1.3 trillion from Germany as reparations for World War II, a request which German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock firmly rejected on a visit to Warsaw: 'The question of reparations is . . . concluded from the German government's point of view' (Anon 2022).
3. One could cite *The Magnificent Seven* (Sturges, 1960) or *High Plains Drifter* (Eastwood, 1973) as two classic examples of this trope.
4. Arslan cites this figure in *The Making of Gold* (Von Boehm, 2013) on the DVD of the film.

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Melodrama, Realism and Internal Migration

Cinematic Representation of Internal Migration in Turkey (1964–1990)

Ali H. Kocatürk

As a traumatic social experience, internal migration[1] in the twentieth century shaped the social structure of Turkey to such an extent that its ramifications are still influential on the political, economic, judicial, and social issues in the country. Turkish filmmakers were relatively slow to respond to such a major subject matter, and hence, the first films exclusively on migration are seen in the mid-1960s. Filmmakers' interest in migrants grew as they started to perceive migrants with limited opportunities and little prospects as a growing social problem in the urban environment. This study aims to understand how internal migration and migrants have been perceived, contemplated, and presented by prominent filmmakers of Turkish cinema history between the 1960s and the 1990s, utilizing thirteen feature films focusing on migration and migrants as their chief subject matter. The last case for analysis is from 1990 because migration ceased to be a popular subject matter for filmmakers in the 1990s when the film industry almost came to a standstill in production and entered a state of transition towards 'the new Turkish cinema',[2] as a result of which internal migration became a side issue rather than the main subject matter.

However, before delving into the subject matter, a brief look at internal migration as a social movement in Turkey is necessary to grasp the main characteristics of the movement and the overall profile of people involved in it to draw the framework of the social trauma on which the films were constructed. Internal migration in Turkey started in the 1950s from rural areas to cities, and from small cities[3] to larger urban areas, and continued until the 2000s in an increasing trend. Rapid urbanization in Turkey has not been accompanied with industrialization to accommodate millions of migrants in the work force each year. Indeed, just before the eruption of waves of migrants, despite economic growth in

agriculture, industry dropped approximately two per cent to become 13.5 per cent between 1946 and 1953 (Varlı 2010: 12–16). Migration was mainly triggered by mechanization in agriculture in the 1950s leading to unemployment among agricultural workers, and by economic depression towards the end of the decade with a massive currency devaluation in 1957. In that period, the rural population (towns and villages), which amounted to around 78 per cent in 1945, started to drop to around 65 per cent as of 1960 with an ever-decreasing trend to 34 per cent in 1990 (TUIK 2010: 10). The earliest official figures on migration as of 1965 reveal that the social displacement has been in an overwhelmingly one directional fashion from the east to the west of the country, mainly to the major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, and then other industrialized cities in the west. The number of migrants between 1965 and 2000 amounts to a total of 21.1 million (Kocaman 2008: 17–18). Although the educational profile of migrants was slightly above the overall average of the country, even as of 1985,[4] 12.45 per cent of the migrants were illiterate, and 46.83 per cent had graduated from primary school. The number of migrants with a high school or equivalent degree and tertiary education amounted to 25.81 per cent (ibid.: 41). So, almost three-quarters of the migrants either could not read and write, or they only had the basic skills to read and write simple texts. Hence, they were not eligible for skilled labour that required formal training, which turned out to be a major drawback for the people in the race for employment in their destination, and a source for dramatic stories. As a result, big cities in the west where wealth accumulated became the target of rural people to start an adventure with unforeseen consequences.

While exploring the filmic representation of this dramatic movement, the study mainly utilizes a formalist approach, and does not claim to provide sociological, political, and/or economic insights, although it benefits from studies and data on the subject matter where relevant. Among the cases, while some films with repetitive narrative elements or limited scope and significance are covered briefly, films with more significance in terms of film history, narrative qualities, and film form are studied in more detail to be able to reach a concise survey of films on internal migration in Turkey. For practical reasons, the analysis of the films is limited to certain elements of form and content from a formalist approach that mainly focuses on, but is not limited to, themes and character formation in terms of narrative elements; and on cinematography, mise-en-scene and editing in terms of film form where necessary. The analysis of the selected films reveals that the films can be divided into two categories as didactic and descriptive films in

their approach to internal migration in Turkey; however, rather than providing an extensive coverage of the social phenomenon, they present a limited and repetitive scope which, in the majority of the cases, utilizes a melodramatic structure in terms of narrative elements, and a hybrid film language combining realistic style and classical narration in terms of film form.

Internal Migration in Turkish Cinema: Archetypes

Although the appearance of migrants in Turkish feature films dates to 1952 with a slapstick comedy[5] called *İki Kafadar Deliler Pansiyonunda* (Two Buddies in a Boarding House Full of Lunatics, 1952), by Atıf Yılmaz, it was not until the 1960s that internal migration became the main subject matter in films as a social problem. The 1960s witnessed heated debates about the future of Turkish cinema under a more democratic constitution of 1961[6] with a more contemporary approach to civil rights and political representation, enabling more room for freedom of expression and political action that also influenced artistic productions although the strict regulations and censorship for cinema remained the same. Turkish filmmakers became more involved in social problems including poverty, class conflict, inequality, migration and so on. Halit Refiğ, a director, writer, and producer, was among the proponents of the idea of 'national cinema' to focus on social problems in a realistic approach, as in Italian neorealism and American realism, using native sources without any collaboration with foreign sources in order not to compromise between local subject matters and production demands (Refiğ 2013: 26, 34, 41). By the same token, in 1964, Refiğ made *Gurbet Kuşları* (Birds of Exile), the first 'social realist' film focusing exclusively on internal migration as a 'social problem'.

Birds of Exile is significant both as the first film to problematize migration and as the first didactic film in terms of the narrative elements and their presentation. The film is basically about the unpleasant experiences of a large middle-class family of six with enough capital to invest in Istanbul to run an automobile workshop after they migrate from a smaller city in the southern region of the country, Kahramanmaraş. Quite a stylistic choice, the story is narrated in an episodic manner by multiple intradiegetic narrators, the members of the family except the mother who metaphorically has not moved to a new environment as she is always indoors and does not have a voice at all. Each member relates his/her

own perspective about how the family is 'defeated' in their ironic quest to 'conquer' the city. Eventually, with the exception of the youngest son who studies medicine at university, and the daughter who commits suicide, the family decides to return to their home city after many mistakes, deceptions and disappointments. Reportedly, one criticism about the film is that the director advocates anti-migration and anti-Western theories, and hence he 'looks for private reasons' in presenting the failure rather than larger concepts such as class relationships (Dönmez-Colin 2008: 59). The director's worldview aside, the film indeed poses class relationships in a very subtle way by accommodating a range of characters from different classes: an upper-class family with insights into and concerns about the country's current crisis articulated in a rather artificial manner; the traditional migrant family as a middle-class unit; and a migrant self-made man as the representative of the rising lower class with aspirations to rise in society, implying the possibilities of quick and easy social mobility. The idealist young son and the self-made man stand in stark contrast to each other. As a migrant, the young son becomes a student of medicine at university, falls in love with an open-minded urban student from the so-called 'decent' upper-class family, and achieves the mental transformation and adaptation in the urban space. The student functions as the mouthpiece vocalizing the premise of the narrative in a Brechtian tirade claiming that the problem with migrants is that they demand everything while offering nothing in return, and those who cannot contribute to the urban environment are not eligible to reside there. On the other hand, the penniless 'self-made man' called 'parasite' starts to build his fortune by utilizing every opportunity while the middle-class family falls apart. Eventually, he becomes the owner of a district full of squatter settlements and discloses his plans to become a rich contractor by selling squatters' houses, called *gecekondu*,[7] to his fellow countrymen.

The presence of the self-made man reveals how the urban space is perceived as a land of endless opportunities for easy social mobility in an unstable environment by those who have nothing to lose and a lot to gain. Indeed, squatting on public land and building illegal constructions not only to fulfil the basic needs but also to raise a fortune through real-estate transactions have been among the biggest problems in Turkey to date. Outnumbering the urban population, migrants gradually acquired a significant political presence as voters, enough to determine the fate of the elections as of the 1970s, and zoning amnesties granting property rights to migrants were issued by populist politicians especially during the 1980s for political gain before the elections (Tercan 2018: 26). From the narrative's

perspective, the presence of the 'parasite' foreshadows the core problems of the future about migration as a warning for the audience. The juxtaposition of the urban upper-class family as the ideal, the middle-class migrant family as the negative example, but the well-educated migrant son as the positive example, and the lower-class 'parasite' as the threat holds the main premise of the narrative: the inevitable social chaos unfolding on one's doorstep due to migration and migrants. Hence, the arguments of the narrative are presented through character formation and largely melodramatic events to elaborate the problems caused by conflicts between the traditional/rural and the modern/urban in terms of patriarchy, cultural conflict, alienation, adaptation, sexual frustration, femininity, morality and so on.

The second film, *Bitmeyen Yol* (The Endless Road, 1965), by Duygu Sağıroğlu, deals with migration from a different angle by focusing on the migrants at the bottom of the social ladder, the uneducated, poor, unskilled and cheap labour from the countryside. At first, the story is about a group of men migrating to Istanbul to have a decent life by entering the workforce at the expense of brutal exploitation of labour. The film epitomizes the gap between ideological struggles and the actual case in an ironic way: barely literate villagers come across leftist slogans for a fair world on the walls, targeting them, yet the message cannot be delivered for obvious reasons. Following this line of argument, the narrative makes use of themes such as employment, exploitation, class struggle, unions, cultural conflicts, alienation, and ideology. However, in the second half, the story quickly evolves into a melodramatic love triangle between one of the migrant men and two married but lonely women with children all from the same village. A chain of melodramatic events leads to desperation and a dramatic end for the migrant man and his beloved when, in a state of delirium, he kills one of the bosses who refuses to employ him. Achieving documentary quality, the film successfully depicts the miserable living conditions of poor migrants consumed by routine. Also, observations about unemployment, education system, traditional marriage, gender issues, sexual frustration, and the established system that does not take migration into consideration are implied. The focal point assumes the position of a relatively silent observer of social problems so that the audience can pass judgment. The narrative tries to create emotional bonds and sympathy to deliver the implied messages rather than setting out a discussion, unlike the previous film, and remains on more humanitarian ground excluding overt discussions.

These two films form the narrative basis of the later films on migration in terms of how they handle the subject matter with a didactic and descriptive stance

respectively. However, from a formalist perspective, neither of these films is realistic, for instance, in terms of Bazin's description of the representation of reality by avoiding aesthetic touches such as the 'classical cut', by using filmic tools such as depth of field to enable the audience to make connections between the setting, the action in progress and the actors to reach 'unity of image in space and time', and by long takes to deliver 'the continuum of reality' (Bazin 1967: 34–37). On the contrary, the films employ a range of formal devices of classical narration to stir emotions and guide the viewers' perception of the characters and events rather than building a relatively neutral distance to encourage viewers' own interpretations of the narrative.

With regard to Italian neorealism, the on-location shooting and the natural light in certain scenes (Shiel 2006: 1–2, 12), especially in the scenes in squatter settlements in *The Endless Road*, create an almost documentary quality. However, because classical narration alternates with neorealism, a hybrid approach is seen in these films which undermines the realism effect and highlights 'fictionality'. Therefore, the film that most deserves to be called 'realistic' in form and content is *Umut* (Hope 1970), by Yılmaz Güney. The film has been regarded as the best example of Italian neorealism in Turkish cinema, the archetype of 'new Turkish cinema' that reaches to Nuri Bilge Ceylan (Daldal 2013: 185), or even the pinnacle of realism in Turkish cinema (Özön 1985: 386). Indeed, except for the fact that the actors who are playing 'illiterate rural characters' are dubbed with 'a decent urban accent', thereby undermining the realism effect, the film matches Bazin's understanding of realism, and follows neorealist conventions by means of on-location shootings, using ordinary people as actors, long takes and long shots. Also, long scenes and sequences without dialogue, and the absence of traditional appealing leading actors prevent identification with the characters, making the viewer distant observers. The film presents a slice of the life of a migrant cab driver whose old cab is pulled by his lean horses in Adana, a relatively wealthy agricultural province. Relying on the 'divine' instinct of a self-proclaimed hodja, the man loses his sanity in a desperate attempt to locate buried treasure to solve his problems caused by poverty. Despite the revisions demanded by the censorship board, the film was eventually censored for creating a sharp contrast between the rich and the poor, and a misleading impression about and suspicion towards security forces (Ataman 2013: appendix 92). The film successfully touches on class struggle, illiteracy, unfair treatment of public institutions, religious superstition, wavering morality, absolute commitment to rigid traditional

worldview, and poverty which is largely ignored by most of society and the political authorities.

These three films can be seen as the archetypal examples for later films on migration in form and content by providing a basis for migration films until the 1990s in Turkey and enabling a rough categorization of films as 'didactic' or 'descriptive' based on their approach to the subject matter. The 'didactic approach' problematizes migration as a social issue from a distance in a rather intellectual manner in order to diagnose the problems and offer explicit opinions, suggestions, criticism or solutions in a rather condescending and commanding manner by explicitly highlighting the victims and culprits. The didactic films are *Birds of Exile,* the trilogy (*The Bride, The Wedding, The Blood Money*), *The City with Golden Land and Rock,* and *Bilo the Banker.* Secondly, 'descriptive films' observe the problems and people, and inform the audience about migration and migrants in a rather sympathetic manner, presenting migrants as the victims of powers beyond their control, as seen in *The Endless Road, Hope, The Horse, A Handful of Heaven, The Broke Landlord, Mr Muhsin,* and *A Little Cloud.* Compared to the didactic films, rather than imposing judgments or conclusions directly, these films present the events and characters in a 'relatively neutral' way so that the viewers arrive at their own conclusion. As for the film form, with the exception of *Hope,* which reproduces neorealism, most of the films in both groups utilize a hybrid approach to various degrees through which mise-en-scene produces the realism effect, but cinematography and editing interrupt the filmic experience of the audience to guide them as much as possible.

Didactic Films

The bulk of the didactic films accumulates in the 1970s, and disappears in the 1980s, which is most probably related to the *zeitgeist* of the era. Despite the military memorandum forcing the government to resign for a stricter order in 1971, the relative freedom in the 1960s carried over to the 1970s in the form of social and political demands in a politically intense urban environment with violent conflicts between the polarized left and right wings, and the struggle for civil rights through unionist movements.[8] Therefore, political themes are seen more often in the films of the period. Some of the major themes are cultural conflict between urban and rural culture, sexual repression and frustration, femininity, patriarchy, adaptation,

integration, unemployment, ideology, capitalism, class conflict, exploitation, lack of education, impotent social institutions, corruption, and the human condition. Despite the presence of overt ideology, melodrama continues to have weight in these films, undercutting the realism effect. Nevertheless, the distinguishing quality of these films is that they always impose a certain point of view in the depiction of problems, solutions, lack of solutions, and lessons to be learned.

After *Birds of Exile*, a trilogy by Lütfi Akad, an acclaimed, versatile and prolific director, is dedicated to the problem of migration with a critical look. The trilogy consists of *Gelin* (The Bride, 1973), *Düğün* (The Wedding, 1974), and *Diyet* (The Blood Money,[9] 1974) and presents stories of different migrants from different parts of the country migrating to Istanbul, depicting the transition from 'mechanical solidarity' to 'organic solidarity' in a fairly didactic fashion. In the first two films, the household preserves all the rural values, beliefs and traditional rules. The whole family is a single unit working like a machine to employ capitalist means of profit on a small scale, yet, at the expense of humanity, by allegorically sacrificing one of 'them'. In all three films, the narratives are structured to reflect the point of view of the main female character as the mouthpiece of the filmmaker. A study on the trilogy claims that the films pose binary oppositions such as traditional–modern or Islam–the West, and whereas the male characters represent the traditional and Islam, the main female characters represent the opposition befitting the aspirations of the Kemalist discourse on modern Turkish female citizens (Çöloğlu 2009: 148, 152). However, the main female characters in each film take traditional religious teachings as the guidance to the right path, and they create moments of epiphany. Specific Islamic parables are used as evidence to add more credibility to the moral lessons, to underline the digression from the moral code by the males as savage capitalists, and to establish a rapport between the main characters and the target audience by using 'their' language rather than the language of the urban elite. Hence, the main female characters are in constant conflict with their environment, underscoring that the main negotiation is indeed between traditional religious teachings and modernism, implying that they are compatible with each other, and contrary to the popular assumption, that migrants do not need to become 'western' to become 'modern' urban citizens. Indeed, the director himself, while mentioning the first film in his memoirs, regards the current migration movement as a movement that does not fit the romantic descriptions of unfortunate sorrowful accounts of migrants. His narratives do not present pitiful people, but daring and fearless people who do not care to change and adapt to the new

environment (Akad 2004: 544). While writing about the second film, he further elaborates that when migrants fail to succeed as unskilled, unemployed and penniless people, they would metaphorically tend towards cannibalism (ibid.: 549–50). Hence, the common denominator for the trilogy is sacrifice or price manifested by the characters either by sacrificing one of their own or themselves, providing moral lessons for the viewer.

In *The Bride*,[10] the main conflict around sacrifice is narrated through an allegory with reference to the story of Abraham and Samuel (İbrahim and İsmail in Turkish register) about the origins of the festival of the sacrifice in Islam as told by the head of the family to the son of the bride. Rather than providing money for the treatment of the bride's terminally ill son, the male members sacrifice him to the family business. This sacrifice is an awakening for the woman, and she leaves the house and the communal order to become a factory worker, which is the equivalent of prostitution for the traditional family whereas it is a step towards individualization and modernization for the narrative. In *The Wedding*, the religious rhetoric continues with the story of Joseph (Yusuf in Turkish register), again as an example of sacrifice and betrayal. First, the youngest member of the family is sacrificed when he is manipulated to take the blame for stabbing another street vendor to protect one of the adults. Then, for business purposes, two young sisters are literally sold to men against their will to exploit the tradition of bride money by the males, who take the money to utilize as capital: hence, metaphorical cannibalism. Once again, the main female character, the older sister, plays the part of the saviour, and rescues her sisters during the wedding ceremony despite being stabbed by the groom. In addition to savage capitalism internalized by the migrant entrepreneurs, the narrative also criticizes the hypocritical, contradictory and dichotomic worldview they pursue.

The last film of the trilogy, *The Blood Money*, extends the themes to migration, class struggle, unions, and class consciousness. The story develops around a work accident which results from the deliberate negligence of the management to fix a faulty machine in a factory, which is metaphorically associated with faulty modernization, urbanization, and labour. The new migrant worker in charge of the machine and the main female character, a working-class single mom, fall in love. However, they disagree about the local trade union and the unionist activities struggling to acquire the right for collective bargaining. Rather than referring to leftist terminology or literature, she justifies her decision to join the union with reference to the prophet's religious teachings that advise solidarity, unity and

collective action. Eventually, the anti-unionist husband has the same accident, and his arm is torn off. The wife throws the arm at the boss as the price for the emancipation of a modern slave. The film ends with her tirade blaming all parties involved without specifically pointing fingers at a particular group and gives a Brechtian look at the camera to include the audience as well as creating an explicit sense of didacticism. The film tries to reach the migrant working-class people to raise awareness, underline their social position, and convince them to participate in class struggle. Hence, the trilogy clearly states the right and wrong, the morally acceptable and unacceptable, and even explicitly delivers the message by means of tirades by the main female characters to reconcile the traditional and the modern for the migrants, to persuade them to change their perspective in the urban space without giving up the core values that have guided them for decades. To that end, Islamic teachings are strategically used to reveal, by one of the migrants, that the deeds of culpable migrants are against the Islamic creed.

Towards the end of the 1970s, the initial optimism around raising awareness among the migrants and offering solutions to ameliorate the complications of rapid urbanization is replaced with growing pessimism and sarcastic criticism rather than guidance. One example is a satirical and didactic film called *Taşı Toprağı Altın Şehir* (The City with Golden Land and Rock, 1979), by Orhan Aksoy. The film depicts the disintegration of a migrant family after migrating to the city to make money to buy a tractor and return to their village. However, amid economic depression and social frustration in a turbulent period just before another military coup d'état, they immediately meet the chaotic dark side of the city with its nepotism, corruption, insecurity, exploitation, inflation,[11] juvenile delinquency, and organized crime in a series of melodramatic events. 'The family as the smallest unit' disintegrates, and 'individual' action gains priority over group action because of the growing personal interests and ambitions of the migrants as they explore the opportunities in the city. Eventually, the head of the family leaves the city alone, uttering a tirade of frustration after losing everything and all other family members for various reasons including death, adultery, and imprisonment: an extremely pessimistic picture about the filmic world of migrants when compared with the initial cases.

In a similar fashion, the bitter criticism and pessimism continues in a popular dramatic comedy film called *Banker Bilo* (*Bilo* the Banker, 1980), by the master of comedy in Turkey, Ertem Eğilmez, which foreshadows the new Turkey[12] from the migrants' perspective. The film depicts the upcoming banking crisis in an unstable

social, political and economic environment through the story of a naïve rural migrant who falls prey to a confidence man in the guise of a human trafficker. After a series of hardships and tricks, the naïve migrant learns by bitter experience to become ruthless, and has his revenge on the confidence man by replacing him in his company using similar tricks. The didactic tirade uttered by the main character at the end is a concise description of the new *zeitgeist*. The virtuous human being in him is killed by 'them', and what they now see is the reincarnation of an immoral man. The grim implication in the previous films becomes a motif that migrants are now convinced that survival skills should include normalization of immorality, corruption, and individualism at all costs, and that success is mainly measured by money and the power it brings.

As migration grows to be a more chaotic problem, discussions, solutions, and optimistic observations cease to exist in the narratives, and are replaced by grim portrayals of migrants. A vicious cycle is formed: as the system ignores the massive social mobility, migrants become significant contributors to the problems as, in the eye of the filmmakers, they make obvious mistakes, act selfishly, become opportunists, disrupt the social order, even sacrifice or deceive their own family members, and usually face an unpleasant ending. Therefore, for the viewer, the emotional bond is established with only some of the migrants who are victimized by the established system, or even by their own people. *The City with Golden Land and Rock* marks a turning point due to the sharpness of criticism and pessimism. Towards the 1980s, the filmmakers seem to lose hope for a positive change and are disappointed in the migrants as well as the institutions and the rest of society. According to these didactic films, hope is conditional, and largely related to other members of society. Failing to acknowledge the need for mutualism causes the adaptive and assertive individuals, groups and communities disregarding ethics and even laws to have the upper hand and be more likely to climb up the social ladder than the law-abiding people, which in return poisons society.

Descriptive Films

Sharing the themes seen in the didactic films, the descriptive films underscore human suffering more than the social implications of migration. Although the social, economic, and political elements are not excluded or ignored in the narratives, migration is mainly handled in terms of its effects on the individual. The

descriptive films target the audience to establish a bond by relating the bitter experiences of migrants usually leading to a sense of defeat in a rather existential fashion by situating migrants as victims of powers larger than themselves. The main characters lose their sanity, die or go through a period of denial as seen in *The Endless Road*, *Hope*, *The Horse*, *Mr Muhsin*, and *A Little Cloud*; and only in *A Handful of Heaven* and *The Broke Landlord* do they face a bittersweet ending with a little bit of hope for the future, although they are still defeated and at the bottom having lost all they have struggled for. Perhaps it is not coincidental that most of the descriptive films accumulate in the 1980s, under the heavy shadow of the military coup in 1980, a period of major negative changes in all departments of life in parallel with increasing authoritarianism.

After *The Endless Road* and *Hope*, the theme of the doomed individual reappears in *At* (The Horse, 1981), by Ali Özgentürk. The film presents the bitter story of a migrant father in Istanbul who tries to provide for his son so that he can have a proper education, but he cannot cope with the demands of the era and falls prey to economic circumstances. Being part of the informal economy, the father faces defeat, and starts to suffer from hallucinations. He sees himself in a coffin, implying that his son will be saved upon his self-sacrificial death, and will receive an education as an orphan under the state's supervision. In the end, the prophecy fulfils itself, and he is accidentally killed in a fight with another fellow migrant after stealing the man's cart. Hence, the film involves sharp criticism from a humanitarian perspective in relation to all parties and factors involved, including the political authority, bureaucracy, widespread corruption, migrants and the loss of humanity. From this perspective, migrants are still outside the society on their own; they are either the predators or the prey, and the meek and mild-mannered ones are doomed to destruction by the very society and institutions that are supposed to provide aid. While reminiscent of *Hope* in the scenes portraying the harsh reality, when the psychological deterioration of the character becomes the focus, a more stylized film form, close to theatrical drama, is seen, resulting in a hybrid style breaking away from the realism effect. Similar to *The Endless Road*, the narrative depicts the story of uneducated, unnoticed, 'failed' people in society. However, a counter example to *The Horse*, about the challenges of survival of migrants with a similar profile, is *Bir Avuç Cennet* (A Handful of Heaven, 1985), by Muammer Özer. The film focuses on a nuclear family of four that arrives in Istanbul, and desperately takes shelter in an abandoned bus.[13] The family transforms the bus into a pleasant home with a garden and plants around it.

However, the family experiences a series of problems with the officials due to complaints from the city people situated across the deserted bus. Eventually, the bus is removed by the officials by force, and the perseverant family becomes homeless. However, they decide to stay and struggle for existence in the city and set up a tent at the same spot as their new home rather than give up. Although the story reflects only the migrants' perspective, for the first time, it clearly mentions the migrant-urban dweller tension, and how uncomfortable some urban dwellers feel about migrants squatting near their modern buildings. The film ends on a positive note; however, the future of the family remains open-ended for the audience.

So far, the films on migration have had very little to say about the conditions in the migrants' hometowns and the reasons why people leave their homes. One of the films that maintains the equilibrium between the city and the country is *Züğürt Ağa* (The Broke Landlord, 1985), by Nesli Çölgeçen, a narrative that traces the social transformation from the perspective of a landlord of a rural region in *Şanlıurfa*, who is indeed idealized as a conscientious generous but shallow-minded person. A comparative study aptly reveals the similarities between Don Quixote and the obsolete feudal landlord in terms of character formation as an 'anti-hero hero' who is unaware of the end of an era and the beginning of a new one until it is too late (Yumul 2018). As a remnant of regional feudalism, the landlord falls victim to the social changes related to urbanization after he moves to the city. The first half presents the adverse conditions in a village, which belongs to the landlord, together with its inhabitants, hinting at the faulty mechanisms in the countryside and mentioning the role of impoverished land, drought, inefficient agricultural methods, mutual distrust, religious moral decay, and local political deals. The second part is devoted to the urban experience, leading to a fall from power when the landlord gradually loses all his money and people around him, including his wife and children, due to his inability to realize and adapt to the new culture. In the end, the landlord is forced to accept the new status quo, the end of an era, and sells his remaining asset, the riding boots – a metaphor for feudal power – to become a street vendor, which is, nevertheless, a rather bittersweet ending. On the other hand, the former subjects of the landlord adapt to the new conditions more successfully and explore the opportunities of the urban space as self-made men on equal terms with the landlord. Again, the narration is too idealized, but is functional in underlining, through caricaturized characters, the individualism which is on the rise.

Almost the mirror image of *The Broke Landlord,* and the last case from the 1980s, is *Muhsin Bey* (Mr Muhsin, 1987), by Yavuz Turgul, which focuses on the cultural conflict and transformation mainly from the urban perspective. Mr Muhsin is a gentlemanly, sensitive, naïve, old-school but broke music producer and organizer. He is approached by a talented young migrant who follows the *arabesk* music hype to Istanbul to become one of those rich and famous *arabesk* singers. The narrative sets these characters as opposite poles to each other, to discuss the convergence of diverse cultures in the midst of the cultural transformation in the city. The migrant lacks finesse, manners, perseverance, and artistic background, and thus represents the rising *arabesk* culture. The old man adores Turkish classical music and abhors *arabesk* songs, and accepts the young talent for his debut album on the condition that *arabesk* music is off the table, and that the latter will only sing folk music. In the end, the producer swindles people's money to afford the cost of the debut album, turns himself in, serves his sentence in prison, and finds the young talent only to witness that he has become an *arabesk* singer in a third-rate place, and has become lovers with the old man's beloved. He finds peace in regressing to the 'good old days' in his dreams while the cultural transformation symbolized by the *arabesk* culture is in full throttle. The narrative is constructed around the term *arabesk* which is mainly used to describe a hybrid music genre popular among the rural migrants in Turkey from the 1960s onwards. However, both the musical production and the cultural manifestations and associations of *arabesk* soon stirred discontent in the urban society to various degrees and became a pejorative term to define a specific group of people listening to such songs, which depicted intense pain, suffering, love, divine mercy and justice with a musical structure mixing Arabic melodies and local musical heritage. Indeed, *arabesk* music quickly became a cultural element, an expression of ambiguity stemming from displacement, a lack of sense of belonging and identity. In the 1980s, *arabesk* culture became more acknowledged by the political leaders as the migrants, who were also voters, outnumbered the urban dwellers (Özbek 2000). Hence, the narrative presents the perspective of an urban character who opposes everything that *arabesk* stands for, especially the vulgarity dominating society in all departments to replace 'the good old days' for the urban dwellers. Indeed, the narrative ends on a pessimistic note with failure, defeat and disappointment for all parties involved regardless of their background, ambitions, motivation, and gender, and the audience is given enough space to interpret the implications themselves, unlike with the didactic films.

Finally, a retrospective film, *Bir Küçük Bulut* (A Little Cloud, 1990), by Faruk Turgut, marks the end of an era with the dramatic story of a family migrating to Istanbul. The intradiegetic narrator is an adult relating what he experienced as a little boy during a turbulent period after migrating to the city. Like *The Horse*, the story of a father and a son is the focus, and again, the father struggles to provide his son with a brighter future and educational opportunities. However, he ends up imprisoned for groundless ideological reasons, and is eventually killed by one of his relatives in a brawl. The film is another example of the existential perspective on the insignificance of human lives in a ruthless system due to rapid urbanization. The overall social, political, economic problems produce such an unstable environment that false arrest or death of an individual is a mundane event due to the faulty system the foundations of which have been weakened over the period of transition driven by migration. The appearance of the adult narrator at the end, as a noticeably well-off and decent urban individual who managed to survive the hardships, signals the completion of the first phase of the traumatic internal migration movement after all the sorrow and drama summarized in the previous narratives, and the beginning of a new phase, the integration and negotiation process of migrants in the cities to create a new hybrid urban culture.

The descriptive films focus more on the individuals and the nuclear family, and are without an overt didactic approach. The presentation of diverse problems and the criticism of the malfunctioning system and deteriorating society are used as the context for the stories, but the context itself is not developed further to explicitly create the discussion of a social problem. The approach changes to a more impartial but emotive stance that aims to present open-ended cases for the audience to interpret. With the exception of *Hope*, and partly *The Horse*, which rely on neorealism, the use of classical narration enables the audience to establish emotional bonds with individual characters more easily than is the case with realistic approaches, at the expense of undercutting the realism effect. Hence, melodramatic modality is seen with a series of unfortunate events dragging the characters towards unhappy or pessimistic endings, or ambiguous endings that are partially consoling for the audience although the characters are indeed in a worse position than they were in previously. Eventually, the descriptive films tend to focus on negative and pessimistic stories about migration and migrants.

Repetition, Limitation and the Lack

The study of these examples reveals a trend in the ways in which films on migration approach their subject matter. After the archetypal films, which seem to be experimenting with narrative scope and film language in handling social problems in cinema, the examples allow a rough categorization as didactic and descriptive films in a surprisingly chronological manner, which is related to the *zeitgeist*, the conditions that are subject to change due to major political, economic, and social factors in time and space. The films share basic narrative and stylistic elements stemming from the powerful archetypal films on migration but with different perspectives and diverse styles. In both types of films, a narrative pattern can be observed: first, the conflict is set between the old traditional rural order and the new modern urban order, and then between the desires of the migrants and their inability to fulfil them because of a range of internal and/or external factors including the inadequate established system that is unable to produce solutions for problems about urbanization.

In parallel with the social changes, the filmic approach of the narratives changes as well: the victims and the oppressed of the 1960s transform into victimizers and oppressors in the 1980s, turning the initial picture upside down. Most of the films focus on the lives of stereotypical migrant profiles with stories usually composed of unfortunate events, death, sorrow, suffering and so on, to produce an excessive emotional response (for a discussion of similar themes and stylistic approaches in the Indian context, see Raj and Sreekumar in this volume). This melodramatic excess is translated into imagined spaces and agents, which undermines realism and leads to decontextualization, especially in the descriptive films. The films usually employ a hybrid film form composed of classical narration in terms of cinematography and editing, and neorealism in terms of mise-en-scene, particularly in setting, costume, and visual details. Except in *Hope* and *The Horse*, the style functions mainly to guide the audience throughout the film to signal for certain emotional reactions to be produced.

Birds of Exile and the subsequent didactic films imagine migration as an intellectual question that refers mainly to the disrupted order caused by migration which victimizes the migrants in return. These films propagate the idea that migration can easily become a source of disappointment, deprivation, regret and frustration for all parties involved, and that migrants should go through a period of adaptation and change and should not expect too much while offering too little.

The initial didactic films try to identify the problem in order to offer insights and solutions using the characters as the filmmaker's mouthpiece in a somewhat constructive but one-sided and condescending manner. The later films opt for harsh criticism and even satire to underline the severity of the problems, and some of the migrants' share in them. Hence, the idealism intended to raise awareness and provide insight in *Birds of Exile* and the trilogy is gradually replaced with pessimism and dark humour in *The City with Golden Land and Rock,* and *Bilo the Banker.* In these two films, the characters become wiser, but to no avail as they lose too much, including people they care about, their hopes and dreams.

On the other hand, *The Endless Road* and the subsequent descriptive films assume a 'relatively neutral' stance to focus on migrants as individuals with tough psychological experiences in an unstable society experiencing ongoing moral decay. These films are seen frequently after the 1980s during one of the most oppressive periods of the country, in a post-coup d'état environment. Without explicit didacticism, migrants are presented as victims of the conditions they encounter and of society in general, enabling viewers' identification with the characters more than is the case with the didactic films. The characters end up in a worse position than they were in initially, and even if they are somewhat content in the end, the ambiguity of the endings prevent the implication of a truly happy ending.

However, with the exception of Güney and to some extent Akad, filmmakers cover a tiny portion of a massive social phenomenon by categorically reproducing a similar discourse that does not include the major local and national political, economic, ideological, and social events of the eras they belong to, nor their socio-psychological implications, probably relying on the viewers' background knowledge and ability to fill in the blanks. Apart from citing financial reasons, the films do not even explore the reasons why people desert their homes, bear the otherwise unbearable conditions in urban areas, and refuse to return even when they are without food, shelter and money. Similarly, the reasons why 'the east' is considered uninhabitable by millions of people remain almost nebulous as the films do not provide a concise political, economic, or social background for the audience, except in *The Broke Landlord* to some extent. In a similar fashion, with the exception of *Mr Muhsin*, the urban side of the subject matter is not elaborated at all, as if urban people did not exist side by side with migrants. When they are visible, for instance, they are sketched as stereotypical characters in *The City with Golden Land and Rock,* and as ghostly functional beings in *A Little Cloud* merely to trigger

dramatic conflicts. Therefore, the result is usually a repetitive narrative design, and the narratives fail to explore the diverse cases of migration as a social problem. With the exception of the trilogy by Akad, the experiences of the migrants follow a similar path: migrants are either simply poor to varying degrees, as in *The Endless Road, Hope, Bilo the Banker*,[14] *The Horse, A Handful of Heaven, Mr Muhsin*, and *A Little Cloud*, or they end up becoming poor after a steady fall, as in *Birds of Exile, The City with Golden Land and Rock*, and *The Broke Landlord*. The lack of innovation in narrative construction and style signifies the limited response of the filmmakers to the social trauma. The reasons for this might vary, from commercial pressure from the producers and lack of freedom in the Turkish film industry of the era, to censorship boards and political oppression, or any other reason and their combination thereof.

Although there are many factors at play, censorship and financial restrictions need to be touched upon briefly to elaborate on the relationship between the environment and stylistic and narrative limitations, and the major reasons for the arrested development of the film industry, which eventually encompassed films on migration as well. To begin with, from the Ottoman era until 1986,[15] all regulations concerning the film industry had been aimed at institutionalized censorship executed by the members of a variety of formal institutions, such as the Ministry of the Interior, the General Directorate of Police, the General Staff, the Directorate of Press and Tourism, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Culture (Çiftçi 2001: 22–25). Due to the nature of the censorship boards, films were essentially subject to political control from a certain ideological perspective putting them under pressure about diverse topics including political discourse and representation of social events that the political authority might not approve. For instance, two of the films analysed in this study, *The Endless Road* (1965) and *Hope* (1970), are among the very first examples of their kind, and they were immediately targeted by the censorship board, and the screening of both films was banned in Turkey and abroad on the debatable grounds that the films were insulting certain social values, misrepresenting different strata of society, and so on. To avoid such restrictions, which were based on highly ambiguous concepts open to interpretation, producers and directors tried to take advantage of loose and sloppy practice of the boards by submitting 'decent' copies of scripts and trimmed versions of their films which were not the same as the final copies of the scripts and films (Ataman 2013: 115, 121, 122, 135). However, no matter how creative producers, directors, and writers were in their attempts to escape the authorities,

the mere presence of censorship boards – with the authority to reject a film project partly or entirely before and/or after the production stages – has created a crippling effect on freedom of expression. Şeref Gür, a producer whose films shared a similar fate, underlines the fact that the worst part of censorship boards is self-censorship, which gradually leads creative people to internalize the hovering threat to the extent that they become their own police (*Remix, Remake, Rip-off*, 2014). Hence, filmmakers would revise their works as if they were a member of the censorship board in order to stay away from trouble, financial loss, or imprisonment; this might also account for 'the lack', the unexplored stories from all sides in films on migration.

Another factor is the structural issues of the film industry in Turkey, which is characterized by, figuratively speaking, never ending austerity measures due to chronic high inflation and currency crises. All camera equipment, film stock, post-production devices were imported; and therefore, economic fluctuations and foreign currency rates, and, especially during the 1970s, embargoes for political and financial reasons all had to be considered in film budgets. On top of that, the industry in the 1950s was built to prioritize profit over the wellbeing and healthy growth of the industry in the long term. The industry was fuelled and controlled by distributors, regional operators, and cinema owners who had a say in the number of films made per season, the genre, cast, and content of the films to be produced, and they became the main financial sources for filmmaking due to lack of bank loans and subsidies. Eventually, the golden years of Turkish cinema, which flourished in the 1960s (with an increase in the number of productions per year from 80 films to around 300 films), came to a halt in the late 1970s (Erkılıç 2003: 93–96; Kalemci and Özen 2011: 85–90). One of the biggest producers of the period diagnosed the financial problems of the industry as a lack of capital and wrong economic policies by the governments. He claimed that the production companies overextended themselves by making more films than they were capable of, by raising only around 25 per cent of the money required at the start and collecting the rest from the aforementioned sources. As a result, a large sum of box-office earnings flowed to people outside the industry, which led to a shrinking industry in the long run. However, he also confessed how he refrained from purchasing modern equipment for post-production due to heavy customs tariffs, which was not sensible from a business perspective as the return on investment would have taken a long time; and therefore, the company continued to use obsolete equipment for over thirty years (Dorsay, Coş, and Ayça 1973: 25, 32). The

ramifications of the worsening financial conditions were felt in the production stage in the form of tight budgets, limited shooting days, archaic equipment, and limited film stock. For instance, Akad, whose last feature length film was *The Blood Money*, recollected the constant downturn in working conditions in terms of the length of film he was allowed to use in his career. As was customary in the past, the amount of film consumed during the production stage was measured by metres; at the beginning of his career as a director he was able to use around 10,000 metres of negative film, but this amount steadily decreased to around 6,000 metres as the industry standard, and then to 4,000 metres in dire circumstances (2004: 38). Considering that a 35 mm film reel is approximately 305 metres long, amounting to 11 minutes for sound film, the directors could shoot roughly 215 minutes of footage at best when they use 6,000 metres of film. This means that they could hardly have the opportunity for retakes and extra shots for details and experimentation. Further taking into account the busy schedule amounting to twenty to thirty shooting days, usually without a proper shooting schedule and shooting script (Özön 2013: 236–37), it would not be an overstatement to deduce that quality is compromised for faster filmmaking relying on formulas which undermine creativity and novelty in film style, which might at least partly explain the presence of recurrent and similar stylistic patterns to combine classical narration with neorealism in the majority of the films.

Hence, from a formalist perspective, the films analysed in this study display certain narrative and stylistic patterns in the ways in which they handle the subject matter of internal migration, enabling a categorization as didactic and descriptive films with substantial differences in how they perceive and present their subject matter. However, overall, these films project only a small part of a larger picture, and the film industry fails to provide a diverse and thorough portrayal of the ongoing problems related to internal migration in the given period in Turkey. Placing these films in a historical context reveals that the limited repertoire in form and content can be related to the economic and political conditions in the form of financial restraints and censorship. Further and more detailed studies on what these films have ignored, and the influence of cultural, political, and economic factors that explicitly or implicitly steer filmmakers in terms of film form and content, might prove to be essential to gain new insights about the theme of migration in Turkish cinema in particular, and filmmaking in general.

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Notes

1. The term 'migration' in this study broadly refers to the basic definition of social migration as 'any instance of geographical movement of individuals and groups relative to one another, or any instance of the geographical movement of a group, which has consequences for group structure' (Startup 1971: 177).
2. The early 1990s are usually considered to be the beginning of a new era in Turkish cinema called 'the new cinema', which refers to the detachment in filmmaking from the old tradition to restructure the industry almost from scratch after the fall of the old production companies, compromised film quality, and a significant fall in the number of spectators (Atam 2009: 206). Eventually, a new generation of directors, together with some of the younger members of the older generation, started making films with better cinematographic quality, state-of-the art equipment, soundtrack, special effects, and editing to be able to attract the audience who avoided Turkish films in a market under the dominance of foreign films, especially Hollywood films, which raised the expectations of the audience. This new generation had bigger budgets and benefitted from the ongoing financial expansion in the 1990s in media industries (Suner 2010: 12–14). On top of that, after Turkey became a member state of *Eurimages* in 1990, and thanks to the state subsidies to support cinema, the directors had better prospects of securing financial resources themselves in the absence of production companies of the previous era (Teksoy 2005: 938–39; Atam 2009: 206). Eventually, the new generation of directors started to make commercially successful films that stimulated the spectators' interest in domestic films and regained the lost prestige.
3. Until 1982, settlements with more than 10,000 inhabitants were classified as urban areas (Öztürk et al. 2018: 514; UKKS 2014).
4. The rates are expected to be lower between the 1950s and the 1970s.
5. In this study, slapstick comedies are excluded, but dramatic comedies are included.
6. In 1960, a military coup d'état, which probably paved the way for future military interventions, took place producing a surprisingly democratic constitution the following year.
7. *Gecekondu* literally means 'landed at night', referring to the quick and illegal construction of houses usually on public land. The number of *gecekondu* settlements in 1955 was 50,000 accommodating 250,000 people, and that figure rose to 1.75 million units accommodating 8.75 million people as of 1990 (Keleş 2018: 540). It is estimated that squatters' houses accommodated approximately at least 50 per cent of the population in three major cities in Turkey in the 1990s (Taş and Lightfoot 2007: 267).
8. As of 1975, trade unions represented approximately 3.3 million members, a dramatically high number when compared to 295,000 members as of 1963 (Buyukuslu 1994: 59).

9. Not a proper translation, but a popular one. The title refers to a torn arm thrown at the management by the main character as the 'price' or 'compensation'. Therefore, 'the price' would make more sense.
10. The main character is called 'the bride' to underscore her position in a traditional patriarchal family: she is an outsider in the eye of her husband's family, and she is excluded from decision making processes.
11. According to the official reports, the inflation rate in 1978 was 52.6, and it increased to 63.9 in 1979 (TCMB 1980: 92).
12. Here, 'the new Turkey' refers to the paradigm shift triggered by a new liberalization attempt driven by Turgut Özal in the 1980s. He was the deputy prime minister in charge of economic affairs in the military government after the military coup d'état in September 1980, and then the prime minister after winning the first free elections in 1983 while the existing political parties and their leaders were banned (Başçı 2017: 74).
13. The imprint on the deserted bus reads 'Prisons and Detention Houses', implying that now the bus houses new urban prisoners, the migrants.
14. As an exception, the main character starts as a poor man and then ends as a rich man, again appropriate to the melodramatic modality.
15. There have been many versions of the regulations, beginning in 1909 and 1915 in the Ottoman era, and then in 1932, 1934, 1977, and 1983 with amendments with no improvement. In 1986, one of the most significant changes was the removal of the police from the board, implying a more civilized board. However, members from the Ministry of the Interior and the General Staff remained intact (Çiftçi 2001: 22–27). So, these changes did not solve any problems about political censorship at all but made them more implicit.

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PART II

Dislocation

No Man's Land

Rafi Pitts' *Soy Nero* Tells Us What It Means to Be Constantly Confronted with Borders

Andreas Hudelist

Soy Nero is a film drama by Iranian–British film maker Rafi Pitts. Produced in 2016, the film takes up the theme of migration, which Pitts had already centrally dealt with in his short film *In Exile* in 1991, about a writer living in exile in Paris and coming to terms with her past. According to reviews, the director's own experience always plays a role in his films. Pitts' personal cultural experiences, which are rooted in the different nationalities of his parents – his father is from England, his mother from Iran – but also in his various places of residence in cities such as Paris, London or Tehran, shape his cinematic work. His film figures can be seen as a product of liquid modernity as described by Zygmunt Bauman (see Bauman 2000). However, the focus of his films is neither the refugee experience nor migration, but always the question of identity and belonging. That is one reason why he is fascinated by borders.

While Pitts wanted to make a film about the border between Mexico and the United States, he came across the issue of Green Card Soldiers. When he personally heard about this topic, which has been in existence since the Vietnam War, he was surprised that there had not been a film about it. Since the Vietnam War, it has been possible for minors who had already lived in the US but were deported to become American citizens by joining the army and serving a minimum of two years. The soldiers were promised that they would receive US citizenship after their duty abroad. The same promise was repeated to illegal immigrants after 9/11. Under Barack Obama's presidency some were also made citizens before their deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan. However, there are countless examples of young people who survived their deployment and yet were deported from the country.

In his research, Pitts got to know Daniel Torrez, who fought in the army for the US and was deported from the country afterwards because of a faked birth

certificate. Hundreds of such cases are said to be known in Mexico, maybe thousands worldwide. It was clear to Pitts that he had to make a movie focusing on this theme. The migration movement between the US and Mexico was particularly interesting for him, because the US is also largely made up of immigrants. The story of the Green Card Soldiers became interesting for him when he met more and more deported Green Card Soldiers. Many are deported if they have committed misdemeanours or crimes. Others, however, are deported because of bureaucratic errors or incomplete forms. Many Latinos in California have been deported under the Patriot Act, while at the same time they have been given the opportunity to join the army under the DREAM Act[1] in order to regain a residence permit. The DREAM Act, which was introduced in 2001, stands for Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act. This act has only been passed in the California State Assembly but failed to achieve a majority in either house of the US Congress. It promises minor illegal immigrants a temporary conditional residency including the right to work. At a later stage, if certain requirements are met, a permanent residence permit can be obtained. For Pitts, this is a great injustice, considering the history of the US, which for him is rather a No Man's Land. He is referring to the history of the country and the colonialists' brutal treatment of the indigenous people.

> I wanted to make a film about No Man's Land. I relate to No Man's Land and to me, America is this No Man's Land. America doesn't have a nationality because it belongs to the world. It's a country of immigrants. There's not a single nationality that you could say is truly American apart from the Native American Indians, and these people are not in charge of America. The Green Card Soldiers are fascinating: there are Iranian Green Card Soldiers, and there are German Green Card Soldiers – they come from all over the world. So here you have an army without a nation, and a nation without a country, if you will. (Johnston and Pitts 2016)

In this interview we can observe how Pitts deconstructs the nation state using the example of 'America' as well as the soldiers from around the world, who are in the US army. He differentiates between the American people, people from all over the world, the country itself, and indigenous people. Within these thoughts the concepts coined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari correlate in an interesting manner. In *A Thousand Plateaus* they write about America as a rhizomatic West,

which can be perceived for instance in general in the arts or specifically in the example of beatnik literature. They summarize the main elements of rhizomatic, or rhizome, as follows: 'the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 21). Olaf Sanders has impressively analysed films by Jim Jarmusch and presented Jarmusch's expanding *œuvre* as a growing body of films that makes a rhizomatic America transparent (see Sanders 2015: 121–63). Film studies analyses that make use of Deleuze's reflections usually focus on his cinema books, which present 'a taxonomy, an attempt at the classifications of images and signs' (Deleuze 1983: xiv). First and foremost is Ronald Bogue's book *Deleuze on Cinema* (2003), in which he guides readers through Deleuze's cinema books. Daniela Angelucci, following Deleuze, emphasizes the connection between cinema and philosophy, pointing out that they both deal with the same problems, only with different tools. Angelucci discusses ten concepts of cinema, but not the rhizome (Angelucci 2014: 311), as it was developed by Deleuze and Guattari together in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). In the cinema books, Deleuze builds on different concepts and thoughts starting from time and movement. Although neither play a subordinate role in Pitt's film, the analysis in this chapter focuses on the rhizome, as this gives greater consideration to the theme of the migrant movement.

In *Soy Nero*, places of becoming and rhizomes are to be identified to subsequently work out possibilities of lines of flight.[2] In the following, more attention is paid to the rhizomatic narration of the film, which can be divided into four parts or rhizomes. Nero Maldonao, the protagonist of the movie, must adapt (or 'become', as Deleuze and Guattari would say) himself in different situations again and again and lives through the spaces of, for example, a refugee and an illegal migrant: firstly, as someone who wants to illegally cross the Mexican–American border; secondly as a hitchhiker on the road; thirdly, with his family, while living the life of the rich for a short time with his half-brother in Beverly Hills; fourthly and finally joining the US army and becoming a Green Card Soldier. Nero's journey is marked by different attributions and identifications, whereby he is always able to come to rest briefly before he is forced to move on.

The First Rhizome

At the beginning of the film, we see Nero Maldonao running. We can see this race as a rhizomatic movement because the protagonist, as we will find out, is rootless. Running away is like rain washing away, scattering the seeds of the plant, and helping it to live on elsewhere (see Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 11). He runs away from two border guards, but one of them catches him. He is then frisked and interrogated by both. His data is recorded. They want to know where he comes from and if he takes drugs. He explains several times that he has no identification with him, but that he is from South Central Los Angeles and is seventeen years old. Because he cannot identify himself, neither his age nor the fact that he has already lived in the USA is believed. Yet he claims he grew up in San Fernando and later in South Central Los Angeles, where he went to Riverside Drive Elementary School on a scholarship.

A look at the history of Los Angeles shows structural racism and xenophobia. With *City of Quartz* (1992), sociologist Mike Davis wrote a book about Los Angeles that is now read as a classic of urban sociology. He describes how the infrastructure of the city segregates certain spheres of life, producing alienation. Nero can be seen as a product of this alienation, even if we do not know whether he is telling the truth or not. Davis writes that '[i]n cities like Los Angeles, on the bad edge of postmodernity, one observes an unprecedented tendency to merge urban design, architecture and the police apparatus into a single, comprehensive security effort' (Davis 1992: 224). The character Nero can be seen as a product of this environment that cannot find a legal place in society. Since he cannot be controlled by official documents, he has no place in this society and must be deported according to this logic. In Deleuze and Guattari's logic, it is impossible for him to identify himself. With a fixed identity, the potential of possibilities is disturbed. The existence of an agency results from becoming, not being. 'A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 237). It is a dialogue that is already established before the first word is spoken. It does not matter what Nero answers and it does not matter what the border guards ask. The identities here are ordered as well as fixed by space and clothing.

In an act of semiotic exuberance, Nero wears a T-shirt with 'Enemy' printed on it. Moreover, his name, Nero, intends to underline his minor position and at the

same time danger, with no power over his environment. His power of action is determined by the border guards, even though he speaks perfect English, grew up in Los Angeles and claims to be a teenager. He feels American. Claiming to be seventeen years old to avoid a prison sentence, he must go back, probably to Tijuana. The fact that he speaks perfect English does not help him. He has a story to tell, but no identity, character, or convincing name. Appadurai writes about migrants: 'The challenge of evolving a new form of legal and ethical hospitality is to create a name to fit the plot, an identity to fit the narrative' (Appadurai 2016: 106). In other words, the feature of modern living is that one needs to become what one is (see Bauman 2000: 32). In the following scene, Nero is on a bus with other men and is taken back to Mexico. He is sent back to a definable space – an attempt to territorialize Nero. For the guards, he looks Mexican, therefore he must go to Mexico. There, Nero attends a funeral, where a Green Card Soldier is buried. Because this man died serving the United States in the war, he is given American citizenship and his family is presented with an American flag in honour of his memory. Here, we (and maybe he does too) learn about Nero's possibility of becoming a permanent American citizen. As such, he would be marginalized in society as a migrant, yet that is what characterizes reterritorialization. 'One reterritorializes, or allows oneself to be reterritorialized, on a minority as a state; but in a becoming, one is deterritorialized' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 291). When Nero is in Mexico, we learn that he also speaks Spanish and that his identity is not so much an American or Mexican, but someone in-between. This mix of identity ascriptions does not make it easier for Nero to find his identity. He seems to feel American because he already has a stronger relationship to the country through his school socialization than to where his parents come from. The search for identity, however, is marked by a fundamental incompleteness (see Bauman 2000: 29). His second border crossing attempt takes place on the night of the New Year. As the midnight fireworks in the sky light up the area, Nero manages to get past the patrol unnoticed. At least the New Year does not let him down on the first day. Dressed in dark clothes and under a starry sky, the fireworks show him the way and at the same time distract the border guards. But as we know, all colours will agree in the dark.

The Second Rhizome

In the second part of the film, Nero finds himself on a road trip. He waves to cars on the side of the road until a man pulls up in his car and asks him if he wants to go to Cincinnati. When Nero answers that he wants to go to Los Angeles, the driver asks him to get in. In the back seat of the car is the young daughter, who we later find out is allowed to spend the weekend with her father. The driver asks Nero to open the glove compartment. After that he challenges him to catch the gun faster than him. The man takes the gun and explains: he has the gun not for violence, but to make peace. With it, he can establish healthy boundaries. That is all he does, he establishes boundaries. Interestingly, he sings the song 'Good Morning Mr. Zip-Zip-Zip!' with his daughter. During World War I, it was a famous army song, which was remembered by the soldiers like many songs, through parodies (see Arlt and Harris 1944: 36). Although the veteran is introduced both as a nice father and a violent driver, the refrain of the song can be understood as drawing a territory line as an American. As the two sing, Nero smiles; however, it alienates him. Deleuze and Guattari state that singing a refrain, typical for children – but we also can observe it in this scene – can lead to marking a territory (see Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 300). During a restroom break, they stop at a spot overlooking dozens of wind turbines. The driver explains that these produce electricity only in appearance and are actually powered by gasoline. The turbines stand on an east-west axis, have an inclination of four degrees, a degree of correction that prevents the earth from going off its axis of rotation. According to the driver, it is a set-up: as an American citizen, you are getting screwed, and Nero is supposed to prepare for it. Here we realize that the veteran has problems with US authorities. He claims that being an American brings a lot of problems. The next break leads to a gas station, where Nero takes the driver's daughter to the restroom. Meanwhile, the driver is approached by police officers who want to examine his car. The complexity of identities, attributions, and the fluid construction of the self can be seen here. The driver is shown as a caring father, veteran, conspiracy theorist, and gun owner, yet in the dialogue with the police he is criminalized because he seems to be suspicious. In direct contrast to the police, he falls into a subordinate position. 'Capitalism institutes or restores all sorts of residual and artificial, imaginary, or symbolic territorialities, thereby attempting, as best it can, to recode, to rechannel persons who have been defined in terms of abstract quantities. Everything returns or recurs: states, nations, families' (Deleuze

and Guattari 1983: 34). With the police, dichotomies are opened up and with them normalizations that result from a capitalist and Oedipal economy. Nero, equipped only with a backpack, runs away, and visits a mass grave at a cemetery before arriving at a garage where he asks for Jesus, his half-brother. When the owner comes and learns that Nero is Jesus's brother, he is thrown out. The secretary goes after Nero and gives him an address where he should find his brother. On the way, Nero is stopped by two policemen. Because he cannot identify himself, he is to be taken to the police station. However, Nero talks himself out of it with several arguments and the policeman does him a favour and takes him to the address. There he meets his brother in a house in Beverly Hills. The police officers act differently from those at the border patrol at the beginning of the film. In both scenes, he has no identification on him. At the border, Nero was still very factual and repeated several times where he grew up and went to school. He asked the officers to just call and check his story. In Los Angeles, Nero becomes more emotional. He asks the police officers to help him. His mother is sick, he has forgotten his ID and his brother doesn't have a phone (in Beverly Hills), so he can't call from the police station either. To be stopped so close to his brother, he loses his factual reasoning and becomes emotional. The policeman is affected by this – he finds no argument not to help him.

The Third Rhizome

Nero's brother Jesus lives in a large estate that towers above him. Here Nero experiences a few quiet days in luxury, where he may appraise the life he is striving for after obtaining a residence permit. However, this dream fades away when the real owner of the villa, a rock star, returns. In the film, the temporarily lived utopia seems like a break or the calm before the storm. In the scene all protagonists live a life that does not seem to suit them. The half-brother wrecks a car that does not belong to him and pretends to be the owner of the villa. His girlfriend sunbathes in the garden of the villa and swims in the pool, when in fact they are the driver and maid of the actual owner and therefore employees of the estate. Nero tries hard to find his place here. Bauman describes this short-lived lie as a breathing space in the chaos of spaces and identities that structure the power of action. He builds on the thoughts of Ulrich Beck and emphasizes that someone has to find individual biographical solutions that continually produce contradictions to the system:

'Risks and contradictions go on being socially produced; it is just the duty and the necessity to cope with them which are being individualized. To cut a long story short: a gap is growing between individuality as fate and individuality as the practical and realistic capacity for self-assertion' (Bauman 2000: 34). Bauman describes the paradox that characterizes fluid societies. He emphasizes that all people are in search of their (own) individuality. This search is part of their biographical plot. Within the film, we can see this in other characters, but probably best in this third section, where Nero's brother and his brother's girlfriend take a break from everyday life and enjoy a few days of luxury living with Nero: time-out. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, it means a line of flight that, at least temporarily, allows 'movements of deterritorialization and destratification' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 3). Nero is getting a break from the ordinary day as a migrant. But not for long. He escapes when the owner arrives, and his half-brother and his girlfriend resume their roles as employees. However, there is no role for Nero here, who has to find one for himself. However, this is complicated by the fact that Nero receives the ID from his brother Jesus and thus assumes the latter's identity. While living the American dream with him, he decides to join the army to be allowed to live and work in America as a 'dream kid'. In order to do this, he needs an ID card, which is why from now on he calls himself Jesus.

The Fourth Rhizome

Although Nero is called Jesús by others, with a Spanish pronunciation, he insists that he is Jesus and wants it to be pronounced that (English) way. He is not so much trying to take on the identity of his brother, but to be American. Also interesting is the reference to Jesus as a martyr who sacrificed himself for his conviction. Nero is now not only in a new role by name, but on the way to making his dream as a 'dream kid' a reality. With the help of his half-brother's identity, he now becomes a guard at the border which did not let him enter the USA at the beginning of the film. This time it is him who asks for IDs and lets someone cross the border. In his squad there are also Bronx and Compton. Both are rooted in American society with their (legal) history, even if they have a very specific geographical history. Their identity is territorialized. 'What defines the territory is the emergence of matters of expression (qualities)' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 315). Between Compton and Bronx, there is intense debate between opposite

views. The main subject is hip-hop and the unexplained circumstances surrounding the death of rapper Tupac Shakur. Through music and the historical confrontation of gangs as well as their West and East coast beginnings, both draw their origins and thus also construct their identities. Jesus tries to intervene in the discussion as Tupac's soulmate. However, he is rejected by both of them. He cannot be part of the discussion, if he has not lived the life of a Black man as perceived by Bronx and Compton (see Bauman 2000: 32). Neither can believe Jesus, because, in their perception, he has not lived the life of a Black American. For them, his biography does not exist, therefore he cannot speak, because in their group or in their imagination of Black history he is not even marginalized, but non-existent.

A key sequence in the film is the moment when Jesus discusses with his Black colleague why they are here at all. He emphasizes that his name is Jesus and that he is American. He explains, 'I am Negro. I am a nigger like you.' However, this only causes incomprehension. 'There are two of us, you are alone. Don't forget that.' Just as Gregor Samsa, the protagonist of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* who has been transformed into a beetle, wants to continue to take on the role of the son with all his strength and thus maintain the Oedipal as well as capitalist position (see Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 14) within the family (and perishes from it), Nero wants to take on the role of the capital-economically marginalized. However, there is no place for him next to Bronx and Compton because he is not one of the marginalized – in the view of the American state he (still) does not exist. He is neither Nero nor Jesus, but a number in the army system.

Despite this confrontation, things are initially calm at the checkpoint. It seems temporarily as if he might succeed and acquire his green card at the unlocatable border to the east. However, the border control does not remain peaceful. When a car is stopped with gunfire and the car explodes, we find out that the border point has been attacked. In the night Jesus escapes with two other soldiers in a jeep. They get off the road and come to a halt. As they walk farther and farther away from the checkpoint, they wander around the rocky landscape. On a hill there is another exchange of fire, which Jesus survives. He continues to wander through the area until he reaches a road. On this road he meets an army jeep, whose occupants frisk and arrest him. He insists that he is from the 2-2 unit, but the two soldiers are not convinced, because he can neither identify himself by means of ID nor remember his personal identification number. In the last scene he is asked for his name. He still answers Maldonao, but no first name is pronounced.

The last film sequence shows him again wandering alone in the stony landscape. In this last chapter of the movie, becoming clearly means a transformation of identity. But it is an identity that is still not found. The different scenes made it clear that the protagonist of the film is only identified by others, which means he only has or gets an identity in opposite to others. In the context of the rhizome, the loss of the first name is not uninteresting. According to Deleuze and Guattari, a rhizome is a root plant that differs from the common root we all know from nature. A rhizome has the ability to form new root shoots by simply sprouting anew once separated. This corresponds with the concept of becoming, which, according to the authors, means losing one root and gaining a multiplicity. It is a 'a voyage of initiation, a transcendental experience of the loss of the Ego, . . . and everything commingles in these intense becomings, passages, and migrations – all this drift that ascends and descends the flow of time: countries, races, families, parental appellations, divine appellations, geographical and historical designations, and even miscellaneous new items' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 84). When an individual cannot cope with the fixed hierarchical structures established by a capitalist economy, he or she loses his or her predefined global identity; for Deleuze and Guattari, however, it is an 'experience of intense quantities in their pure state, to a point that is almost unbearable – a celibate misery and glory experienced to the fullest, like a cry suspended between life and death, an intense feeling of transition, states of pure, naked intensity stripped of all shape and form' (1983: 18).

The scenes discussed so far have demonstrated failure but have shown that something is in the offing. After each setback, Jesus motivates himself to move forward and find his own identity. The pictures at the end of the film, in which he is still wandering through the desert carrying a gun, are a confirmation of his rhizomatic identity. By refusing to be a refugee or an illegal migrant, he is becoming the narrator of his own identity. This desert is a No Man's Land, which he enters by becoming a nomad. For Deleuze and Guattari, militarization is part of the nomadic. '"Military" is not the part that counts, but rather the distant nomadic origin' (Deleuze und Guattari 1987: 366).

A Nomad in No Man's Land

One of the most absurd borders is, following Pitts, the border between Mexico and California, because California belonged to Mexico in the middle of the nineteenth

century. The character of Nero is to some extend also Pitts, who found himself in a similar situation to Nero after the film was made (see Pitts and Lowy 2017). While abroad promoting his film, *The Hunter* (2010), Pitts supported his colleague and film director Jafar Panahi, who was arrested in Iran for taking part in a demonstration. Since then, Panahi has not been allowed to leave Iran and Pitts has never returned there because, as a supporter, the same also would have happened to him (see Lowy 2016).

In *Soy Nero* we see that the wall between Mexico and the US is not a future project, but already exists in parts, for example between San Diego and Tijuana. Right at the beginning the wall is introduced visually: once as a border that has to be crossed, once serving as a volleyball net for two teams. One almost has the impression that it could be the national teams of Mexico and the USA playing against each other here. The dichotomy is constructed and maintained by both countries. The paradox of the Green Card Soldiers is introduced in the opening scene by means of a soldier's funeral. Here we learn that a Mexican immigrant in Iraq died for the fight for freedom and thus became a (dead) citizen of the USA. At the same time the Mexican immigrant disappears from the USA as an American citizen and gets buried. The DREAM Act guarantees legal status to all soldiers who served and died in the US army. Nero is present at this funeral and calculates his chances when he joins the army. However, the so-called DREAM Act is not a way to become a free citizen but consolidates the hierarchy and ideological positions within the state. The act represents an attempt to create a legal naturalization process that would give the illegal deportees a way to bind themselves to the country. The problem is that these people do not have identities 'which fit the legal narrative requirements of legitimate migration. . . . It is because, in the eyes of their new hosts, they are truly "nobodies" that is they have no identities that fit their new circumstances' (Appadurai 2016).

In the various scenes, it is easy to understand how, on the one hand, Nero is treated as a nobody by others and, on the other hand, is repeatedly pushed into a subaltern position, from where he faces 'the violence of imperialistic epistemic' (Spivak 1988: 285). This is clearest at the beginning, when he cannot make the border officials believe that he is from South Central Los Angeles. No matter what he says, he is accused of lying. Although he speaks English without any problems, he is addressed in Spanish in the middle of the conversation. After he declares twice that he grew up in South Central Los Angeles, he is asked if he has been to America. The end and the outcome of the conversation is already decided. In the

other scenes, there is sometimes the feeling that Nero seems to be emancipating himself from this position.

First, he manages to get to Los Angeles as a hitchhiker. However, he is placed in a role below that of police or citizen by the appearance of the police. While staying at his brother's estate, he proudly talks about the idea of joining the army. However, when the actual residents of the mansion return, there is no room for him. Here, he does not even have the chance to have a dialogue. For Nero there is no possibility of escape here and possibilities of becoming are at most temporarily apparently possible; these are however soon interrupted, since it is already determined what will happen with him. From this we can see that Nero occupies a subaltern position.

Gayatri Spivak made clear that there is virtually no group of subalterns. Subalterns usually do not know each other and therefore cannot form a collective. Spivak explains that subaltern is not an identity designation. Subalterns are marked by their difference from the hegemony. They lack agency because there is no community to build a collective agency, they have no feeling for a community and the do not form a class (Spivak 1988: 277). What is more 'the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous' (Spivak 1988: 284). According to Davis, this is partly due to the way security is dealt with, which does not ensure individual security, but rather the maintenance of various borders that entrench and exploit marginalized people in their positions. This also includes the suppression of a collective feeling, so that knowledge and feeling of community cannot arise at all. '"[S]ecurity" has less to do with personal safety than with the degree of personal insulation, in residential, work, consumption and travel environments, from "unsavory" groups and individuals, even crowds in general' (Davis 1992: 224).

The position of subalterns makes us understand that for Nero there are highly limited possibilities of becoming. What drives him the most is the idea of becoming an American citizen by means of the DREAM Act. The name of this act, however, already unmistakably shows what distinguishes it. It is the dreamy idea of being able to undergo a social transformation that is permanent. In the film there are scenes which can give the impression that Nero moves freely. However, the circumstances that lead to this are limited in both time and space. He imitates his environment and its people in order to distance himself from his (illegal) position. 'A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification. The whole structuralist critique of the series seems irrefutable. To become is not to progress or regress

along a series. Above all, becoming does not occur in the imagination' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 238). While the road trip and the almost utopian time-out in his brother's villa are aiming in the direction of an imagined better future, the stay at the border to be guarded as a border guard is no longer an imagination but the execution of the DREAM Act. Before, the idea of becoming an American was a distant notion; as a soldier, it seems within reach. Becoming a soldier means both potential freedom and a high risk of getting killed, but it is a line of flight (see Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 340). Becoming absent from the environment can be seen as the potential to become something different, somebody different with a greater agency.

To All the Green Card Soldiers

Bauman's idea of a liquid society does not result from an attempt to distinguish it from something like a solid society. By emphasizing the adjective liquid, he is trying to point out that the stable identities and, by extension, entities are constructions that were never as stable as they appeared to be. Liquid and solid are thus not opposites, but characteristics that can both describe entities at the same time. Bauman explains in an interview: 'Originally, solids were melted not because of a distaste for solidity, but because of dissatisfaction with the degree of solidity of the extant/inherited solids: purely and simply, the bequeathed solids were found to be not solid enough' (Dawes and Bauman 2010). The character of Nero shows how identities can be challenged. In particular, the identity of a Green Card Soldier can be characterized as Bauman defines 'liquid' modernity, where 'the status of all norms, the norm of health included, has . . . in a society of infinite and indefinite possibilities, been severely shaken and become fragile' (Bauman 2000: 79).

Following Claire Colebrook, who draws on Deleuze, identity is about a political compromise, where 'norms and values' make me 'a moral individual' but at the same time make me aware that 'those values are provisional, culturally and historically specific and never fully universalizable' (Colebrook 2014: 109). Nero is not able to build relationships with other people. His acquaintances are only short-lived. According to Bauman, this is another characteristic of liquid modernity (see Bauman 2000: 22). The encounters on the run are singular and without duration. This means that any opportunities for improvement must be seized in the moment, otherwise it is not possible to repeat them. Life can therefore only be

lived in the present without exception. All hope and despair is thus suspended in the now and is also constantly being constructed anew here. The way life is lived in different difficult circumstances is a constant theme. Without omitting these negative aspects, which more than clearly come to light in the film through the character of Nero, the intention here is to emphasize a potential agency that, according to Deleuze and Guattari, rests in the potential of the rhizome.

> *A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes. . . . any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order. . . .* Collective assemblages of enunciation *function directly within* machinic assemblages; *it is not impossible to make a radical break between regimes of signs and their objects. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 6–7; emphasis in original)*

While identity is often understood as a closed entity and compared to roots of a tree, rhizomatic roots challenge these identitary borders by bringing the multiplicity and its potential of an identity into consciousness. The goal is not to be something, but to become, which presupposes self-determination, but also constitutes the basis for accepting new identity patterns. Links with a rhizomatic identity were made based on various scenes in the film. The idea also corresponds with the understanding of roots as described by Stuart Hall: 'If you think of culture always as a return to roots – R-O-O-T-S – you're missing the point. I think of culture as routes – R-O-U-T-E-S – the various routes by which people travel, culture travels, culture moves, culture develops, culture changes, cultures migrate, etc' (Hall 2005). In Hall's understanding, roots are always routing towards the new. The necessary movement always produces something new. While the focus here is strongly on culture, so is the identity of those who shape culture. It is precisely one's own shaping potential that not only brings about change, but also expands one's own power to act. On the one hand, hope is repeatedly generated cinematically, as Nero acquires a power to act in a certain period of time that we did not consider possible at the beginning of the film. On the other hand, through various events Nero and we are reminded that without proof of identity and 'proper biography' he has no chance of becoming an American citizen. The DREAM Act emerges as an escape route, but it is doomed to failure because of its state structure and its Oedipal and capitalist hegemony (only minors who have

already lived in America and been socialized in it are allowed into American society), which only allows him to be deported again shortly before the possibility of becoming a citizen. At the end of the film, Nero only mentions his surname and no longer speaks his first name. He thus discards his identity as Jesus or Nero. He is neither the martyr nor the marginalized outsider. In the last seconds of film, he wanders on in the stone desert, alone. He becomes a nomad through his ongoing movement and produces a new linkage (see Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 15). He can no longer go back to being a migrant. He cannot no longer re-territorialize himself.

> *It is in this sense that nomads have no points, paths, or land, even though they do by all appearances. If the nomad can be called the Deterritorialized par excellence, it is precisely because there is no reterritorialization afterwards with the migrant, or upon something else as with the sedentary (the sedentary's relation with the earth is mediatized by something else, a property regime, a State apparatus). With the nomad, on the contrary, it is deterritorialization that constitutes the relation to the earth, to such a degree that the nomad reterritorializes on deterritorialization itself. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 381)*

As a Green Card Soldier, he is fighting for the United States of America although he is still not an American citizen. The legal state remains unclear in the film. What is clear is the state of being inbetween, which does not allow a fixed position as is the case with nomads. America's borders opened for a brief moment, but now he has not found access to American society, but to the No Man's Land that existed before the American state and now gives him a space that can be accessed nomadically as well as crossed. The real border he crossed at the beginning of the film dissolves at this moment with the imaginary limited identity of an American and lets him find himself. Following Rosi Braidotti, the nomad is 'a multicultural individual' (Braidotti 1994: 1). She builds on the work of Deleuze and Guattari and explains how bodies form multiple identities throughout their actions. There is neither I nor Self, but solely a potential 'actualizing or realizing itself . . . Only when the world, teeming with anonymous and nomadic, impersonal and preindividual singularities, opens up, do we tread at last on the field of the transcendental' (Deleuze 1990: 103). The dedication at the end of the film has the potential to make us aware of such transcendence. It is dedicated to all Green Card Soldiers who were deported after their military service, like Daniel Torrez. Braidotti

emphasized that the vision of the nomadic is not only to foreground a process of change, but also to bring to the fore an ethic that should enable an ecosophical sense of community. According to this, there is no one who is alone – we are all in this together (see Braidotti 2011: 210).

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Notes

1. Since 2021 several versions have been introduced in the US Congress. It says that all of them 'would have provided a pathway to legal status for undocumented people who came to this country as children' (The American Immigration Council 2021). Now there exists a larger bill named the Dream and Promise Act which was introduced in 2021.
2. I have already written on Deleuze and Guattari's reflections regarding the rhizome in relation to feature films by Jonas Carpignano (see Hudelist 2021).

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CHAPTER 6

Bollywood, Mobility and Partition Politics
Representation of Displaced Muslims in Films on Indo-Pak Partition

Sony Jalarajan Raj and Rohini Sreekumar

Partition on Indian Screens

The ultimate horror of history is not the persistent fear that it is bound to repeat itself but the very unfathomable nature of the temporal and spatial coordinates that constitute its existence as an incomprehensible form of knowledge. The discontinuous and disrupted notion of history is a self-negation of certainty and any opposite activity to place the reality of events in the historical timeline has far-reaching consequences. Such a discourse of history is an extension of the violence perpetuated through the fragmented memories of our collective consciousness. India, entwining the webs of its complex and traumatic past, exemplifies this perception of history, not just the narrativization of the past embellished by the ambience of nostalgia but a vortex of uncertainty through which the present finds its meaning. The historical significance of 'Indianness' perplexed in the literary and cinematic forms is a product of the 'historical violence' that literally erupted from the day when India as a nation came into existence, and is subliminally re-represented through the spectacles of artistic imaginations. The event known as the Indo-Pak Partition or the independence of India/Pakistan was a 'seismic political transformation' conjoining the regional identities into the larger geographical narrative of cinema which mutated the linguistic and cultural elements along the way of emerging migratory patterns (Vasudevan 2010). The epistemological, artistical, ethical, cultural, and political modes of 'being' stuck in between the binary border politics emanating from the Partition are precisely historical and this is the vantage point where one must start scrutinizing the inveterate discourses of India.

It has been observed that cinema is 'corollary to Indian psyche' and the social discourse of cinema can be an effective narrative tool to document the statements

about life with its historicity prematurely yet observably delineated in the visual form as a reconstruction (Roy 2003). The laborious task of reconfiguring the traumatic repercussions of Partition through the wider lens of cinema summons the lost memories of displaced bodies, their severed cultural roots and heritage into moving images, invoking the pain of the past. The growing body of Partition narratives is significant as it somehow recreates the reality of the people caught up in the sectarian violence that engulfed everything they considered as part of their homeland. Aided by the radical nationalistic forces, the Partition of the Indian subcontinent unilaterally separated individuals into elusive categorizations of 'us' and 'them'. The displacement and dislocation of Indian Muslims during this catastrophic mass mobilization process requires that special attention is paid to their confused history as an ambiguous existence in a new nation state. This destruction of normalcy was fundamentally a process of creation where a unique ambivalent notion of 'Other' had been born. Partition dissolved the much-celebrated Indian motto of 'unity in diversity' by disintegrating the multitudinous coordinates of cultural differences to engender a unified homogeneous cultural land.

The apparent disillusionment brought by the aftermath of Partition was a thematic source of Indian cinema. Although running a decentralized film industry that epitomizes an idea of 'plural cinema' as it nourishes various regional cinema (Srinivas 2010), Indian cinema is often construed as Bollywood for its international recognition and capital matching the cultural interests of the majoritarianism. This 'Bollywoodization' of Indian cinema and the cultural nationalism inseminated by its ideology as a prominent culture industry in a global level (Rajadhyaksha 2003) retroactively put a halt to veracious representations of the exiled bodies on the silver screen. There have been historical texts to jog the memory of the reader with a conscious determination to divert the discourse from the grand political narratives about Partition to a more subjective approach; that is, to read it as a 'human tragedy' (Tiwari 2013). However, the activity of interpreting history is more crucial as these interpretations eventually become the representations of history itself and such actions are to be done with discretion. The resulting inadequacies of having an inconspicuous past of overlapping stories concerning Partition problematize the ineffectual collective realities of a civilized India that tends to diffuse the illusory line between a violent past and an oblivious present. This challenges the corpus of literature of Partition where some stories have undermined other ones, consciously or unconsciously.

The impetus to trace out the identity crisis of displaced Muslims and their unheard narratives in the spectacle of cinema embarks on an excavation into the past where it adds to the body of academic research on the contours of mobility, displacement and border politics. This goes along with the international problem of minorities and refugees, and how it is projected in the ubiquitous cultural and political text of cinema. Even though the contextualization of this chapter is within the limits of Bollywood cinema and its large canvas that (mis)represented the tragic Indo-Pak Partition in light of the ambiguous existential problem of the (dis)placement of Indian Muslims, it intends to touch the universality of the matters discussed here. As sources of this study, M.S. Sathyu's debut feature film *Garm Hava* (1973), Bhisham Sahni's novel-based film *Tamas* (1988), Deepa Mehta's *Fire, Earth* and *Water* trilogy film *Earth* (1998), Kushwant Singh's classic postcolonial novel-based film *Train to Pakistan* (1998), a Canadian co-production filmed in both British Columbia and on-location in India entitled *Partition* (2007), are some of the films chosen as historical texts to examine the confounded state of Indian Muslims and the ramifications of the Partition politics that represented their displaced bodies.

Partition Narratives, the Cinematic Cemetery of Departed/Deported Souls

The spectacles concerning the discourse of Partition render a hermeneutic reconstruction of the historical fixation of what is collectively referred to as 'Indian' and its varied significations that qualify the standardizations of the institutionalized state of Indian nationalism. This historical documentation, 'the story of Partition, and the accompanying Hindu-Muslim and Muslim-Sikh riots . . . written up as a secondary story', has been called the 'biography of the emerging nation-state', 'one that, for all its consequences, miraculously left the course of Indian history unaltered, [as] "India" . . . started firmly and "naturally" on its secular, democratic, non-violent course' (Pandey 1992). The greatest task of the filmmaker is thus to contest the violence of narration itself and merge the mutually opposing coordinates of the past to attain a point of harmony between the fragmented pieces, the parts left out by the Partition. Indian cinema always tried to portray Partition in the form of localized stories which had been strategically neglected by the task of border-building that cost millions of lives as collateral damage. The film industry of India has been making a significant contribution to the process of

nation-building (Sarkar 2009). A microcosm of the nation-building energies has persistently been reflected in Bollywood where the filmmakers' subconscious devotion to the culturally 'new-born' India was evident (Chatterjee 2012).

The Partition narratives of Bollywood cinema inadvertently follow a pattern of recreating the ethnoreligious tensions of the Hindu and Muslim communities set against the background of the political debates that shaped the modern India. What these films accentuate is the historically imposed image of the Hindu-Muslim conflict as a discernible characteristic of the displacement of individuals, families and communities, with an emphasis on the theme of estrangement. Early films like *Chhalia* (1960) and *Dharmputra* (1961) try to exemplify the hostility of Partition by using it as a narrative background for the development of the generic Bollywood spectacle where melodramatic romantic tales and the mysticism of the mythical ideal are normalized. Manmohan Desai's *Chhalia* follows the eponymous protagonist's (Raj Kapoor) attempts to reconcile the estranged relationship of Shanthi (Nutan) and her husband Kewal (Rehman). Set in the background of Indo-Pak Partition, the film depicts the displacement of Shanthi from her husband and the resulting dubious existence of their son Anwar. The illegitimacy of Anwar's existence as a Muslim and the disowning of Shanthi's virtuous self for her association with a man named Abdul Rehman (Pran) constitute the body of the film as it tends to reveal the dislocated Muslim selves in the context of Partition. Although *Chhalia*'s allusions to the epic Ramayana – where the metaphor of Shanthi, whose name literally translates as peace and sanctity in the Indian mythological context, is a misinterpreted figure in the Partition discourse – are explicitly evident, they make infinitesimally less momentous attempts for reparation. The superfluous climax of the film reiterates the reunion of the characters in harmony but leaving the questions about the historical necessities unanswered and the dislocated Muslim identities intact.

Yash Chopra's *Dharmputra* is considered as the first major film to deal with the monstrosity of religious fundamentalism that peaked at the time of Partition where families were divided on the basis of their collective religious ideals and separated from their former positions of universality and brotherhood. The film portrays the communalism erupted in the wake of Indian Partition that transformed not only the material existence of people but also their psychological temperaments. In *Dharmputra,* a Muslim child who is the product of an illegitimate affair is separated from his mother and forced to live with a Hindu family. The film depicts the metamorphosis of the child, Dileep (Shashi Kapoor), into a Hindu

radical whose antipathy towards the Muslim community mirrors the illogical implementation of hatred which was the epicentre of the violence regurgitated during the Partition.

The Bollywood narrative as an artistic medium of the Indian cultural land neglected the complicated form of interconnectedness of the issues relating to the Muslim population as the oversimplification of its narrativizations reveals the triviality of treatment adopted by filmmakers. Popular films resorted to romantic melodramas as opposed to social realism where myth-making of the past was a preferable narrative trope instead of political evaluation. The political overtones are subjugated by the totality of the film that focuses on how to mitigate the horror of the Partition. Recent film *Pinjar* (2003) uses similar storyline to films like *Chhalia* and *Dharmaputra* to portray a Hindu woman excommunicated for her accidental involvement with a Muslim kidnapper. The film lures the common Indian spectator in to sympathize with the circumstances without having given conscious consideration to the complications of the Partition politics that devoured specific individuals. It is as if the spectator is passively paying tributes to the buried bodies of history with no intention of investigating the 'cause of death'.

Partition films attempt to picturize the process of sectarianizing the Indian subcontinent into the categories of 'Indian Muslims' and 'Indian Hindus' where the former is delegitimized and denigrated to the point of completely detaching the 'Indianness' from their identity. The formation of Pakistan as a Muslim nation-state has been accredited to be the only place for anyone who carries the identity of an Indian Muslim. Bollywood films make sense of this unanimous discreditation of the pluralistic and secular values of the Indian cultural heritage through protagonists who are emotionally and physically ostracized from the newly emerging nationalistic discourse of India. Kumkum Sangari (2003) observes this as 'xenophobic nationalism', a 'chauvinist Hindu discourse of culture and civilization' which assigned all evils to the collective history of the Muslim diaspora. This sectarian view of civilization is the qualitative feature of the subtexts of post-Partition India. The separationism marked the deterioration of the prevailing anti-colonial nationalist discourse of the Indian subcontinent that had never been, in its diversified cultural contours, considered a two-nation / two-culture theoretical proposition.

Bodies at Border, Displacement and Dislocation

Partition envisaged the dissociation of the cultural land of the Indian subcontinent into two distinctive regional spaces demarcated by the discursive terminology of an ethno-religious-nationalistic discourse and the subsequent process of occupation and reoccupation of a mass community of individuals on either side of an imaginary line that redefined their existential position from that historical turning point. This differentiation was an act of minimization of social, political and cultural domains to fit in a field with specific borders which have been '(re)produced, (re)created, (re)conditioned, (re)established and (re)modelled spatially and temporally' (Misra 2016). In closer analysis, these borders can be recognized as 'imaginary lines' in the strict sense that they were socially constructed on the grounds of an outrageous subjectivism asserted by a selected few in a collectivistic manner and embellished purely by the myopic vision of the imaginative fanaticism. The uncertainties and inadequacies of such a bordering explains the unimaginable violence that displaced and distanced lives far away from their homes. The uncertainty brought by the Partition border politics was an existential crisis for those who were suddenly pushed to the inevitable need of reorganizing and dislodging. The identity, ancestry and nationality which they imagined as home being shifted to the other side of the border realigned the structural contours of their existence in a uniquely disproportionate manner. Here the unique status of the Indian Muslims is relevant, precisely in the context of the dichotomization of two nations separated by a border where the territorial space of Pakistan became the ideal home for all Muslims. Deconstructing the way in which Bollywood cinema dealt with the sense of loss and ambiguity of belonging encountered by Indian Muslims across the borders, which were more forceful rather than natural, then becomes the locus point of watching cinema as historical re-representation.

A significant cinematic endeavour that visualizes the complexity of the border politics of India-Pakistan Partition problematizing the confused position of the Indian Muslims came in 1973 as the directorial debut feature film of M.S. Sathyu. The film, *Garm Hava* (Hot Winds), centres around the Mirzas, a Muslim family which resides in North India, and their exponentially deteriorating state of existence amidst the alarming time of Partition. The main protagonist is Salim Mirza, who runs the family business of shoe manufacturing and faces the imminent threat to leave his home for Pakistan, as the dilemma that frames the narrative is

the emergence of the composite notion of border that demands the physical as well as psychological disintegration of social, cultural and familial kinship. The migration of Salim's brother Halim to Pakistan instigates the separation of family members during the mass mobilization as an inevitability of Partition. The film follows Salim's resilience to not succumb to the populist imaginations of the changed politics of the subcontinent.

Garm Hava encapsulates the prejudice and hatred inexplicably incorporated in the body of Partition and reveals the underlying structural tenets of borders that reflect their own immaturity in origin and systematical premeditation in implementation. The border that defined the national identity of the newly emerged states of India and Pakistan is the tool that epitomized the process of distancing groups by identifying and branding them as enemies in terms of culture, community and land. This bordering is the embodiment of sectarianism which reverberates in the alienated self of individuals like Salim Mirza who loses his ancestral home and family business. A constant fear of migration shadows the family, resulting in grave loss and estrangement; the aged mother of the Mirzas, anguished by the thought of losing her home, dies in it and Salim's daughter Amina commits suicide due to the despair of losing her lovers. Partition was precisely an event of compartmentalizing categories of people on the basis of the belief systems that constructed their social identities. The desire to displace Muslims to an imaginary land of Pakistan, which was previously part of the same region where people coinhabited with their families and histories, can be witnessed as part of the terrorizing act of forming homogeneous territories. Misra (2016: 39) opines that:

> Bordering gives a sense of homogeneity with respect to the outside world. Borders mark the site of identity formation by segregating political, social and geographical spaces in a territorial boundary. The geopolitical representation of self and others and perceptions regarding an imminent danger are instrumental in articulating subjectivity of the world through bordering spaces.

The enunciation of the border and its enactment of displacing bodies to the other side of the line encompasses the incessant polarization of the Indian subcontinent into the ideological edifice of Hindu and Islamic discourse. The globalizing effect on the Bollywood cinematic productions resulted in 'family films' that synched local tradition with global trends (Mehta 2005). The families that embody

traditional Indian qualities were overrepresented on the Indian screen as they were conflated with the identity of the nation itself. The segregation of Muslim families using the border politics of Partition was a recalibration of the apparatus of cultural verification in which the guidelines to commensurate the notion of Indianness have been redacted to the level of sustaining an irrevocable tension between Hindus and Muslims.

Borders uphold the personal liminality of cultural bodies during the rite of passage called Partition. This liminality, in the anthropological sense, is an 'ambiguous state' where the transition from one social status to another 'takes the form of a mere opening of doors or the literal crossing of a threshold which separates two distinct areas, one associated with the subject's pre-ritual or pre-liminal status, and the other with his post-ritual or post-liminal status' (Turner 1974). The body of a Muslim is embroiled in a disputable position which Bollywood cinema uses as a trope to showcase the duality stemming from the interplay of borders. The placement of characters like Salim Mirza in *Garm Hava*, Nathu in *Tamas*, Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* (2012) elucidates the articulation of ethical, political, and geographical borders containing and contesting the vegetative state of the disenfranchised bodies. Partition, already observed as a continuation of the colonial policy of 'Divide and Rule' (Sharma 2009–2010) and the opportunistic communal politics of national political parties (Hassan 1993), extends these borders, not only to exploit the illusory qualities of these separating lines but to make the colonial and postcolonial demarcations of Indian history more visible.

Transgressing Borders, Subjectification and Othering

In Partition narratives, the protagonists are represented as travelling bodies who are seen to be crossing borders in order to find a new home or to escape from the violence and misery inflicted upon them. 'Discourses of power which seek to legitimate certain forms of identity and marginalize others by imposing a logic of binary oppositions remain operable and challenge new forms of identity from emerging' (McLeod 2000). They impact thus the spatial orientation of the postcolonial population. The emergence of the Indian nation as the identifiable subject and the state of Pakistan as the reprehensible Other dismantled the common historical continuity of the land. The post-Partition era essentialized a

binary mode of comprehension of history that established a new cultural, political and social normality in India. As a natural reflection of this phenomenon, one can see the influence on the composition of the cinematic text of Bollywood where the stereotypical representation of the harmonious coexistence of Hindu-Muslim population is overemphasized in creating the narratology of the nation. This construction of the pseudo-harmony as a methodical intervention of the filmmaker to conceal the historical reality of the impediments has now been revealed to be problematic in the context of Indian Partition.

The historical genre has been providing Bollywood cinema with the material for the production of politically motivated films where a historical fictionality is embedded in the sense of political causality (Jaikumar 2006). The collective dissent against the British Raj and the desire to unify the population in favour of the struggle for Independence against the colonial horrors define the style of these films. The further transition from pre-Independence to post-independence is assimilated in cinema along with a shift in its emphatic obsession of narrativization: changing from political functionality to the notion of patriotism as the axial point of narration incorporating real and imaginary pasts (Raj and Sreekumar 2013). Critically acclaimed films like *Mother India* (1957), *Gandhi* (1982), and *A Passage to India* (1984) portray the new focus on the image of the nation and the concertedness of the patriotic discourses that structuralize it in the first place. In addition to this, there are instances when the unexchangeable Indo-Islamic shared past is erased in films to strategize the national identities of the nations (Chandra 2018). In light of this, the Partition narratives are overshadowed by the subject of the nation as a supreme entity, and everything outside the nationalistic discourse was identified as 'outcast'.

One of the reasons why the historical films of Bollywood that represented the scenario of Partition failed to address the confused state of Indian Muslims comes from the fact that it could not surpass the accretion of thematic elements of patriotism and nationalism which constitute almost all films. This leads to the realization that the mentally and physically gruelling problems of Partition cannot be settled by the duality of the nationalistic discourse that birthed the two nations and its religiously segregated citizenships. Transgressing the politics of geographical borders, the transnational cultural ambiguity signified by Muslim bodies resonates with the failed conceptualizations of nationalism. Partition substantiates the idea of nation as an 'inherently limited and sovereign' ideology of 'an imagined political community' (Anderson 1991). The ideology of nation, and its inherent

oppressiveness and authoritarianism, is confirmed through the fictional construction of the Muslim community as the common enemy of the nation.

The fundamental narrative of Partition centres around a twofold perception of nation as both home and refugee camp. The people who tend to cross borders are labelled as either citizens or refugees strictly on the basis of their ethnoreligious identity. This legitimization or delegitimization was an easy process as it had slowly become ingrained in the collective social consciousness of the subcontinent. In *Garm Hava*, the representation of the Muslim family of the Mirzas shows how the Muslims were denied their civil rights almost immediately after the Partition, without wielding any blatant coercion. The voluntary migration of Muslim characters in the film precisely demonstrates the core conspiracy of the ideology of Partition, that it is a self-asserting and self-implementing process which is hegemonically internalizing the whole sectarian political violence. This antagonizes the self-representation of one's identity as Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, in strict conflict with the imagined inclusiveness of the socio-political body of the nation.

Laura Busetta (2019) observes that 'The self-representation of the displaced subject is constitutively and intrinsically a gesture of political resistance' where the subjectivity of the geopolitically suffering migrant subject is perceived in biopolitical terms. However, representing the Muslim identity in Indian films imposes a negative connotation of resistance as it is viewed as a contingency that limits the subject's geopolitical movement in the changed border of the geographical zone. The Muslim subjects in movies like *Tamas* and *A Train to Pakistan* attain the status of a refugee whose mobility is a forceful infraction of their formative identity projected onto the elusiveness of nationalism. Thus, the eventuality of mobilization predetermines the nation as the locus point of the historical narrative replicated in cinematic forms.

Witnessing the Traumatic Past, Cinematic Reproduction of Historical Violence

The problem of impossibility encountered by the filmmakers in their attempts to realistically reproduce the past is one of the major obstacles that hinder the recapturing of a traumatic historical event. Although cinema is always defined by its fictionality, historical re-representations using cinematic narrative demand an authenticity of a higher level as they would actively influence, or in a deeper sense,

alter the epistemology of history. Paramount in the popular cultural imaginations of India, Bollywood cinema, notorious for its populist pervasiveness, political incorrectness, and censorship, has always been in an overtly incompetent position when it comes to portraying the greatest traumatic event in Indian history, the Partition. The filmic corpus of Bollywood film industry is embellished by overexaggerating melodramatic narratives and its aesthetic demonstrated by emotional instabilities with which the character representations are constructed. The basic structural background of mainstream Indian cinema successfully validates the inability of the Indian silver screen to address the trauma of Partition: not only its failure to assimilate the political sympathies and the corporal violence that erupted in the forefront of Indo-Pak Partition, but also the total rejection of the post-traumatic identity crisis of the displaced bodies of Muslims.

While the notion of the history of Partition is mostly remembered in terms of the amount of violence it dissipated while constructing social paradigms, the imperative to make sense of the recurring trauma and the process of recuperating the incessant forms of uncertainties is tantamount to the social construction of new identities that might repair the psychological and emotional suffering of its subjects. William Dalrymple (2015) recognizes that the event of 'Partition is central to modern identity in the Indian subcontinent, as the Holocaust is to identity among Jews, branded painfully onto the regional consciousness by memories of almost unimaginable violence' (*The Great Divide* 2015). The violence, though almost unrepresentable in its actuality, finds considerable space as a major theme of Partition films. In Govind Nihalani's *Tamas*, Partition is represented as a catastrophic event through the visualization of the underprivileged. The protagonist Nathu is a tanner who unconsciously becomes the nodal point of the outbreak of sectarian violence among the Hindu and Muslim communities. The film depicts the inception of violence as a consequence of a misunderstanding between the communities; Nathu is unknowingly being led to slaughter a pig, thus desecrating the Muslim sensitivities and eventually disrupting the interreligious peace. The whole narrative of the film is reduced to the 'misunderstanding' between some reactionary religious fanatics. This oversimplification of the unimaginable violence is always how these narratives are formulated to incite the spectators to read history at its most unsophisticated level.

Another significant film on Partition is an adaptation of the celebrated postcolonial work *Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Kushwant Singh. The film, directed

by Pamela Rooks, bears the same title of Singh's novel and follows events in the small fictional village of Mano Majra where a communal riot between the majority Sikhs and minority Muslims takes place when a train arrives from Pakistan containing the slaughtered bodies of Sikhs. An eruption of imminent violence as a motivation to return the 'favour' in the form of a 'train to Pakistan' becomes the narrative plot of the movie. The film, like *Tamas,* circulates around the socio-political reality of the unimpeded forms of horror as the immediate repercussion of Partition. These movies use the tokenized ideological presuppositions of the collective violence equally divided between the religious groups that antagonize each other in the duel for domination. As a result, a dominant-submissive polarization is evolved that recalls the old colonial ideological system which 'perpetuates itself by inducing the colonized, through socioeconomic and psychological rewards and punishments, to accept new social norms and cognitive categories' (Nandy 1983). The Partition narratives in effect transforms the old colonial subjects into a new form where the Hindu-Muslim conflict begins to mimic the colonizer-colonized power struggle.

The complexity of the historicity of Partition prevents anyone from objectively locating the victims and perpetrators of the mass mobilization event. The masterminds behind the political decision are in a position of denial; the event was carried out by a self-motivated mass of segregated individuals who were in fact victims and perpetrators at the same time. Simon Lewis (2019) proposes the term 'border trouble' to define the 'form of cultural trauma that transcends binaries of perpetrator/victim and oppressor/oppressed'. Although the disintegration of the difference between the victim and perpetrator is sceptical (Leys 2000), this historical inaccuracy is an omnipresent predicament that puts the whole process in a state of ambiguity. Yet, the newly created nation state of India transposed the native position of the Indian Muslims into the minority status of refugees. The victimized position of the Indian Muslim is a ubiquitous theme in the narrative mode of Indian cinema. Vic Sarin's *Partition*, a Canadian co-production filmed in both British Columbia and India, portrays the story of a Sikh soldier who protects a seventeen-year-old Muslim girl from the traumatic background of Partition. In imitation of the conventional Holocaust narrative where a Jew is protected or loved by some German, *Partition* emphasizes the inter-religious love affair between the protagonists, the sympathetic approach of humanity transgressing the border politics of national and religious limits, and ultimately the collective hatred subverted by universal love.

This subjugation of the real traumatic past through a narrative that establishes a compassionate and sympathetic interaction between two sectional representatives who ought to be opposing one another, had they not been part of the fictional narrative, problematizes these representations. These narratives that trivialize the traumatic are precisely a forceful assertion of a regulated, suggestive and, more importantly, heavily censored version of historical re-representation. The depiction of a sub-narrative that accentuates the organic unification of the Sikh-Hindu-Muslim communities in *Tamas* is an exception to what it intends to picturize as the social and political displacement of communities, and the dissection of the communal, political and colonial influences affected its development as a transnational event. In fact, the film actually integrates what Rajadhyaksha and Willemen (1998: 225) highlight as the problem of 'individual expressions of human concern that serve sometimes to dilute a notoriously complex historical episode into no more than a conflict between common good and politically motivated bad.' Disguised as a form of reparation to the violent past of India-Pak Partition, these tales disseminate an imposed image of Indian Muslims oblivious to the traumatic past that dislocated and displaced their cultural origins, and in doing so, bombard them with a more discombobulated sense of existence and belonging, which is inconveniently equivalent to obliterating the historical lineage of an entire generation of people.

Memory-Loss: Duality and Ambivalence of the Partitioned Selves

The paradoxical duality of the India-Pakistan Partition lies at the juncture of an historical event that projects itself as 'Independence', much celebrated and narrated upon the cultural memory of the Indian social and political conscience (for a discussion on the role of history in the work of postcolonial filmmakers, see Trandafoiu and Shannon in this volume, who address this issue from the perspective of Egyptian cinema). Even though the simultaneous occurrence of Partition and Independence stands as a reality, the modern pedagogical accounts of history have had a fascination with romanticizing the latter while collectively ignoring the former (Butalia 2000). The nationalistic and patriotic praxis of Bollywood cinema has never posed a threat to the point of re-evaluating this historical moment, particularly with any intentional approach to accommodate the personal and cultural loss into the grand narrative called Indian independence.

For these narrative texts of cinema, the collective trauma of Partition is a memory lost in the labyrinth of historical appropriations and homogenizations. Thus, a theoretical framework incorporating the 'loss of memory' and the 'memory of loss' ascertains the ambivalent position of the partitioned subject as a cultural product of the duality of their existence in a fragmented state of inextricably infused identities and memories.

The politicization of the private domains in Partition cinema is linked with the perception of the gendered nature of violence heightened during the Partition where women's bodies become the site to stage the ideological and communal conflict (Viswanath and Malik 2009). Their bodies are inseparable from the violence of Partition reflected in their loss of homeland, home, family and, eventually, the control over their bodies (Mookerjea-Leonard 2018). Deepa Mehta's *Earth*, released in India as *1947: Earth*, the second instalment of the Elements trilogy (*Fire*, *Earth* and *Water*), dramatizes the Partition politics through the female focal view of picturizing history. Narrated by a young Parsee girl named Lenny, the film tells the tale of Shanta, Lenny's beautiful Hindu Ayah (nanny) who becomes the centre of a triangular romantic relationship including two Muslim men. The melodramatic narrative of the film emphasizes the gradual loss of interreligious friendship and love and the body of Shanta is presented as the epitome of the violence orchestrated in the wake of Partition. The climax of the movie effectively shows a grief-stricken and guilty Lenny who betrayed Shanta to a violent mob. The lament of Lenny and her memory of loss encapsulates the essence of Mehta's film which forcefully acts as a medium to rouse the forgotten memories of loss. This duality of memory – the continuous act of forgetting and reminiscing – plays as a significant theme in the historical narrativization of traumatic events such as Partition.

Earth recalls Partition as the 'largest and most terrible exchange of population known to history'. The film vanishes the displaced body of Shanta into a space of uncertainty where her disappearance delineates the mobilization of bodies and their state of ambiguous existence in the post-Partition era of India and Pakistan. The amount of loss brought by this historical uncertainty of displacement is evident in Lenny's words as she recollects the memory of Shanta at the end of the film: 'that day in 1947 when I lost Ayah, I lost a large part of myself'. The scattering of the partitioned selves of people like Shanta not only demonstrates the loss of their own bodies but the loss of many others who were associated with them. Similar to *Earth*, Chandraprasad Dwivedi's *Pinjar* (The Skeleton) also portrays the

recurring image of a displaced young Hindu girl who gets lost in the middle of Partition. The film follows the abduction of the protagonist Puro by a Muslim man, Rashid, and the following disenfranchisement of her abandoned body. *Pinjar* exemplifies the herd mentality of a collective civilization that categorizes and separates the identity of individuals, which precipitates loss and estrangement. The portrayal of a villainous identity attributed to the Muslim protagonists in films like *Pinjar* and *Earth* suggests the abduction and occupation of a Hindu woman by a Muslim man which subliminally mirrors the 'occupation of the Hindu nation by the Muslim invader' (Sengupta 2019), thus further problematizing the representations of Muslim identities in these films. The success of the Indo-Pakistani film *Khamosh Pani* (2003) in India, which depicts the gendered nature of violence but in the context of Pakistan, can be viewed in contrast with Bollywood's balanced style of filmmaking that mostly ignores these problems (Khan 2009).

The themes of loss and estrangement are central to the *œuvre* of the influential filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak who uses the cinematic medium to represent the historical period of 1947. His Partition trilogy, some of his important films, consist of *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (The Cloud-Capped Star, 1960), *Komal Gandhar* (A Soft Note on a Sharp Scale, 1961) and *Subarnarekha* (1962), all of which examine the varying degrees of the horror of Partition displacement and the social realities of its aftermath. Incentivized by the motivation for the cultural integration of the land, the impediments of 'exile' constitute a structural, linguistic and thematic component of his films (Vahali 2018). In *Subarnarekha*, Ghatak explores the involvement of caste as a significant social reality of the Indian land. The amount of suffering and despair one encounters in *Subarnarekha*, and the unprecedented losses that haunt the physical as well as emotional dispositions of the protagonists, reflect the kind of confused position in which they find themselves lost. *Meghe Dhaka Tara* narrates the tragic story of Nita, the young daughter of a migrant family from Pakistan, and her agonizing life dedicated to the survival of the family. In *Komal Gandhar* all the middle-class protagonists suffer from the torment of separation that invokes a sense of loss about their home on the other side of the border (Mandal 2008). In contrast to Bollywood, Ghatak's films address the refugee problem of the land with a form of frustration that according to him is tantamount to the feeling of reality, assimilating the cultural shock of Partition (Ghatak 1987).

Memory plays an important role in connecting the temporal and spatial coordinates that articulate the social, individual and historical components of a

geographical area. Both the lack and excess of memory can be traumatic as the reality of events is superimposed onto the consciousness of individuals. This duality of memory, its subliminal and concrete forms of presence, is reflected in acts of perceiving the traumatic event of Partition. Mass culture industries like Bollywood cinema thrive on the synthetic recreation of the traumatic memory which Alison Landsberg calls 'prosthetic memory' (2004). The traumatic memory of Partition as represented in the films of Bollywood is not the reproduction of the lived experience that helps to reflect and recreate the entrenched violence of history but the indirect simulation of a fictional one.

Adapting the Fictional Real: Cultural Re-reproduction of the Mythologized Reality

The unfinished business of representing the traumatic experience of Indo-Pak Partition in the gigantic landscape of Bollywood screen has also been revealed as inauthentic and discontinuous. The inability of the cinematic medium to locate the dislocated identities of Indian Muslims is still an unsolved predicament. The filmic community of India is guilty of following a conventional pattern of recycling old methodologies of popular cinema as the material for new spectacles. It is interesting to note that the major films that came out as Partition narratives were all adaptations of various literary works. To name a few examples of such adaptation: *Garm Hava* from an unpublished Urdu short story by Ismat Chugtai; *Tamas* from the novel of the same name by Bhisham Sahni (1973); *Earth* from the novel *Cracking India* (1988) by Bapsi Sidhwa; *Train to Pakistan* from Kushwant Singh's classic postcolonial novel of the same name; *Pinjar* from the 1950 Punjabi novel by Amrita Pritam; and *Midnight's Children* (1981) from Salman Rushdie's famous novel.

Bollywood's fascination with adapting literary works into the visual medium reduces the historical re-representation of Indian Partition into a mere fictional activity of artistic re-reproduction. Reproducing the already fictionalized narrative of historical activity is an imitation of the fictional, thus the realistic portrayal of the same seems an impossible activity. All these Bollywood productions about the Partition, irrespective of how realistically faithful they are to the mother text, are adaptations of the fictionalized real. The reality is fictionalized and re-fictionalized and the process continues indefinitely. This perpetual recycled motion of

fictionalization displaces reality to an unattainable point and the product is a mythologized reality where the subject of the text is in an unreal or hyperreal state. The emanation of the hyperreality is a simulation without having 'a real' as Jean Baudrillard (1994) puts it: 'Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal'.

The hyperreal posits a threat to the conceptual idealizations of the real and its imaginations hence 'sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences' (Baudrillard 1994). The cinematic subject of Indian Muslims in the Partition narratives is the representation of the hyperreal, a mythical image itself, from which the authentic realization of the true identity is lost somewhere in-between the original and the differences of the reproduced fictional real. This in-betweenness is the quintessential quality of Indian Partition narratives that assimilate the experience of the mobilization of Muslims into the narrative structure of its cinematic body. The qualitative in-betweenness of Bollywood narratives can be conflated with the notion of simulacrum which is 'an image without resemblance' (Deleuze 1990), that is, an unoriginal copy.

The historical retelling of the Indo-Pak Partition is an act of problematizing the reality of the past with certain limitations which reveal the very impossibility of the action as a threat. This threat is countered by the postmodern techniques of (de)constructing the reality of events through the construction of an intertextually metafictional text that makes use of the fragmented realities of the past. An example of the postmodern fictionalization of Partition history is witnessed in Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* (1981) and the cinematic adaptation of the text by Deepa Mehta in 2012. The complexity of the historical narrativization deliberately adopted in *Midnight's Children,* the self-reflectivity of the tumultuous events that constitute the grand narrative of Partition, all experienced and witnessed by the protagonist Saleem Sinai who is self-conscious of his fictional identity, shows the possibility of understanding the incomprehensible and presenting the unrepresentable. This attempt is essential in deciphering the elusive nature of the dichotomizations of Hindu-Muslim religiosity, the duality of the nationalistic border politics and the pseudo-textual constructions of ethical, cultural and patriotic discourses of the nation states of India and Pakistan. The demystification of the institutionalized historical narratives of Partition is

tantamount to decentralizing the epistemological prejudices that have been denigrating the Partition subjects for years.

Conclusion

Visualization of India-Pakistan Partition in the filmic narrative of Bollywood problematizes the notion of historical reality of the event of partitioning the Indian subcontinent. The popular Indian cinematic medium is characterized by a lack of authenticity and originality in portraying the monumental 'cultural shock' experienced by the massive population of the Indian subcontinent just before it was cleaved into the two border nations of India and Pakistan. The violence that erupted after 1947 created 'new subjects and subject positions: a fact that in itself necessitates a reconsideration of the standard view of history as a process with an always already given subject' (Pandey 2004). The construction of the new historical subjects is often perceived as the cost of freedom achieved and ratified through the twofold religiously segregated narratives of Hindu and Muslim hatred. Bollywood cinema as a social and cultural text of the newly created national entity of India usually assimilated the dichotomization of the Hindu-Muslim conflict as the natural background of its narrative, collectively neglecting the other side of the grand narrative: the unheard stories and incomplete representations. The anti-Pakistan discourse favoured by the patriotic imaginations of the land, which was successfully translated as a collective anti-Muslim stand, consciously or unconsciously forms the narrative base of the majority of the spectacles of Bollywood.

Bollywood cinema overcomes the anti-Muslim or anti-Hindu accusations by incorporating a subplot that demonstrates religious harmony among the protagonists. The trivialization of the plot – a deliberate attempt to ameliorate the rivalry among the communities and to escape the horrors of censorship – does little to address the real issue of the mass mobilization and displacement of the population during the Partition. The back and forth motion of individuals and families to the land of Pakistan and India completes the polarization put forth by religious segregation and the sectarian violence associated with it. There are numerous films that contextualize the Partition and the themes of identity crisis, estrangement, loss, dislocation, and abduction. Films use the narrative trope of inter-religious love affairs and friendship of families to transcend religious, cultural

and political borders. However, the unique condition of the Muslim subject is still in an ambiguous position that cannot be dissected by the instrument of the dualistic nationalistic border politics.

The narrative of Partition is analogous to the narrative of nation and like any socio-political construct loses its origin in the course of time and becomes a powerful historical idea (Bhabha 1990). The nature of borders that transgress the geographical zones of the national demarcations brings a sense of transnationality between the displaced bodies where their spatial and temporal dimensions are interconnected by collective trauma. Witnessing the traumatic re-representations of the violent past brings a logic of solidarity among the subjects where the ambivalence of their psychological suffering is recapitulated through the 'memory of loss' and 'loss of memory'. The counter-representation of the oppressed selves of the partitioned subjects is an almost impossible task strictly for the reason that the authenticity of their 'true self' is always a fictionalized one. Bollywood cinema repeatedly resorts to the method of adapting fictionalized works to represent the historical accounts of the Partition. The result is a re-representation of the fictionalized real, a hyperreality, that perpetually neutralizes and displaces the original to leave the subject in a spiral of fragmented realities where the differences are constantly recurring.

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CHAPTER 7

Frames, Stereotypes and Authorial Politics
The Transits and Landings of Migrants in Italian Cinema

Gaia Peruzzi, Marco Bruno and Alessandra Massa

Migrants' Journeys in Italian Films: Our Research Field

This chapter aims to develop reflections on the role of cinema in the representation of migration. It starts from the main findings emerging from research on Italian audiovisual productions on this issue, in which more than a hundred works, both films and documentaries, were analysed. The present work will focus on a selected corpus of stories of journeys and landings, in the belief that media narrations of these two phases of the migration experience play a role of particular importance not only in the public and political debate over migrations but also in relation to identity processes in Italy and Europe.

Migration in Italy is a highly debated issue that has been the subject of intense political discussions. The frequent turnover of governments, whether technical or political, over the past twenty years has proved the powerful impact of migration on electoral campaigns and political information, utilizing various channels such as broadcasting and digital media to disseminate the issue to the public and civil society (Greco 2019; Bentivegna et al. 2020). Political debates on the issue often take on an aggressive tone, serving to polarize public opinion. Right-wing and populist parties have turned migration into a defining element of their political platforms. Proposals for managing migration policies have helped to outline political parties' identities and electoral communications. Even the work of nongovernmental or humanitarian organizations engaged in sea rescues has been the subject of polarizing narrative dynamics and frames. However, these organizations have attempted to delineate their specific narratives, sometimes in opposition with political actors (Abbas et al. 2019).

An emblematic case was that of the Sea Watch, a German-flagged NGO ship involved in rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean Sea. In 2019, the vessel's captain, Carola Rakete, refused to dock in Tripoli, considering it an unsafe port for the 53 migrants on board. Due to the Security Decree Bis, signed by then Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini, the ship was formally prohibited from docking in Italy. However, Rakete decided to dock on the island of Lampedusa, Italy, after a two-week standoff. The captain was arrested and released a few days later. This incident revealed the manifest and latent tensions within the Italian political class. The ruling coalition at the time, consisting of the right-wing party Lega Nord, focusing on territorial claims and nationalist border protection, and the populist party MoVimento 5 Stelle, founded by comedian Beppe Grillo, focusing on challenging the political establishment, exhibited contradictory attitudes. Opposition forces, such as the Democratic Party and other left-wing representatives, heavily criticized the government and the inadequacy of current migration policies (Geddes and Pettracchin 2020). The issue has taken on the characteristics of both a domestic and a foreign policy matter. Migration policies often conflict with European policies and directives, which some believe do not align with the needs of citizens and are adverse to Italian interests. After a period of being overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent media coverage (Bruno 2021; Giacomelli et al. 2020), the migration issue has forcefully returned to the political agenda under the right-wing government led by Giorgia Meloni, which took office in September 2022. This resurgence was further fueled by tragic shipwrecks near the Italian coast, such as the one in Cutro, Calabria, on 25–26 February 2023, when at least 94 people are believed to have lost their lives.

Having established the political context of Italy's recent history, we now aim to bring the theoretical and empirical coordinates of our discussion into sharper focus. Firstly, we will examine the reasons that give significance to the cinema–migration linkage and, within it, focus more specifically on transits and landings. We will then provide details about the nature and method of the research, in order to contextualize our analysis.

In discussing the relationship between cinema and migration, we ask: why are cinematographic representations of migrations considered sociologically meaningful? What is interesting in the way this specific medium deals with migrations, particularly the migrants' journeys and their landing in Italy? What can films tell us about phenomena and problems that the news media have been reporting on for years and on a daily basis? The scientific literature has amply

demonstrated that, in contemporary democracies, media representations of migrations have crucial political and social importance, because they contribute to public opinion formation and the emergence of political agendas.[1] In answering the above questions, we therefore take this premise as a given, while focusing specifically on the medium of film.

In comparison with other current media, the distinctive characteristics of the cinematographic work may be summarized in the following manner: firstly, films are industrial publishing products that, in order to be made, require summoning the efforts of highly qualified professional figures; secondly, they come into being for (ideally) public enjoyment; thirdly, if historic and fantasy works are excluded, most cinematographic narrations, even when they are invented stories, are based upon representations of actual social contexts that resemble reality. In addition, films are extended narrations, among the longest of those circulating in the contemporary digitalized media landscapes. Finally, the film text is based on the image, and on the relationship between image and word. In the authors' opinion, the analysis of these elements can delineate the perimeter of meaning within which we assess the role of cinema in dealing with current events like migrations.

While the first three characteristics make cinema similar to the information media (news journalism, to be precise), the last two (the length and complexity of storytelling and the predominance of the image) are those that distinguish film in the media landscape. Every film is a highly dense stock of stories, conversations, and images that, in being shown, propose socially constructed and historically situated cross sections of reality. In this sense, cinema is accorded a privileged relationship with modernity, which places it – albeit in a non-central position – beside the information media in the narration of social issues. With respect to these media, the distinctive force of cinema lies in the fact that the narrative modes of film, engrossing and immersive as they are, aim to touch the sphere of emotions, and to trigger feelings. In the construction of popular imageries, the audiovisual text combines reason and pathos; where journalism tends towards objectivity and impersonality, cinema, without abandoning the impression of realism, can allow itself to explicitly involve the viewer in different perspectives. It can allow the point of view of the 'other', of the 'different' – in our case, of the migrant – to be adopted. It is a practice we know as the Achilles' heel of Western mainstream information, which continues to tell the story of migrants as *Other* than us, the native, white, (male), well-to-do Westerners. The reason for the interest in the cinema–migration pairing lies essentially in this potential

subversiveness of narrative cinema. The attraction between the two (cinema and migration) is also exemplified by the number of sub-genres used in the literature to refer to films recounting stories of migrants and migrations: accented, exilic, diasporic, postcolonial, ethnic, hyphenated identity, intercultural, transnational (Naficy 2001; Loshitzky 2010; see also the Introduction to this volume). It is precisely the central nature of the diaspora and its associated social, cultural and political issues, along with the realistic style and recurring tensions between tradition and modernity, that were recognized as one of the distinctive features of European cinema.

Having confirmed the central significance of the cinematographic narration of migrations, we approach the specific theme of our investigation: why focus on the representation of transits and landings? Sociologically and narratively, the passage itself and the landing in a foreign land are the most interesting phases of the journey. The narration of the transit is in fact the account of the migrants' strength, will and hope, an account of their uncertainties and of the dangers they are fleeing from and are exposed to. Portraying the crossing may be considered an act of listening to migrants, and to their fears and dreams. On the other hand, the narration of the landing is the account of the meeting with the host society. Aside from whether the movie camera is the protagonist's eye or the director's external gaze, the depiction of the arrival contains the host country's reaction. A film on arriving in Italy is a counter analysis of our own and Europe's reaction to contemporary migrations (Sayad 1999).

If this may be considered generally true for all migration stories, the decision to select Italian films which narrate landings of migrants also responds to considerations of politics and current events, as already established in the opening part of this chapter. Positioned in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, Italy is a strategic gateway to Europe. The cases of Lampedusa and of the landings denied to the ships of humanitarian NGOs (Open Arms, Sea-Watch3) have made it one of the focal places symbolizing migrants' journeys of hope. Alongside the Port of Calais, the island of Lesbos, the Lipa camp, the Alpine passes and Viktor Orbán's wall, the Italian coastline has been for years one of the open wounds in Europe's conscience.

To study the representation of arrivals in Italian film discourse therefore means intertwining studies on media and migration with border studies, but also with solidarity studies. In dealing with a Europe that looks more and more like a 'borderland' (Balibar 2009), these emerging strands of research raise questions

about the new phenomena of criminalization of solidarity and politicization of groups and clashes (Giliberti and Potot 2021). In the face of an unprecedented evolution in state/citizens/foreigners relations, the intersection between political sociology, the sociology of migrations, and sociology of the media appears – as Andrea Pogliano has noted – to be a necessity (Pogliano 2017).

In conclusion to this introductory part, we dedicate these final lines to illustrating the objectives and nature of the research conducted, before we embark on developing our main reflections on the representation of migrations in Italian films. Our corpus of reference consists of more than one hundred film texts based on stories of migrants and migrations, produced or co-produced in Italy, and collected between 2012 and 2020.[2] More specifically, the corpus comprised: films about the journey of migrants from Italy, made from the beginning of the twentieth century to today; films about Italy as a migratory destination and about immigration to Italy, made during the last thirty years; and documentaries on the crossing to Italy, made over the last two decades. For this chapter, for the reasons already explained, we have concentrated on films telling the stories of journeys and landings, with a thematic analysis focusing on the recurring and/or particularly significant themes in the representation of migrant transits and landings. The hypothesis at the basis of this technique is that the repetition of certain aspects in the representation of a subject, by numerous authors, can reveal deep-seated structures of the imaginary of an era. These frames and frameworks of meaning become receptacles for symbolic materials, such as stories, images and labels, which are consistently consolidated through repetition, thus becoming powerful models for the attribution of established meanings (Gamson 1992; Bruno 2014; Peruzzi and Lombardi 2020). Consequently, this chapter compares texts of dramas and documentaries to reflect upon the role of authorial politics, an area still underexplored in the current literature.

Italian Cinema and the Frames of Journeys and Landings

Framing is a fertile device for any analysis on media representations of reality and, in particular, those defined in terms of diversity (Bruno and Peruzzi 2021; Binotto and Bruno 2021). Framing though acquires an additional dimension of meaningfulness when the focus is on cinema, a phenomenon which can be credited to the relationship that cinema has with the imaginary. An analysis of the

imaginary is therefore fundamental to understanding how each frame can function by constructing representations that are concrete and rich, realistic and full of references to symbols, myths, and 'cultural resonance' (Gamson 1992). Like much of the media system, the imaginary performs the dual and only apparently contradictory function of showing (but also expressing tensions and conflicts) while at the same time guiding the imagination, crystallizing and in certain ways limiting it to 'large blocks of meaning' (Ilardi 2010: 21). On the other hand, the frames are constructed as common sense: every new example, by belonging in that frame, is automatically deemed truer and more significant for those who know and are recognized in the frame, thus appearing 'already known'. The use of myths reinforces the imaginary and at the same time endows it with concreteness, providing a symbolic and narrative framework. Myths are consequently inserted into common sense by making them appear 'naturally' linked to the imaginary.

Of the various topics, the theme of the journey seems most able to be configured as an autonomous and direct frame producing imagery in addition to common sense. As already discussed, with the term 'journey' we also indicate the journey's wider dimension relating to transits, the places traversed by movements, the interruptions and reorganization of trajectories, and so on. The theme of the journey is, in fact, implied in every representation of migrations, and this can only be the case for cinema too, given the narrative and pathemic value this topos has for all stories. From mythology to adventure literature and the audiovisual (in cinema, the 'road movie' has nearly acquired autonomy as a 'genre'), the journey makes it possible to explore the characters' reactions to the stories, to define their existential changes, and to track the coordinates of a before, during and after in which physical displacement is also and always an existential movement.

In this sense, the selection of the issue of the journey and the analysis of its sociocultural articulations in the cinema dealing with migrations nearly takes on the outlines of a tautology. The various aspects and materials of film that can be explicitly considered here are only a subset of those potentially called into question. In fact, from certain standpoints, every film that deals even vaguely with migrations (from and to Italy, in our case) has something to say about the dimension of the journey; the selection made here will, by necessity, be partial, to say the least.

To overcome this epistemological problem,[3] the reflection is organized around two specific subcategories of the more general dimension of the journey. These two subcategories will, in our analysis, constitute the frames that, to us, appear

most prevalent and capable of defining the coordinates of the representation of migrations in Italian fiction cinema: 1) the journey as physical and at the same time existential displacement, and 2) the sea as an icon of crossing.

The Frame of the Journey as Physical and Existential Displacement

The theme of the journey permeates much of Italian filmmaking on migrations which, to a certain point, has begun taking an interest in the issue from the perspective of immigration and no longer with reference to Italian emigration, in what has been defined as 'the new migrant Italian cinema' (Schrader and Wrinkler 2013: 8). In fact, during the 1990s, and thus about twenty years after Italy had reversed its migration balance,[4] immigration finally became a theme of Italian filmmaking. At that initial moment, the productions were few and disconnected from one another. Titles of note included *Tomato* (Michele Placido 1990), *Un'altra vita* (Carlo Mazzacurati 1992), and *Lamerica* (Gianni Amelio 1994) – an output that enjoyed international success. In these films, we can already see the first signs of an engaged cinema (Schrader and Wrinkler 2013: 8) that seeks to ally itself in favour of immigration while, at the same time and in order to reach a wider public, including references to the classics of genre cinema as well as the history of Italian filmmaking (ibidem). Placido's *Tomato* is a paradigm for this in more than one sense, showing, in a development reminiscent of a classic 'road movie', the journey of Kwaku (Thywill Amenia), a Ghanian medical school graduate, from Southern Italy to Germany.

More recently, a more dramatic – or melodramatic (Schrader and Wrinkler 2013) – direction was taken explicitly with *Una volta che sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2005) and with *La sconosciuta* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 2006). In all these films, the dimension of the journey is explored by relying on various archetypical representations. From this standpoint, one may cite (in order to introduce cinema dealing with Italian emigration into the reflection as well) a film like *Il cammino della speranza* (Pietro Germi, 1950), which already contained many of the elements characterizing the body of films under analysis.

Through the way it is represented and introduced into a narrative, the journey (in its spatial sense) is transformed into an existential dislocation, a dislocation in emotion and feelings, in the same way that the boundaries that are crossed are not only physical and geographical, but also psychological, metaphorical, social, and cultural (Leed 1992; Naficy 2001). One may say that they are also 'political' in

nature, since the very idea of 'boundary', or the experiences of dislocation, of migration, of nomadism, and of crossing those very boundaries, call political configurations into question while rearticulating social and cultural ones (Capussotti 2009; Connolly 2010).

In cinema (as in literature), the topoi relating to the journey therefore take on great importance, and often mobilize certain mythological or epic journeys that, in certain aspects, represent something quite close to 'cultural universals' (even though they often regard the cultural and religious substratum of the West especially). As proof, consider the expulsion from Eden, the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, and their search for the Promised Land (Naficy 2001), wherein that Promised Land is another topos of great relevance in filmmaking about migrations.

Spaces of Journey and Arrival: The Sea as an Icon of the Crossing

The analysis of the Italian films dealing with migrations places substantial emphasis on the dimension of the arrival (and, by extension, of entry) into Italian territory. The arrival is substantiated through an iconic presence of the maritime and coastal setting – a presence that, in reality, and also from a visual standpoint, is nearly never central in terms of the spaces in which the events and settings are played out. In fact, Berger and Winkler (2012: 66), referring to the film production of Southern Europe (Italy, France and Spain), assert that 'although the Mediterranean Sea is often used to introduce the action or to close a film, the *Mare Nostrum* itself is strikingly absent as space of action' in the proper sense of the word. Even in a film like *Una volta sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2005), which presents the sea as one of the expanses that leave the greatest impression (starting from the poster), and which has the original narrative device of the young son of a Northern industrialist falling into the sea and being rescued by a migrant boat, the Mediterranean is not exactly configured as the space of the film's action. The Mediterranean, rather, is a space of passage, a place of transition, as are all the coasts of Southern Italy.

In *Terraferma* (Emanuele Crialese, 2011), the visual force of the scenes presents us with a sea that is the counterbalance to the landing, to the island, and in specific terms to the *terra ferma*. The land, on the other hand, is fixed and bound to its traditions, divided between welcoming tourists and the arriving migrants and their stories (like that of Sara and her very young son, brought to that landing from Africa). It is an island where the Puccillo family appears to move in search for its

own space for expression, and in some way for its own 'elsewhere'. Crialese's careful and rigorous exploration is not only aesthetic, but clearly presents the antinomies of immigration, the tension between the prospect for security and the 'law of the sea', between the past and a present to be deciphered, between the wellbeing of tourists and the aspirations of those who, to different degrees and in different ways, experience the diverse peripheries of the 'hyper-civilized' world. Here, the sea surrounds the island, dictating its rhythms as in an eternal present. But at the same time, in responding to new emergencies and the inhabitants' aspirations, it envelopes it, seeming to trap the island in some way.

The presence of the sea relates above all to the cinema on immigration to Italy, rather than the representation of immigration from Italy. *Nuovomondo* (Emanuele Crialese, 2006), not coincidentally a modern film dealing with a topos of Italian filmmaking like emigration, presents a major exception. The sea takes on a very central placement in *Nuovomondo*, conveying the dimension of danger, of confrontation with the sea (an extraneous and at times terrifying element), while also focusing on the ship that, by carrying the travellers, becomes the bearer of change and of transformation for (even) relationships. In *Nuovomondo*, 'in the memorable scene of the departure from the port, the sea slowly and inexorably insinuates itself between those who stay on land, on the dock, and those standing on the ship's deck, who have embarked: the image is that of a humanity that is dumbfounded, compact, and silent, lacerated by the unknown that separates hope from poverty' (Corrado and Mariottini 2013: 113). The journey towards the new world is thus clearly an existential one, and this setting of the sea (the fluid place of passage and transit, which is also enveloping) is transfigured into the dimension of dreams: the most important example of this is the famous scene of this journeying humanity swimming in milk – a scene that, with visual force, delivers a surreal and highly allegorical dimension to the reflection on the stories of our migrants. 'I don't know how to swim, but I would gladly swim in a river of milk!' says the protagonist Salvatore, dreamily.

The Migrants' Journeys: Spatial, Temporal, and Relational Trajectories in Documentary Narratives

The documentaries dealt with in this section were selected taking into account the central narrative nucleus (for further discussion of the role of documentaries on

migration in the context of the relationship between journalism and narrative fiction, see Campanioni in this volume). The discussion will explore those documentaries that represent migrations which have the Mediterranean Sea as their setting and principal route. This choice makes it possible to examine more deeply how documentary production helps to crystallize the theme of the journey within a symbolic spatial arc that depicts the *Mare Nostrum* as a central node of extra-European movements, whereas what takes place on the coasts and on the Sicilian islands acts as an access point while awaiting much-sought entry towards other European destinations.[5] This selection critically inserts documentary production within the mainstream narrations of migrations, which the literature describes as prevailingly focused on the arrivals of migrants by sea, on travelling routes laden with imagery for the building of Otherness and on the processes of othering (Said 1978) places such as Africa or the Middle East (Binotto, Bruno and Lai 2016).

In Italy, documentary production tends to be characterized by a 'new canon' (Hipkins and Renga 2016) defined by a trend towards ethical commitment. Migrations are part of an active and innovative production devoted to political issues and to the representation of persons traditionally placed at the margins (Angelone and Clò 2011). These forms of *cinema engagé* deliver images of social change, and include imageries and public debate figures traditionally underrepresented in mainstream media. The documentary production analysed here may therefore be read by virtue of the proposition of a reality more realistic than certain journalistic representations: the theme of the journey is treated in emblematic fashion. Hardships, difficulties, meetings and separations are part of a symbolic account in which the intentions of raising awareness clearly appear. In reconstructing the main thematic nodes emerging from our analysis of the documentaries, we focus on specific categories that contribute towards placing the account of journeys and landings into narrative paths. We then aim to illustrate the journey in time, in space, and as relational practice.

As for time, it bears considering both the historic dimension to which the migrants' journeys as a collective experience belong, and the temporal variable that describes the journey's 'before and after' in the individual accounts. The documentaries taken into consideration tend to emphasize the now 'routine' nature of sea voyages. At the same time, documentary representation helps to reveal how the public responses to these phenomena fall within the characteristics of a supposed exceptionalism that still describes the migrants' journey as an

ahistorical and therefore universal account. There are, then, no allusions to long-term dynamics. When the migrations are historicized, this is done through the outlining of certain parallelisms that refer to local experiences. In *Come il peso dell'acqua*, a 2014 documentary directed by Andrea Segre, the historicization of the phenomena is functional for underscoring the communality of experiences. The relationship between the difficult Italian emigrations that marked the history of the twentieth century and the needs of the migrants landing on Italy's coasts is constructed through the lyricism exemplified by the theatrical reading of Giovanni Pascoli's poem *Italy*.

The migrants' life stories are immobilized in the limbo of the landings. The documentary storytelling does not always recount the journey's 'before'. At the same time, the life stories of the migrants – in the rare cases in which they are given room to speak – are almost never articulated in the steps after arrival. The space in which the journeys are made tends to privilege a representation where routes that do not 'make' imagery come into being. The selection of documentaries analysed here, in fact, is emblematic of the narrative force of the sea voyages, which end up summarizing the entire experience of the migratory flows. Although some of the migrations ending in Italian territory originate from Europe (Caritas and Migrantes Report 2020), or see Italy as a first step towards reaching other destinations, the narratives remain focused on the sea voyage, omitting the intermediate steps preceding the embarkation. This mode of representation – which, at times, does not hesitate to rely on the logic of the emergency – may typically be found in the frames relating to journalistic storytelling. As the sociologist Maurizio Ambrosini (2020) notes, the mediation of migratory phenomena by the mainstream media contributes towards emphasizing the divergence between reality and its representation. In journalistic representations, this is dictated by a complex set of factors, which range from journalistic routines to the processes of simplification and stereotyping, as well as to images of the various publics' interests in the abstractions of the newsrooms. However, it is peculiar that these 'simplified' representations also find correspondence in documentaries. A partial exception is the documentary *Come il peso dell'acqua,* in which the playwright Marco Paolini – famed for his commitment to civil theatre through which he brought to Italian theatres representations relating to moments critical to the country's history, like the terrible Vajont tragedy – moves physically within a large map rebuilt in the studio, marking, with the aid of graphic representations, the multitude of routes leading to the journey in the

Mediterranean. The routes are inspired by the testimony of three women, the linchpin of the documentary: Gladys, who, from Ghana, reaches Saba, from which she embarks for Italy; Nasreen, a Syrian exile whose journey starts in Egypt; and Semar, who begins her journey in Eritrea. The interposed mediation of the map only shows the arbitrariness of boundaries and borders, and consequently of the alternating fortunes of the destinies that depend on them.

On the other hand, the space of the landings exemplifies the intertwinement between global and local; the Sicilian islands are the scene for the dynamics of glocalism. These areas are peripheral and marginal with respect to the continental dimension, but central for the points of intersection originating from the global south. In *Fuocoammare*, directed by Gianfranco Rosi and presented in 2016 at the 66th edition of the Berlin International Film Festival,[6] it is the linguistic evidence that marks the various territorial divergences and the social position of the individuals within them. Thus, Samuele, the film's young protagonist, uses Sicilian dialect as the language of personal affection and childhood games, while the migrants at immigration centres speak fluent English. Pietro Bartolo, a physician on the island and the point of linkage between migrants and native inhabitants, is the only one among the characters who speaks a 'standard' Italian (Orrù 2017). Although the alternating linguistic registers are a consequence of the realism sought by the film's director, who spent a year on the island of Lampedusa to grasp their rhythms and gain insights, one cannot help noticing that, in the editing, these registers have performed a narrative function. Samuele speaks English only when forced to by study, while watched over by his grandmother in the kitchen of his home where he reads a passage on Christopher Columbus and the conquest of America, with the focus turning to what was stolen from the Native Americans (it appears superfluous to detail the numerous streams of expression that arise from this choice – from the sea voyage to the rights of native people and the oppression by the wealthiest); and again, under the guidance of his teacher at school, symbolizing an external pressure towards globalization.

The migrants' journey may also be read as a powerful device revealing the relational dispositions towards those whom we manage to see as Others, and who intersect family relationships, interactions with civil society, and the encounters/clashes with bureaucracy. On the one hand, a dimension prevails that assesses the journeys as significant for the processes of dialogue with the native society. The depiction of the bureaucratization of borders provides the image of flows of migration joining mechanical, depersonalized flows. The long queues of migrants

in Lampedusa, the encoded relationships with institutions, and the daily routine of handling the reception of migrants, show the landings as encoded operations managed by professionals. At the same time, this standardization can only confirm the 'anomalous' nature of migrations: while the ordinary, encoded practices suggest a certain ability to handle the phenomenon, now currently inserted into the routine of island landings, some symbolic elements of the representations do not appear equally reassuring. What emerges, forcefully, is the 'quantitative' dimension of the migrations: migrants are often depicted in queues, awaiting support from institutions; the immigration centres are always overflowing, while the personnel dedicated to identifying the migrants are always swamped with work.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the migrants, and the outcomes of their journeys, are functional to the representation of the Other (in context). These representations appear at times to settle upon the figure of the 'good migrant'. The journeys are nearly always motivated by the stories and needs of family redemption; the forms of socialization with the native inhabitants are for the most part asymmetrical, since they are guided by principles of solidarity, but at times with notes of paternalism. The dimension of work and commitment exemplifying the functional relationship with the native reality absorbs any form of individualistic expression of the migrants' identities. It also bears pointing out that the management of the integration relationships is marked by the opposition between civil society and the family. This tension intercepts a leitmotiv of the Italian films on migration (Gianturco and Peruzzi 2015).

If institutions are present prevalently at the time of entry, it is up to the individuals – and to their consciences – to contribute towards reception. Quite often, this is interpreted as part of 'doing the right thing', also by opposing a restrictive regulatory dimension. An example of this is described in *Mohamed e il pescatore*, a documentary filmed by Marco Leopardi in 2007, in the space of passage where it is the law of the sea, with its ethics of behaviour, that prevails over legislative restrictions. The story of Mohamed has something of the unbelievable to it, yet at the same time it is rendered common by the tragic accounts of recent years: the youth, having held on to a floating board for a week, is the only survivor of the 47 shipwrecked people who had travelled with him. Many vessels had approached the wreck, but only the one belonging to Vito, a Sicilian fisherman, stopped to provide assistance. Vito sees Mohamed as a son, to the point of calling him back from France, where the youth had gone to stay with some relatives, in

order to teach him the fishing trade, and in the end bringing him into his family. This story exemplifies how the empathic, individual bond, clashes with and/or integrates the institutional dimension, creating a daily routine (as in the scenes where the migrants are seated at the table with the family at mealtimes) marked by persistent reduction to 'procedure' and to the depersonalization of guests and hosts alike. It bears noting, however, that the reception of migrants into the family network is a theme found especially in the most dated productions of the *corpora*, while the film texts closest in time privilege a collective, ensemble dimension of migrations and of the dynamics of welcoming, by including the migrations within a systemic and social gaze.

Final Remarks

This chapter discusses how cinema plays a significant role in the representation of migrations. In our study, we use over a hundred films and documentaries to explore how media narratives shape public opinion and political agendas regarding migration. Industrial production, mass consumption, adherence to reality, extended storytelling, and imagery and words make films a unique form of communication. Placed at a strategic crossroads, Italy is particularly important for migrant journeys into Europe, so transits and landings have a special significance.

Examining Italian cinema and its representations of journeys and landings reveals the critical role that framing plays in media representations, especially regarding diversity. In cinematic narratives, the journey holds a special place, encompassing physical and existential displacement. Characters' reactions, existential changes, and the before, during, and after of their experiences can all be explored during the journey. Additionally, the sea is a powerful symbol of the tension between security and the law of the sea, tradition and modernity, tourist wellbeing and migrant aspirations. There is a strong focus on the sea in documentaries, too. Documentaries focusing on the Mediterranean Sea as a central migration route provide significant insights into migrants' journeys and landings. With a commitment to ethics and a tendency toward political activism, Italian documentary production portrays marginalized people and social change in a realistic and engaging manner. It is through the space of landings, especially the Sicilian islands, that we are able to observe the interaction between the global and the local. Glocal dynamics in these areas are characterized by convergences

of the Global South and European continental dimensions. In conclusion, this study highlights the multifaceted nature of cinematic representations of migration and their contribution to shaping narratives, perceptions, and discussions about this complex and evolving issue.

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Notes

1. The bibliography on the issue is vast. For an up-to-date critical overview of the international literature on the subject, see Bruno and Peruzzi (2020).
2. For a detailed description of the research project, see Gianturco and Peruzzi (2015).
3. For an examination of some of the epistemological and methodological implications of the sociological approach to the issue of the journey, see Toscano (1996) and Gianturco (2000).
4. Immigration is often seen as a relatively recent phenomenon in Italy, especially when compared with the seasons of prevailing emigration; however, the migration balance reversed – that is, immigrants began outnumbering emigrants – in 1973.
5. In keeping with the choices of method that were described in the previous section, the discussion will focus on a selection of documentaries able to suggest narrative trends. The documentaries, then, were selected by assessing the homogeneity of the setting and of the migration routes. This section will concentrate on the following film texts: *Come il peso dell'acqua* (Andrea Segre, 2014); *Fire at Sea* (Gianfranco Rosi, 2016); *Lontano dagli occhi*

(Domenico Iannaccone and Luca Cambi, 2016); *Mohamed e il pescatore* (Marco Leopardi, 2007); *U stissu sangu/Lo stesso sangue* (Francesco Di Martino, 2009).

6. Rachel Johnson (2020) maintains that the case of *Fuocoammare* is emblematic not only of a particular, 'brutal' realism that is the mark of some recent works of Italian cinema – including both documentaries and drama (one title for everyone: *Gomorra*, Matteo Garrone, 2008) – with major overseas circulation, but also of the framing that presentation at film festivals confers on these works. Presentations, synopses, interviews, and public declarations relating to the film have contributed towards reinforcing the imaginary of humanitarian commitment in the account of the migrations shown on film.

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'I Am Not Here to Just Be *En Vogue*'

Talking about the Politics of Dislocated Filmmaking, the Clarity of the 'Third Eye' and Having a Place in Your Country's Film Memory with Egyptian-British Director Khaled El Hagar

Ruxandra Trandafoiu and Roger Shannon

This chapter emerges from two interviews conducted by Roger and Ruxandra with Egyptian-British director Khaled El Hagar. Khaled El Hagar's career debuted in the United Kingdom in 2000 with the feature film *Room to Rent*. At the time, producer and film professor Roger Shannon was Head of Production at the British Film Institute (BFI), a period during which he championed the work of migrant filmmakers in the UK, like Khaled El Hagar. Trained at the National Film and Television School (NFTS) in the UK and now an A-list director in the Arabic market, El Hagar continues to draw inspiration from his life and work in-between his two homes in Cairo and Birmingham. As the interview transcripts (in the Postscript to this volume) reveal in quite a lot of detail, the educational and professional experiences acquired in Egypt and then the UK are intertwined and inseparable, as far as his life and craft are concerned. As El Hagar himself recognizes, while his film narratives are shaped and coloured by his Egyptian roots, his themes are deliberately controversial, stemming from his love of creative freedom cultivated during his time in England. The braiding of intercultural experiences also gave El Hagar's work a certain robustness. Omar Kholeif, who wrote about El Hagar's 'sexual dissidence', which has occasionally been a point of criticism in his native Egypt, described him thus:

> El Hagar, which translates roughly as 'The Rock', is an apt moniker considering the sheer resilience that the filmmaker has had to endure in order to continue producing narrative pictures. His films have been banned, censored and the filmmaker himself has survived a period of exile from Egypt after his graduation film A Gulf Between Us (1991) was shown to an Egyptian audience in 1995, instigating a media stir. (Kholeif 2012: 68)

Consequently, Roger and Ruxandra's interviews with Khaled El Hagar pay credit to two of El Hagar's most important achievements. On the one hand, El Hagar is part of a generation of filmmakers that have revitalized European cinema by imbuing it with migrant, diasporic and 'cross-cultural' experiences, mixed with non-Western 'aesthetic paradigms' and narratives (Berghahn and Stenberg 2010a: 2). As Roger Shannon wrote previously, 'it is the depth and the range of his [El Hagar's] films that resonate with audiences, as he shuttles between cultures and genres with an ease and a versatility, taking in comedies, dance films, popular musicals and contemporary dramas with a social cutting edge, and all filmed with Khaled's palate of "kitsch bazaar"' (Shannon 2007). On the other hand, the impact of El Hagar's work is felt in bringing Egyptian and Arab audiences closer to considering uncomfortable subjects, such as Arab–Israel relations glimpsed through intercultural love (*A Gulf Between Us*, 1994), migration, identity and homosexuality (*Room to Rent*, 2000), sectarian divisions (*Lust*, 2010), the burden of history and the nature of power (*Sins of the Flesh*, 2016) and identity and trans rights in El Hagar's ongoing projects. Kholeif thus credits El Hagar with a 'shift in what is normative and non-normative minority representation' (2012: 71) in Arab culture.

This chapter discusses some of these key themes through a detailed exploration of El Hagar's positionality as a dislocated filmmaker, at the interface between African, Middle Eastern and European cultures and cinemas. It achieves this by quoting from two interviews conducted in 2013 and 2022. As already mentioned, the full transcripts are available in the Postscript to this book. This approach is inspired by the work Sarah Cardwell and others conducted for the Television Series published by Manchester University Press. Based on interviews with top writers and showrunners in the UK, among which Andrew Davies (Cardwell 2014), these texts not only explored authorship in the television industry, but also brought together the insights of academics and practitioners to explore media practices in connection to screen content and audiences. Andrew Davies had already been the subject of two interviews published, as transcripts, in 2007 (Cartmell and Whelehan 2007: 239–51), that sought to better understand processes of adaptation. Trandafoiu, together with Carol Poole, continued this trend while interviewing screen producer Julia Stannard about her approach and practice while working on classic text to screen adaptations (see Poole and Trandafoiu 2020; Trandafoiu and Poole 2021). In this chapter, Ruxandra and Roger continue to expand on the idea that creative practice is best understood through a fruitful dialogue between those researching screen cultures and film and television

makers, an approach which also has the advantage of producing new insights into industry practices that go beyond those established by British cinema. In this chapter we also want to return to the concept of adaptation – cultural and social – as it is circumscribed and illuminated by dislocated filmmaking.

'You Can See the Truth. You Are the Third Eye'

Writing in 1903, American sociologist W.E.B. du Bois asked, 'How does it feel to be a problem?' (Du Bois 2018: 8). Du Bois defined 'this sense of always looking of at one's self through the eyes of others' (Du Bois 2018: 9) as 'double consciousness', a powerful depiction of the Black experience in the United States. Over the next one hundred years, 'double consciousness' was appropriated and applied to diverse experiences of many individuals or groups who live with identity doubleness or twoness, at the intersection of at least two discourses and experiences, and often from a minority position, as subaltern subjects. In this chapter we rely on this wider understanding of 'double consciousness' as the lived experience of being both 'us' and 'other'.

For filmmakers like Khaled El Hagar, who have experienced migration and dislocation, such experiences are entirely familiar. Becoming a 'problem' in his own country due to Egypt's censorship laws and fearing being drafted into the army at the time of the first Iraq War, Khaled El Hagar and his wife Janice Rider, a costume designer, moved to Birmingham. Living in-between two cultural spaces had certain advantages, but it also brought about a feeling of alienation, an ambiguity. As El Hagar recounts:

> You always have a second home; you always see the two countries from a distance. I am equally involved in the two countries, but I can always escape. I remember meeting once a young Indian filmmaker and he said, 'You always have another country, you can always run from England to Egypt or the other way around, when there is no work, for example, or the situation changes' and I think it's true. It makes you unique or strange in both countries, you are always looked upon as the outsider from both sides.

Du Bois's 'double consciousness' encapsulates the notion that an uncomfortable identity position leads to acuity of vision or 'consciousness'. Rejection and

alienation are partially offset by heightened and critical observation and understanding. Postcolonial and diasporic theory further elaborates du Bois's duality into a triad to better signal this questionable positivity. The 'Third Space' (Bhabha 1994) of postcolonial theory thus transforms the interstitial space of opposition and conflict, typical of the Black experience in the United States, into one of 'translation', 'a place of hybridity', of '*negotiation* rather than *negation*' (Bhabha 1994: 37, emphasis in the original), more relevant to migrant experiences in Europe. Thus, the unique perspective of a complex (doubled or in-between) positionality gives rise, in El Hagar's own view, to a rich imaginary that leads to inspiration and new ways of working and creating:

> *I think both experiences feed each other but moving to England opened for me a new way of thinking through meeting new people and encountering a different cinema. That had a big impact. Returning to Egypt meant returning to a place I was familiar with. For the first five years I was thinking differently from everybody around me. I still had this idea of freedom from England – you can do what you want – but then sadly I discovered I couldn't do that. You must work trying to find your way between the lines. But my first few years back in Egypt were quite daring for Egypt and the reason for that was my experience in England.*

The 'new way of thinking' El Hagar reflects on is equivalent to the new ways of seeing reflected in theories of dislocation. It is fed by 'double exposure', defined as 'a superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life' (Boym 2001: xiv). In film theory this vision is called 'diasporic optic' and described as a 'visual grammar that seeks to capture the dislocation, disruption and ambivalence' typical to transnational lives (Moorti 2003: 359). 'Double exposure' or 'diasporic optic' translates alienation into acuity. As El Hagar explains, 'because I see from a third perspective, I notice what's dangerous and what's good at the same time in either context.' This optic is characterized by the 'desire to inhabit many places' and therefore is 'a sideways glance rather than as a backwards look', 'simultaneously familiar, alien, domestic, national and transnational' (Moorti 2003: 359). El Hagar's description is more powerful, in that his redefinition of Moorti's 'diasporic optic' as a 'third eye' better reflects the importance of 'seeing' in cinema: 'I think it's important because when you write you write with a third brain, you are not that involved in all the propaganda, be it in

Egypt or in England, and you can see the truth. You are the third eye.' The concept of the 'third eye' and embodying the 'third eye' informs El Hagar's filmmaking aesthetic, as well as his understanding of the filmmaker's role in history, on which he reflects further on. It also connects to the familiar category of 'Third Cinema', which is discussed in the Introduction to this book.

'I Need to Work; I Don't Need to Dream'

Living in-between Egypt and England inevitably resurrects the spectre of colonial legacies. The 'Third Space' is a contested concept specifically because it can be seen in negative terms, as an attempt by the colonizer to rewrite the identity of the colonized. In failing to achieve this deletion of identity, the colonizer produces a 'Third Space' of hybridity, which Bhabha (1994) chooses to see as a negotiation, despite the power imbalance at play. Yet, as Ponzanesi reminds us, 'spaces of otherness, neither here nor there', which 'are simultaneously physical and mental' (Ponzanesi 2012: 677), are established through a continuous dialogue with colonial practices. They are what Foucault (1984) called *des espaces autres*, heterotopias that recreate simultaneous inclusion and exclusion (Ponzanesi 2012: 677–78). This ambivalence between opportunity and encountering specific barriers permeates El Hagar's work, but also defines his personal and professional experiences.

El Hagar's comments on his encounters with racism, working as a young but ambitious filmmaker in the UK, feed thus into his observations about the politics of perception within the film industry. Despite the assumed transnationalization and cosmopolitanization of working practices in film and television, historical legacies of inequality loom large. They circumscribe El Hagar's depiction of his attempts to negotiate cultural differences among the French and British financiers of his feature film *Room to Rent* (2000), a story of love and immigration set in London, which features an Egyptian screenwriter (played by Saïd Taghmaoui) as its main character:

> I think that in the beginning there was a lot of misunderstanding about Arab culture. In England people are more aware of Indian culture because they grow up with an Indian corner shop. For the British financiers, Arab culture was a bit further away, they didn't understand the Arab theme. The French do understand

it, because they have six million Arabs or more, so it's part of their culture, like Indian culture here is part of British culture. I think the French understood easily what I wanted to talk about; the British were trying to translate everything to how they think about Arabs, not to how Arabs think.

Filmmakers have always engaged, to some extent, in practices of mobility, but mobilities between what are still seen as the 'centres' and 'peripheries' of the filmmaking industries tend to reproduce old colonial hierarchies. This perpetuated power imbalance is evident in El Hagar's professional experiences after *Room to Rent*. Despite accumulating positive reviews and numerous prizes at international film festivals, El Hagar struggled to find further similar opportunities in the UK. He notes that 'after *Room to Rent*, it was a big struggle to make another film. In my country I have now made nine feature films and four big TV series; I would have never made them in England.' This lack of opportunity was partially caused by the political climate that descended over the creative industries in the Western world after 9/11, when stories written from ideologized perspectives on Arab culture began to be favoured. As El Hagar humorously says, 'the French have more of a mentality of cultural invasion. The British have a mentality of oil or spice invasion.' Consequently, British financiers became unwilling to absorb the comedy melodramas that El Hagar wanted to make, about the minutiae of multicultural lives, and turned towards profit-making projects that resonated more with British audiences, despite their pronounced political and ideological flavour. As Ezra and Rowden reflect, the post-9/11 transnational cinema confirmed the 'ideologically determined resistance of commercial cinema to the recognition of radical political commitment under any category other than those of greed and fanaticism' (Ezra and Rowden 2006: 10–11). Yet, the lack of opportunity in El Hagar's case seemed to have deeper and more troubling roots, going back to the same colonial legacy and its racism, both casual and instrumentalized. It curtailed El Hagar's potential to continue to develop his style as a diasporic filmmaker:

I had plans for a couple of scripts; I didn't just want to make Room to Rent *but also make two or three other films that people would recognise as Khaled El Hagar's filmmaking. But it never happened. I'm not making comparisons, but Pedro Almodovar makes colourful, flamboyant, deeply Spanish movies; they have a similar feel, culture, and colours, so he's become like a school of*

> *filmmaking. People talk about Almodovar style films. When you allow filmmakers to do that, they develop a different voice. If you are only allowed to do one film and that's it, that doesn't happen.*

The decision to eventually move back to his homeland seems therefore not to be a unique decision, but one shared with a whole generation of migrant filmmakers:

> *Actually, myself with other writers and producers, tried for over two years to do something; I wrote several scripts (e.g.* Sex for Happiness*). But all of us, foreigners living in England, realised that we don't have enough years to try and make just one film in five years. As a filmmaker I need to work; I don't need to dream.*

The experiences of El Hagar and his colleagues are an indication of the intersection between a new political climate that favoured the association of Arab themes with religious zealousness and insurgency, and postcolonial hangovers that looked suspiciously upon migrant filmmakers. Consequently, El Hagar talks openly about his experience of racism, which ranged from casual remarks to open hostility:

> *I think that in England you start to feel dislocated when you are hit with racism. You think that you are like everybody else, you are married to an English woman, you have a British baby, you live in an English house [laughs], until somebody tells you that you ARE different. You suddenly think – I am different, I don't belong here, people do not want me to belong here.*

In his musings, El Hagar draws important lessons from the knowledge accumulated through making a successful film in the UK, but also the lack of opportunity that came after. In his case, the paradoxical mix of presence and absence of opportunity led to important insights into the formation of his identity as an Egyptian-British filmmaker and, in particular, the intercultural aesthetics he cultivated while working in-between European and Egyptian cultural spaces, that continue to define his film and television work and upon which he reflects in the following part of this chapter.

The 'Artistic Technician'

In matters of identity, it is important that people self-identify and do not simply accept or adopt an identity imposed from outside. El Hagar has worked as a filmmaker in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. He has trained in Egypt and the UK. He has lived extensively in both Cairo and Birmingham and maintains homes in both locations. He has dual citizenship and a British family. It was important therefore to ask Khaled El Hagar about the identity positioning of his work, but also that of the filmmaker behind the work. His answers show that two key concepts inform his identity as a filmmaker: duality and universality.

> *I am an Egyptian-British filmmaker. I am both. I can move tomorrow to England, and I can make a film. I have no problem with working in different cultures. I remember when I made* Elements of Mine *(2003), a dance film, in Germany [with Norbert Servos], I went to Germany for a quick shoot, and I felt in harmony with all the people. I didn't feel I was coming from a different culture. I just filmed. I always wanted to feel that I am a free filmmaker; nobody can judge me because of my language or where I am from. I am a filmmaker. There is no difference between an Indian and a British doctor. They are both doctors.*

El Hagar's works, including the topics he is interested in and the approaches he chooses, are shaped by the people and places of his practice. They are, therefore, doubled: both Egyptian and British experiences remain important. However, the emphasis El Hagar puts on working in-between cultures also signals a desire for universal assignation. Since in-betweenness has become a common feature of filmmaking, film directors like Khaled El Hagar can move into the mainstream. This is due to increased transnationalism in film and television production, but even more so to the dislocated position of the filmmaker. One could argue that any artist is dislocated from their inherited culture. To step outside the familiar is a prerequisite for creativity and originality. Armed with a set of universal skills, but also individual curiosity and the desire to create, the filmmaker becomes therefore, as El Hagar, points out, an 'artistic technician', universally legitimate:

> *I always thought I am a filmmaker, and I can work in different countries on projects that would be different. I always thought of myself as an artistic*

technician, I can work here, I can work there. But of course, there are limitations when you approach financiers, they always want to bring you to their level of understanding art, they don't just let you fly. So, the problem I'm facing is one of mentality. Especially because as a filmmaker I don't come from a traditional filmmaking country that makes 200 films a year, starting from the time of silent films. I am also different from Black filmmakers. They talk to Europe or to their own people.

El Hagar pinpoints the natural interculturalism of filmmakers, which is nevertheless held back by old traditional structures. In this view, '"Intercultural" indicates a context that cannot be confined to a single culture. It also suggests movement between one culture and another, thus implying diachrony and the possibility of transformation. "Intercultural" means that a work is not the property of any single culture but mediates in at least two directions' (Marks 2000: 6). Marks' definition of the term 'intercultural' avoids nominating one culture as the dominant one and does not identify an obligatory direction of travel. Instead, intercultural cinema becomes a flowing amalgamation, allowing for multiple comings and goings, in both space and time. However, as El Hagar points out, this liquidity that comes naturally to 'artistic technicians' is constricted by the residual mentality of those who finance films and still work with old labels and categories. Movement is therefore highly regulated, and hierarchies re-emerge based on the cultural provenance or geographical anchoring of the filmmaker. Industry politics thus colludes with old colonial hierarchies to constantly raise new barriers.

However, what many financiers might not recognize is that the in-betweenness, the duality, the interculturalism and 'third eye' optic of filmmakers like Khaled El Hagar can revitalize traditional European modes of cinematic production. Discussing El Hagar's first feature film in the UK, Kholeif praises El Hagar's ability to move in-between aesthetics: 'By bearing a distinctly "Arab" quality within its sonic and aesthetic presentation, *Room to Rent* becomes a unique picture for its ability to form a composite Arab and British film experience' (Kholeif 2012: 69). As El Hagar recounts: 'people say, "Your films are different!" Their look is different, they are a mix between East and West. I have a precise way of shooting and I like beautiful frames; I don't like messy frames. The two cultures come together.' His haptic visuality recalls a sensory experience of place (Marks 2000: 2), typical of dislocated filmmakers. El Hagar sees his approach and aesthetics as being shaped

by his individual experiences of living in two countries and working in more. In Egypt, he feels freer that other filmmakers to tackle culturally sensitive subjects. In the UK, he was not afraid to bring to the depiction of London on screen the colours and sounds of his native Egypt. Multicultural and historical experiences matter. As Malini Guha observes in her analysis of London and Paris as film locations for features films about migration, the 'migrant imaginary of post-imperial London . . . bears seemingly little relationship to London's post-war modernity as detailed in either popular or official discourse' (2015: 15). The migrant filmmaker, blessed with their 'third eye' optic, is able to see what the foreign visitor, imbued by tourism propaganda, would certainly miss: the reality and the hybridity of living as an 'Other' in a postcolonial city.

The Filmmaker Is Not a Journalist

If the intercultural personal experiences of the filmmaker are essential to understanding the composite identity of the films, then it becomes necessary to understand the role played by lived history. European, Middle Eastern and African cinemas have a tradition of reflecting trauma and conflict, but representing lived history still poses unanswered questions about the role of proximity and distance, spatial and temporal. For El Hagar, the answer is simple: 'I never liked an instantaneous response, and I am not able to write about that. [. . .] People like me are waiting to try and understand events.'

This view was shaped by the 2011 Arab Spring in Egypt. As European interests circled Egyptian filmmakers who were asked to reflect almost instantaneously the Tahrir Square protests and subsequent regime change in their work, El Hagar decided once again to put his 'third eye' optic to work:

> I was worried when the Muslim Brotherhood took over, I could see things that my Egyptian friends in Tahrir Square couldn't see. Actually, by living abroad, I read more international press, I read more analyses about what is happening in the Middle East more generally. If you do not have access to this information, you are not aware of the whole situation. You don't see the whole reality, of what is happening now. Egyptian filmmakers wanted to make films about the Revolution after three weeks, without really understanding what was happening. This wasn't mature enough, I needed to wait, to understand.

El Hagar's in-between position proved to be an advantage again, as he was able to withdraw from the immediacy of the events to a place of analysis, adopting an angle from which, once again, he was able to extrapolate the universal themes he is concerned with, such as change, emotional connections, ambivalent politics and the human condition:

> I worked with someone who wrote one of the TV series and we were interested in people who didn't go to Tahrir Square because of fear. I was interested in fear and humanity, but also change. Like an earthquake, the Revolution changed people. People who were political proved to be cowards and people who you thought were cowards, suddenly became very political. So, I'm talking about the human condition during hard times.

While El Hagar acknowledges the opportunity history brings to making politically involved cinema, he is also aware of the duty imposed on the filmmaker:

> People will be waiting for more political films; people have become more politically involved than before. Before the country was flattened emotionally, whereas now people's emotions are really high, they talk about political issues on Facebook and Twitter, everybody I know has become so involved politically. This will come out in our films. Unless there is a good story, I cannot make a comedy now, I feel I have a duty. But I want to make the right political statement, not the statement that people want me to make. I need to first understand what I am talking about. I am not here to just be en vogue.

El Hagar's views recall Ezra and Rowden's notion of 'committed' cinema (2006: 10), which is used to describe transnational cinema or cinema produced from a transnational perspective by transnational filmmakers. This is not instantaneous cinema, because the filmmaker is not a journalist living the moment. The right distance – proximity ratio that living in-between cultures affords filmmakers like El Hagar gives them the opportunity to circumscribe the present by looking back and looking forward. Dislocated filmmakers do it all the time. In the case of the Arab Spring, this approach afforded El Hagar a more nuanced and reflexive engagement with the events. He was able to circumscribe immediate events within a certain historical trajectory and bring new insight from the perspective of the 'third eye'.

By Way of Conclusion: 'I Will Always Be in the Memory of Egyptian Cinema.'

Now in mid-career, El Hagar would be right to think of his legacy. Despite controversial topics, his work continues to equally challenge and entice Arab audiences:

> *The second film I made in Egypt,* Women's Love *(*Hob El Banat*, 2004), is so popular, it has been voted the most popular Egyptian film for that generation. There are thirty million views on YouTube. My film* Lust *(*El Shooq*, 2010) now has over nineteen million views on YouTube. I became part of the Egyptian psyche [laughs]. But in England, nobody has seen them. Some might have seen* Room to Rent *only.*

El Hagar's reflections highlight the ambivalent legacy of dislocated filmmakers and recall the important of opportunity and choice in the industry. Cinematic legacies depend even more on industry culture and politics in the case of in-between filmmakers. Although they always have choices, these choices are ultimately limited. Increased transnationalism has not transformed the close link between cinema and national culture, audiences have not moved beyond certain confines. For El Hagar, this attrition gives an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between migrant filmmakers and their homeland cinemas:

> *I have become one of the top Egyptian filmmakers now. I will always be in the memory of Egyptian cinema. If I died tomorrow, I have ten films, I have TV shows. In England, I am not in the memory of British cinema. I am just this guy who made one film once. That's the difference. In Egypt I am known.*

This may be one of the reasons that El Hagar continues to define himself as an Egyptian-British filmmaker. The hyphenated self-definition is indicative of the importance of 'doubled' and 'third space' experiences for contemporary cinema, but it is also the outcome of the residual power of national identity for cinema and the somewhat ambivalent value of in-betweenness.

Filmmakers like Khaled El Hagar often defy definition, because they do not necessary fit into neat categories. They are ambiguous, in that they can be seen as both successful in their ability to adapt to industry conditions, cultural contexts and historical challenges, and stymied in their creative freedoms and endeavours.

Like their innovative aesthetic, they perpetually defy fixity. The displacement and hybridity (Marks 2000: 2) that characterize what Marks calls 'intercultural cinema' come from 'the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge or living as a minority in the still majority white, Euro-American West' (Marks 2000: 1). This positioning gives rise to a particular kind of politics, as evidenced by El Hagar's transgressions into the realm of uncomfortable or contested themes. His ability to take risks and innovate has placed him in the history of Egyptian cinema. His legacy in the UK, on the other hand, is yet to be ascertained. What we know is that this kind of film work is important, and UK and European cinemas need more of it, not less. A 'third' optic perspective can result in new creative configurations through a process of assembling and 'gathering' once scattered myths, fantasies and experiences (Bhabha 1990: 292), of dislocated people. The films of migrant filmmakers like Khaled El Hagar enrich, as others have highlighted before, national and European cinemas, as well as European identity more generally (see Grassilli 2008; Loshitzky 2010; Bayraktar 2016).

El Hagar epitomizes the important role transnationalism plays in the cinemas that the filmmakers come from or indeed return to. This role is not sufficiently acknowledged in the current literature on transnational cinema, because researchers and critics tend to favour presences – filmmakers who enjoy a certain notoriety in the Western world – rather than absences – filmmakers who have not been offered the chance to continue to work in Europe but have crafted successful careers back home. The emphasis on the contribution of filmmakers from the Global South not only to European cinema, but also to their national cinemas, must thus continue, especially as Europe hardens its borders (Bayraktar 2016: 3). Once encouraged, European mobility is now counteracted with immobility and rebordering practices, as both 'Fortress Europe' and post-Brexit phenomena show. One might wonder what this tendency will do to filmmaking practices in Europe. The mobility–immobility dynamic is a metaphor for migrant filmmakers like Khaled El Hagar who come to Europe, train and are maybe offered initial opportunities, but become stuck in a system where pervasive racism, preferential financing of trendy themes that play with problematic representations and othering tropes prevent migrant or hyphenated filmmakers from achieving their proven potential. Ultimately, this tendency reproduces colonial exclusions and recalls the political significance of film.

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Khaled El Hagar Filmography

Inta Omri (aka *You Are My Life*) (1989) Directed, produced and written by Khaled El Hagar [Short]. Egypt: Goethe Institute, Cairo and MIF.

Best Script Award (Goethe Institute, Cairo) given by German Jury in Berlin.

Alexander S. Socotti Award: Oberhausen Short Film Festival, Germany.

German Dance Theatre in Egypt (1990) Directed and produced by Khaled El Hagar [Documentary]. Germany: ARTE.

Doody's Dream (1992) Directed and written by Khaled El Hagar [Short]. England: NFTS.

Ahlam Saghira (*Little Dreams*) (1993) Directed and written by Khaled El Hagar [Feature film]. Egypt and Germany: MIF and ZDF.

Rotterdam Film Festival: one of best ten films (audience choice).

Samuelson City Film Award: best film award (Birmingham International Film & Television Festival).

Grand Prix de la Ville d'Amiens: Amiens International Film Festival.

Nomination: The Sutherland Trophy (BFI Awards for Best 1st Feature).

Best Music for a Film: National Egyptian Film Festival.

Best Script Award: Pan African Film Festival of Burkina Faso – FESPACO.

The Saudi National Day (1994) Directed and produced by Khaled El Hagar. London: MBC.

A Gulf between Us (1994) Directed and written by Khaled El Hagar [Short]. England: NFTS.

Milano City Award: Milano Film Festival.

Le Prix Tolerance: VUES D'AFRIQUES Film Festival – Montreal, Quebec.

Certificate of Merit: Chicago International Film Festival.

Theatre and Dreams (1996) Directed and produced by Khaled El Hagar [30-minute drama]. London: MBC.

Room to Rent (2002) Directed and written by Khaled El Hagar [Feature film]. England and France: Channel 4, BFI UK, Studio Canal.

Audience Award – Best Film: Berlin Digital International Film Festival.

Audience Award – Best Film: Turin Film Festival.

Best International Film: Foyle Film Festival, Ireland.

Prix Poitou Charentes: Fespaco Film Festival.

Prix Mevter – Titra: Festival International du Film d'Amour, Belgium.

Audience Award – Best Film: Cologne Mediterranean Film Festival.

Cica Award: Cartage Film Festival.

Cica Award: Milano African Film Festival.

Red Sky at Night (2003) Directed by Khaled El Hagar [Short]. UK: C4.

Hob el Banat (*Women's Love*) (2004) Directed by Khaled El Hagar [Feature film]. Egypt.

Special Mention: Cairo International Film Festival.

Seven Awards at the Egyptian Academy Awards Festival.

Best Director: Amal Arab Film Festival, Spain.

Elements of Mine (2004) Directed and written by Khaled El Hagar [Short]. Germany: ARTE.

Best Performance: Moving Pictures Festival, Toronto, 2004.

Mafeesh Gher Keda (*None but That!*) (2006) Directed by Khaled El Hagar [Feature film]. Egypt: ART.

Best Director/Best Film Song: Egyptian Oscar Song Festival.

Stolen Kisses (*Kobolat Masroka*) (2008) Directed by Khaled El Hagar [Feature film]. Egypt.

Egyptian film sector, winner of 8 acting awards: Alex Film Festival.

El Shooq (*Lust*) (2010) Directed by Khaled El Hagar [Feature film]. Egypt and France: Arabic Movies + France 3B Production.

Best International Film – The Golden Pyramid: Cairo International Film Festival, 2010.

Best International Actress – Sawsan Badr: Cairo International Film Festival, 2010.

Best International Film and Best Actress: Muscat Film Festival, 2012.

Best Actress: Wahran Film Festival, 2012.

Egypt Official Oscars Entry for 2012.

Dawaran Shoubra (*Shoubra Square*) (2011) Directed by Khaled El Hagar [TV Series (30 episodes)].
    Egypt and UK: MIF + BBC WST.

Voted by Critiques Best TV series and Best Director 2011, Human Right Award.

El Baltagy (*The Thug*) (2012) Directed by Khaled El Hagar [TV Series (30 episodes)]. Egypt: CBC.

Farah Laila (Laila's Wedding) (2013) Directed and written by Khaled El Hagar [TV Series (30
    episodes)]. Egypt: King Tout Production.

Audience Award, Best TV Drama series.

Shams (*Sun*) (2014) Directed and written by Khaled El Hagar [TV Series (30 episodes)]. Egypt: King
    Tout Production.
        Winner Best TV Drama Series Egypt, 2014.

Haram el Gasad (*Sins of the Flesh*) (2016) Directed and written by Khaled El Hagar [Feature film].
    Egypt: Misr International Films, Youssef Chahine.
        Best actress, Nahed el Sebai: Oporto International Film Festival, 2017.
        Jury Special Award, Best Film: Oporto International Film Festival, 2017.
        Winning 3 National awards: Egypt National Film Awards, 2016.

Immobilia Crime Story (2018) Directed by Khaled El Hagar [Feature film]. Egypt: Misr Arabia Films.

Shihana (2020) Directed by Khaled El Hagar [Feature film]. Albear Haddad, Arab Media/SBC.

Postscript

Interview Transcripts with Egyptian-British Filmmaker Khaled El Hagar

Conducted by *Roger Shannon*

Interview One: 21 March 2013

Roger: Coming to the UK and studying at the National Film and Television School (NFTS), was that your choice or a choice made for you?

Khaled: It was a choice I made for myself. When my wife Janice [Rider; costume designer] was pregnant, we decided to come to England and raise the baby here. When the first Gulf War happened, I didn't want to go back to Egypt, because I could have been drafted into the army again and asked to fire upon Iraqis. I decided therefore to stay longer, and Janice said, 'Why don't you apply to the NFTS?' It is a very prestigious school, but I didn't know about it. I applied with a short film I made in Egypt, *You Are My Life* (1985), and I got accepted after three interviews. I made a film in my second year called *Little Dreams*, which was a feature. I then went back to Egypt and worked for a bit in the film industry. My graduation film, *A Gulf Between Us* (1994), was a political film and I got attacked by the Egyptian media, because it was a love story between an Egyptian boy and a young Jewish girl. I realized it would be difficult to make this kind of political film in Egypt, so I decided to come back to England, stay longer and just work in England.

Roger: How would you describe the benefits of basing yourself in the UK at that time, as opposed to basing yourself in Egypt?

Khaled: I think it's great, because you always have a second home, you always see the two countries from a distance. I am equally involved in the two countries, but I can always escape. I remember meeting once a young Indian filmmaker and he

said 'You always have another country, you can always run from England to Egypt or the other way around, when there is no work, for example, or the situation changes' and I think it's true. It makes you unique or strange in both countries, you are always looked upon as the outsider from both sides.

Roger: And do you think that that sense of uniqueness is important for your work, for your filmmaking?

Khaled: I think it's important because when you write you write with a third brain, you are not that involved in all the propaganda, be it in Egypt or in England, and you can see the truth. You are the third eye.

Roger: That gives you a third aesthetic in a way.

Khaled: Yes, sometimes I do not feel I am really part of what is happening in England or what is happening in Egypt and the Revolution; because I see from a third perspective, I notice what's dangerous and what's good at the same time in either context.

Roger: It is interesting that you use the word 'third' there, because in the 60s and 70s a new type of cinema appeared which was called 'third cinema'. It was a term used to describe filmmakers from non-European countries who were neither Hollywood nor from Moscow or Soviet influenced. It brought in more indigenous traditions of filmmakers rather than championing imported American ideas.

    With what we can call 'your UK moment', *Room to Rent* (2000), a feature film which was British backed and French backed, so it was a completely European film, I'm interested to know whether the UK people involved in it, the financiers, and the French, had the same view of it or whether there were creative differences.

Khaled: I think they had a similar view. I was new, a graduate but with no job yet, and usually when you are new, with a lot of dreams, going to film festivals and winning awards, you become an exotic filmmaker. Both tried to invest in me. Especially when you are younger, people get excited by you and maybe they give you one chance or two [laughs] and then that's it! I think that *Room to Rent* was hard to sell to both the English and the French. Although I think the French understood more of the Arabic mentality than the English.

Roger: I suppose that's what I was wanting to get at; as a filmmaker you describe quite well the sense that you are inhabiting a third space, there is a third brain at work, and *Room to Rent* is a British context with a group of Arab characters. The main characters are Arab and there is an Arab back story in London, but with a French baddie. Did that give you the space to be as free as possible in making this film? Did the people involved allow you a lot of space, because of those reasons, or did you have to make compromises as a filmmaker who had lots of Arabic ideas?

Khaled: I think that in the beginning there was a lot of misunderstanding about Arab culture. In England people are more aware of Indian culture because they grow up with an Indian corner shop. For the British financiers Arab culture was a bit further away, they didn't understand the Arab theme. The French do understand it, because they have six million Arabs or more, so it's part of their culture, like Indian culture here is part of British culture. I think the French understood easily what I wanted to talk about; the British were trying to translate everything to how they think about Arabs, not to how Arabs think. I remember this script editor was using a lot of clichés and I thought 'I cannot talk about Arabs like that, because that is a cliché, it would ruin the project'. So, I had to do a lot of convincing for the British, it was very tiring.

Roger: That's interesting that there is this dilemma between working with French execs on the film who would have wanted you to make a film from within the Arab perspective because they understood that and at the same time you have British film execs wanting you to almost comment on the Arab experience and then produce certain types of characters which you obviously refused to do in the film. Are there any other examples of this tension that you can remember from that time?

Khaled: I remember going with Juliette Lewis, who played Linda in my film, to this film set which turned out to be a Bond film, with a British director. I remember someone asking me about rich Arab men. But why would rich Arab men be making a Bond film in England? Comments like these about rich Arabs show that nobody really understood Arab culture in England. Even when they went abroad the British were never part of the Egyptian culture. They even had places like Zero Club or Garden City, which were only British, so you weren't allowed to live there if you were Arab. The British liked to isolate themselves.

Roger: Whereas the French would be different?

Khaled: The French have more of a mentality of cultural invasion. The British have a mentality of oil or spice invasion. [laughs]

Roger: Some final questions about *Room to Rent*. Were you conscious that you were introducing into your British story elements of Arabic story-telling or Arabic filmmaking that were very different from conventional British film?

Khaled: I think so, it's my culture, I was born in Egypt, whereas my son Adam [El Hagar; actor and writer], he would feel more British than Egyptian. I was one of the tutors in this NFTS (French, English, Arabic) writing workshop with five Arabs, four French, four English and you could see there was an English script, a French script, and an Arabic script. The way one tells a story is completely different. How we think, how we draw, how we see things, is part of our culture. We Egyptians tend to have a more Arabian Nights approach to writing, a 'once upon a time' approach, whereas the French have a more romantic approach in their writing about humanity and the human spirit. The British are more interested in real life, council flats and rough kids. I think that is what makes cinema very interesting.

Roger: What other elements of filmmaking do you feel you were introduced to, for example in visualizing a film and the use of colour.

Khaled: Yes, maybe I wanted England to be as bright as the colours of Egypt without noticing, because I like bright colours, I like flowers, things that reflect my culture. I never consciously noticed I was doing that.

Roger: At the time that you were making *Room to Rent* there were also other films about the migration experience in the UK, Stephen Frears' *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002), Jasmin Dizdar's *Beautiful People* (1999), films by Black and Asian filmmakers in the UK that had an alternative approach to presenting the British experience. Did you identify yourself in that tradition? Or did you see yourself as a professional Egyptian filmmaker working on an international stage?

Khaled: I always thought I am a filmmaker, and I can work in different countries on projects that would be different. I always thought of myself as an artistic technician,

I can work here, I can work there. But of course, there are limitations when you approach financiers, they always want to bring you to their level of understanding art, they don't just let you fly. So, the problem I'm facing is one of mentality. Especially because as a filmmaker I don't come from a traditional filmmaking country that makes 200 films a year, starting from the time of silent films. I am also different from Black filmmakers. They talk to Europe or to their own people.

Roger: I suppose Black filmmakers come from a particular type of experience with the UK, going all the way to slavery, the Caribbean experience and then family relocation to the UK, so different layers.

Khaled: It's a different history.

Roger: It is interesting that you said that in *Room to Rent* you were trying to do something different, a colourful palette, a different visual imagining of London and the UK. And that was, in some sense, different from British cinema which might be shot on council estates. Recently one of the award-winning Egyptian directors in the UK, Sally El-Hosaini, whose films [*My Brother the Devil,* 2012] capture drug dealing and Arab gangs in London, has used a UK format to express her filmmaking.

Khaled: She was mainly brought up here, she is Welsh-Egyptian, although she did live in Egypt too. It's different if you are brought up here, as British. My son Adam is completely different, he would never write scripts like me.

Ruxandra: Were you ever tempted to produce something exotic, to purposefully emphasize the exoticism of your position?

Khaled: I had plans for a couple of scripts; I didn't just want to make *Room to Rent* but also make two or three other films that people would recognize as Khaled El Hagar's filmmaking. But it never happened. I'm not making comparisons, but Pedro Almodovar makes colourful, flamboyant, deeply Spanish movies; they have a similar feel, culture, and colours, so he's become like a school of filmmaking. People talk about Almodovar style films. When you allow filmmakers to do that, they develop a different voice. If you are only allowed to do one film and that's it, that doesn't happen.

Ruxandra: You said that it was an advantage that you were removed from either British or Egyptian realities, you saw things at a distance, but don't you ever get lost in this intermediary space, isn't disconnection a disadvantage when it comes to drawing inspiration from social realities?

Khaled: No, I don't see it like that, because I am involved, although this involvement may be different. I remember when the Egyptian Revolution happened [2011] everybody was excited. The most excited were those who couldn't understand what was happening. I was worried when the Muslim Brotherhood took over, I could see things that my Egyptian friends in Tahrir Square couldn't see. Actually, by living abroad, I read more international press, I read more analyses about what is happening in the Middle East more generally. If you do not have access to this information, you are not aware of the whole situation. You don't see the whole reality, of what is happening now. Egyptian filmmakers wanted to make films about the Revolution after three weeks, without really understanding what was happening. This wasn't mature enough, I needed to wait, to understand what is happening, why Americans were asking Mubarak to leave now, after thirty years. What was the plan? I could see something coming from the people, but not completely from the people. People were pushed by other forces. I tried to find this other force and understand why it's happening now. I feel my position was an advantage. I was never blind, here, or there. When I come to England and I hear people talk about immigration and immigrants, I think you can get trapped if you live in one place. So, I feel that my position is an advantage.

Roger: After *Room to Rent*, you could say that your career in the UK slowed down and your filmmaking career picked up once you resumed working in Egypt. Was there a sense that having been discovered in the UK – *Room to Rent* didn't do a massive box office, but it was well regarded and won fifteen awards around the world, so it brought you to the attention of the UK and international film world and you worked with a Hollywood actress on it, Juliette Lewis, and you worked with a very successful French actor, Saïd Taghmaoui (*La Haine,* 1995 etc.) –, but then there is a sense in which your career stalled in the UK. As a producer trying to make some films with you, there was a question in my mind as to whether there was something to do with the impact of 9/11 Jihadist bombings, and a sense that as an Arabic filmmaker working in the UK you weren't as interesting a prospect. In

the sense that you are an exotic filmmaker doing something different, but your persona as an Arab filmmaker changed and people wanted you to come up with different types of stories, maybe more politicized stories or stories commenting on the experiences of the World Trade Center attack.

Khaled: Actually, myself with other writers and producers tried for over two years to do something; I wrote several scripts (e.g. *Sex for Happiness*). But all of us, foreigners living in England, realized that we don't have enough years to try and make just one film in five years. As a filmmaker I need to work, I don't need to dream. After talking to you and other people about what I should do, I thought that for me working in any country is better than not working. I thought I'd go where the work is. You are right about 9/11, but I am always worried about making very fast films, about what is happening now, which are cliché films about what people think about what is happening now in the Middle East and about Muslims. I never liked an instantaneous response, and I am not able to write about that. Maybe if I get a script and finance, I would do it. But my brain would not allow me to see an accident and immediately write about it and make a film about it. It is part of big propaganda, if something happens, to make lots of films about it. Like the Iraq War. When people are still asking why the war happened.

Roger: I remember, with so many of your scripts after *Room to Rent*, that had the same qualities of *Room to Rent*, where you were mixing comedy with melodrama. I remember people who you were going to see about getting those films backed, would say 'We'd rather have the social realism and the comedy, but not the melodrama'. The different tones you were doing, they were shying away from it, they didn't want that kind of style and were wanting stories about what's it like to be an Arab family with a Jihadist.

Khaled: *My Son the Fanatic* (1997).

Roger: That's right. They weren't that interested in your aesthetic approach, like previously. I always wondered whether a shift was taking place in what people were after. That forces you into decisions: 'if I can't get films made in the UK the way I want to make them and I'm not going to make the films they want me to make and compromise, where do I go?'.

Khaled: Yes, I felt like that, and I feel like that now. Everybody wants you to make films about the Revolution. If you don't understand what is really happening how can you make a film about your country, when everyday there is something new, every day something is changing. They want you to make happy films, but now the Muslim Brotherhood has taken over, it is worse than before. Even emotionally, people think that under Mubarak it was better. There is always this pressure of feeding the media, instead of trying to understand what is really happening. One of the best films about Hitler was made just recently (*Downfall*, 2004). Also, a film about the fall of the Berlin wall was only made a few years ago (*The Lives of Others*, 2006). Filmmakers need to try and understand history, humanity. The filmmaker is not a journalist.

Ruxandra: In Romania we also went through a Revolution. In a way, what you are describing, happened there as well. No relevant films came out in the first twenty years after the Revolution to make real sense of those events. Most films just tried to understand the effects of the communist regime. So, I wonder where you see Egyptian cinema going because you have different influences there. On the one hand, you have the Muslim Brotherhood, which from what I was reading in the press, are really trying to influence some elements of filmmaking in Egypt; on the other hand, you have the amalgamation of Egyptian cinema into African cinema; and then you also have the impact of Hollywood. It's a very complex film environment.

Khaled: Egyptian filmmaking is very confused. Some Egyptian filmmakers flirt with the Revolution, to maybe go to festivals, because festivals like those kinds of films now. In 2011, just three months after the Revolution, the Cannes Film Festival asked one of the directors to gather other ten directors and make short films about the Revolution. It's annoying that such a big festival encourages short turn films like that. A lot of filmmakers in Egypt refused. People like me are waiting to try and understand events. I'm involved in scripts about people who didn't go to Tahrir Square, people who are fighting for freedom against the pressures put on filmmaking by the Muslim Brotherhood. Now films are struggling, television is struggling. Last year, when the Muslim brotherhood wasn't as strong, we made for Ramadan (so for one month only) seventy-seven TV series, whereas this year we only made six. Things are confused because there is a lot of pressure from different directions. Plus, there is a general atmosphere of disappointment, and anger, people are

wondering whether the army will take over. It's a time when nobody understands anything, and this is reflected in the cinema. It is as though nothing happened in Egypt, films are the same as ten years ago or three years ago, not talking about social problems. And then you have films about the Revolution, that audiences here do not watch, so they don't make any money, though they go to festivals. Big films are not happening now because of the confusion, so financiers have gone away. Egypt is the biggest market for Egyptian films, so production has stopped.

Roger: Does it benefit you as a filmmaker now, in Egypt, to have had the experience of working on films in the UK – the contacts you have beyond Egypt and your international profile?

Khaled: Since coming back to Egypt I made five films and two big TV series, and I got more recognition internationally than if I had stayed in the UK. You need to prove yourself in your own country so that other people take you seriously [laughs]. In Egypt I had more chances and I proved I can make good films for my country and go to many festivals. With TV series you enter everybody's house. The two TV series I made were political but at the same time entertaining.

Roger: With the younger generation of Egyptian filmmakers who are fired up by the Arab Spring, do you get negatively perceived because you spent time away rather than being in Egypt all those years?

Khaled: No. I always made it known, even in the press in Egypt, that I thought the Mubarak regime was wrong to stay thirty years and some of my work has not been shown in Egypt during his regime, but I didn't want Mubarak to just go, I wanted him to stay for six months and oversee the transition. Some in the current government are not political people, they don't understand the economy, so the country is going down. There are no tourists. Egypt has become one of the countries one shouldn't go to, because of the violence. People feel strongly that the Muslim Brotherhood do not have good intentions. You have a government which is fighting against its own nation.

Ruxandra: Are people in Egypt turning towards Hollywood movies, since they don't go to watch films about the Revolution?

Khaled: Egyptian audiences have always watched Hollywood films. It is part of our tradition to watch both Egyptian and Hollywood films. Egyptians love Egyptian cinema, they go and watch romantic comedies, but if you give them reality on screen they say: 'but we see that every day, we don't need to see it in the cinema'. The majority are still confused about the Revolution because it happened so fast. They don't know whether what is happening is right or wrong. So, we got rid of Mubarak to get in a more fascist regime. Even those who wanted to get rid of Mubarak are now confused.

Roger: Can you say something about the work that you are developing now, which is about a group of characters who don't go to Tahrir Square? You are choosing again to do something different. Can you tell us how you came to this premise?

Khaled: I worked with someone who wrote one of the TV series and we were interested in people who didn't go to Tahrir Square because of fear. I was interested in fear and humanity, but also change. Like an earthquake, the Revolution changed people. People who were political proved to be cowards and people who you thought were cowards, suddenly became very political. So, I'm talking about the human condition during hard times.

Roger: We were talking about it, and I suggested to make one of the characters English so that you could go to the BFI and get some money for it, because there is a British perspective in there as well. Coming now to *El-Shooq* [Lust, 2010], that's quite a hard film, which also has a hard character in the mother of the family. When it was released in December 2010, just two weeks before the Arab Spring started, some critics have said that it prefigured the Arab Spring Revolution because it looked into the condition of poor people in Alexandria. I find it a very joyful film, but the characters are very hard, and it seemed a very different film from the ones you were previously making in Egypt. It is more of a signature film for you. Is it a departure?

Khaled: Not consciously. I made four popular films for the Egyptian market, and they have won awards, but sometimes they seem that they are not really my films, they are not like *Little Dreams* or *Room to Rent*. I wanted to do something more me. When I read the script, I just felt it was the right time. I felt the country was so bleak, so miserable. I wanted to reflect that. I didn't want to make a funny film or a

comedy. I wanted to tell people that we are really in trouble. Like other artists, I felt very constrained in strange times. We had the same president for thirty years and we used to talk about when Mubarak dies, who would take over. When you disappear after thirty years you suddenly paralyse your country, people fear the future. The mother was for me a metaphor for power, the misuse of power and how power can kill itself. I thought, people are dying from hunger in Egypt, I cannot make a funny film.

Ruxandra: Because of everything that has happened in Egypt, is it more important now to make political films?

Khaled: Yes, people will be waiting for more political films, people have become more politically involved than before. Before the country was flattened emotionally, whereas now people's emotions are really high, they talk about political issues on Facebook and Twitter, everybody I know has become so involved politically. This will come out in our films. Unless there is a good story, I cannot make a comedy now, I feel I have a duty. But I want to make the right political statement, not the statement that people want me to make. I need to first understand what I am talking about. I am not here to just be *en vogue*.

Interview Two: 7 October 2022

Roger: What had the bigger impact on you as a filmmaker – emigration to the UK and working in the UK, or was it the return to Egypt?

Khaled: I think both experiences feed each other but moving to England opened for me a new way of thinking through meeting new people and encountering a different cinema. That had a big impact. Returning to Egypt meant returning to a place I was familiar with. For the first five years I was thinking differently from everybody around me. I still had this idea of freedom from England – you can do what you want – but then sadly I discovered I couldn't do that. You must work trying to find your way between the lines. But my first few years back in Egypt were quite daring for Egypt and the reason for that was my experience in England.

Roger: Was it the case that by being in England you became aware of a wider sense of film styles, and it made you more open to different approaches in film?

Khaled: Yes, because you watch different films. Even in Egypt I watched German and Italian films and that's why I went to Europe, so it's probably not necessarily the cinema, because you can watch films from anywhere, but the atmosphere and the freedom of thinking are different. It's very hard to think freely when you have censorship. I am now doing a film about someone changing their gender and it is so hard to do something like that in Egypt.

Roger: Is it like a hand on your shoulder holding you back?

Khaled: Yes, exactly. You are watching yourself. When I was in England, I felt completely free and that was very surprising and very refreshing. That's why in *Room to Rent* I did everything I wanted to do.

Roger: You explore contemporary issues in your films. Have these issues changed now that you are working from a different location? Or do you think that they are universal?

Khaled: I remember when we watched the film [*Room to Rent*] at the MAC [Midlands Arts Centre], everybody was saying it is exactly about what is happening now: it's about immigration, people being told to go back home because there is no place for them, having to marry a white woman to stay in England, the issues that you could talk about now. And immigration then was much less than now. Especially now when there is a war with so many Ukrainian refugees.

Roger: I suppose what you are saying is that the contemporary issues you explore, you were already exploring ten or fifteen years ago in England.

Khaled: Yes, we still talk about those issues.

Roger: In some sense they are universal, but the way that you approach them is maybe slightly different in a different context.

Khaled: Yes, I would not make a comedy now. It's a sad time. All films about immigration from Syrian or Iraqi filmmakers are sad, because they talk about the experiences of sad people. People are drowning and you feel helpless, so you cannot take that lightly.

Roger: In this book we are trying to understand the notion of dislocation (physical, ideologic, symbolic), as manifested on screen. Did you ever feel dislocated when you arrived in the UK, or did you feel dislocated when you returned to Egypt after a long time abroad? Did you ever feel like a fish out of water?

Khaled: I think that in England you start to feel dislocated when you are hit with racism. You think that you are like everybody else, you are married to an English woman, you have a British baby, you live in an English house [laughs], until somebody tells you that you ARE different. You suddenly think – I am different, I don't belong here, people do not want me to belong here. I remember I got my citizenship and I said to someone 'I got my citizenship today; I am British now!' and this friend of ours just turned around and said, 'You will never be British, Khaled!' Yes, it was right in my face. One of my film tutors at the NFTS used to ask foreign filmmakers 'When will you go back home?' He never thought that maybe I do not want to go back to my home. The discourse was always 'You are very good students and I'm sure that when you go back to Egypt, you will make a lot of good films.' Then they had an open discussion at the NFTS about racism, because there was a lot of it, even between the students. All the foreigners worked together, and all the white British kids worked together, they didn't mix automatically, it was very weird. After talking to one head of production, as I was turning to leave, I heard him saying 'Bloody foreigner, taking over the school'. It was tough. Then you think, ok, I will never really fit into this society, there will always be people like that in important positions.

Roger: So that experience of dislocation is overwritten by a more dramatic sense of a racist approach that you would feel was coming towards you.

Khaled: Yes, after *Room to Rent*, it was a big struggle to make another film. In my country I have now made nine feature films and four big TV series; I would have never made them in England.

Roger: After *Room to Rent,* those wanting you to make a film about Jihadis clearly didn't know your work. It was a form of racism to ask you to do that. But to come back to our discussion, do you think that a sense of dislocation is an incentive for creativity? Does in-betweenness, living between two cultures, inspire certain types of story lines?

Khaled: Maybe if I stayed longer in England, I could have achieved a different filming style. All my friends from the NFTS went back to their own countries (Norway, Germany, Japan, Spain). All these people had plans to stay in England, but they work in their motherland now because it is much easier to work in the EU than in England, where you can be boxed.

Roger: Has it been important for your work as a filmmaker to have lived in-between cultures? Has it been important for your filmmaking?

Khaled: Yes, here, people say, 'Your films are different!' Their look is different, they are a mix between East and West. I have a precise way of shooting and I like beautiful frames; I don't like messy frames. The two cultures come together.

Roger: They are a kind of hybrid, in a way. One of the descriptions of your films, which is possibly influenced by the in-betweenness of different cultures, is that your films are visually flamboyant. At the same time, they are about certain social and contemporary issues. You get some filmmakers who are visually flamboyant and there isn't real substance to what they are on about. Your films are about important contemporary issues. Often these two aspects don't go well together in British cinema. They do in your cinema.

Khaled: I get confused critiques. As if you made films about social issues, they should be dark.

Roger: You are not Ken Loach!

Khaled: No [laughs].

Roger: How do you think this in-betweenness is reflected on screen in your films? I suppose we partially covered that because we were talking about a visually

flamboyant style, and you were saying it confuses the critics. If you are talking about trying to get a Green Card to stay in the UK, you might expect a grim and serious looking film. But in *Room to Rent* it looks carnivalesque (with the colours and the palette), without belittling the issue. It's a fun film to watch but at the same time it is about a serious thing. So, moving on, do you define yourself as an Egyptian filmmaker and if you do, why?

Khaled: Honestly, I am an Egyptian-British filmmaker. I am both. I can move tomorrow to England, and I can make a film. I have no problem with working in different cultures. I remember when I made *Elements of Mine* (2003), a dance film, in Germany [with Norbert Servos], I went to Germany for a quick shoot, and I felt in harmony with all the people. I didn't feel I was coming from a different culture. I just filmed. I always wanted to feel that I am a free filmmaker; nobody can judge me because of my language or where I am from. I am a filmmaker. There is no difference between an Indian and a British doctor. They are both doctors.

Roger: That's a good metaphor.

Khaled: I know my job; I know how to direct different actors. My last films have been in different countries (Jordan, Japan, India). I'm a filmmaker.

Roger: Clearly, your description of yourself as an Egyptian-British filmmaker hasn't prevented you from making films in Egypt.

Khaled: Even in Egypt they introduce me as an Egyptian-British filmmaker.

Roger: I wonder whether if you were back in England, and you identified as Egyptian-British, would you have the same response, would you be 'allowed' to make so many films?

Khaled: Probably not [laughs]. But I think it is difficult for all filmmakers in England, not only me. I am one of the lucky ones in my year at the NFTS. Some colleagues work in television, but only one made his first feature film last year. Can you imagine? I would be struggling like any foreign filmmaker in England. You struggle as a filmmaker even if you are white. Except, if you are a different nationality, you have a different struggle. If people are kind and give you something, it is never repeated.

Roger: Where do you feel more at home?

Khaled: I feel at home in either country. I miss England.

Roger: We miss you too!

Khaled: [laughs] I miss the parks, I miss my friends, I miss my family, but when I'm in England I miss Egypt, I miss the sun. Yet, I have no complaint about this.

Roger: Because you are most productive in Egypt.

Khaled: That's right.

Roger: That's an interesting context, in the sense that you have lived in England, you have a home in England, your son was born in England and he's doing very well as an actor [Adam El Hagar], you feel at home in England, you also feel at home in Egypt. But Egypt, as well as being your home, is where you are most productive.

Khaled: I have become one of the top Egyptian filmmakers now. I will always be in the memory of Egyptian cinema. If I died tomorrow, I have ten films, I have TV shows. In England, I am not in the memory of British cinema. I am just this guy who made one film once. That's the difference. In Egypt I am known.

Roger: That's an interesting point. Your work will be acknowledged as part of the Egyptian cinema in the last decade and your influence in the UK will not be recognized in the same way. You haven't done as many films in England as you did in Egypt, but the way history works, is that you get erased out of British cinema, which perhaps is the case for other diasporic filmmakers too.

Khaled: Yes, exactly. The second film I made in Egypt, *Women's Love* (*Hob El Banat*, 2004), is so popular, it has been voted the most popular Egyptian film for that generation. There are thirty million views on YouTube. My film *Lust* (*El Shooq*, 2010) now has over nineteen million views on YouTube. I became part of the Egyptian psyche [laughs]. But in England, nobody has seen them. Some might have seen *Room to Rent* only.

Roger: Could you say something about the last film that you made in Egypt. And tell us a bit about the project that you are working on now, which is a TV series.

Khaled: I made a film in Saudi Arabia called *Shihana* (2019), a very big film and then I made another film, which was also shown at the MAC in Birmingham, *Immobilia Crime Story* (2019), about a killing in the Immobilia building in Cairo.

Roger: That was a great film. That was shot in your house, your flat in that building.

Khaled: It's funny and it really reflects who I am. In Cairo, I live in the most famous building in the whole of Egypt [Immobilia]. In Birmingham I live in King's Heath. Great artists and directors lived in the Immobilia building (Abdel Halim Hafez, Asmahan, Camelia, Farid al-Atrash, Leila Mourad, Mohammed Abdel Wahab, Mohamed Fawzi, Naguib el-Rihani, Omar Sharif).

Roger: It's like Cairo's Chelsea Hotel [in New York].

Khaled: I am now doing a film about transgender in Egypt, a girl trying to become a boy. I wrote the script when I was in England about a real girl I know, the daughter of a friend of mine. Becoming a boy was a big struggle and she now lives in Canada. She did it, she changed. I also know another famous actor's daughter who changed. So, people are aware of it now, but it is difficult for the censorship to allow something like that.

Roger: Is that a film or TV drama series?

Khaled: It's a film. I am also preparing fifteen episodes for NBC Saudi Arabia. This series is about corruption.

Roger: Tell me a bit more about the transgender story. What is the age of the young girl?

Khaled: She is 20, transitioning to be a boy. She always felt like a boy and was always attracted to kickboxing and football. Her father dies and she gets very badly injured in an accident, together with her girlfriend who becomes paralysed, so she decides to do what she wants to do, because she is not happy. Her uncle will help

her through this process, though he has his doubts, but of course she will lose the family, her mother. It's very emotional. The pain is also physical. She says 'I hate my breasts; I want to cut them off! I should have a penis.' So, it's very heavy. Wish me luck to be able to do it.

Roger: Are you facing some challenges about the script, about getting the film made?

Khaled: Yes, two producers are interested but some financiers got so afraid to just talk about the subject. It's easy to talk about a man becoming a woman, because it is not challenged by society. The man gets some hormones to look like a woman, cuts his penis, but a woman becoming a man . . . people start to think that if she has a penis, then what will happen? How will she have sex? Is it lesbianism?

Roger: Will this be the first Egyptian film about transgender?

Khaled: Yes, it appears to be. It is in your face, looks at the whole process.

Roger: Do you have a synopsis or treatment about the idea?

Khaled: Yes, I have a whole mood board, with actors and a synopsis. I have sent it to a friend of mine in BFI and I am waiting for her answer. It's an important subject matter, it's important to bring up issues that the whole world is talking about.

Roger: It's good that you are still making films that have got the finger on the issues which are dominating discussions about sexuality and gender and that takes you back to your earlier forays. Thanks for answering our questions so honestly.

Executive Producer and Film Professor, **Roger Shannon** is a film industry professional and a published academic of over 40 years standing. Following postgraduate study at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, he has worked in the UK film and TV industry as a producer, film funder, Film Festival director, executive producer, film consultant and policy advisor. He has headed up film production funds at both regional and national level, including at the British Film Institute, the UK Film Council, Scottish Screen and the Moving Image Development Agency in Liverpool. Amongst many films he

is associated with, there have been major awards at international film festivals at Cannes, Sundance, Berlin, Locarno, New York, Edinburgh inter alia. His academic roles include Visiting Professor of International Film Business at Glasgow Caledonian University, International Film Professor at the Cuban Film School, and Professor of Film and Television at Lancashire's Edge Hill University, where as Director he established the Research Institute for Creative Enterprise. He is currently a Visiting Professor at Birmingham City University, Visiting Executive Producer at the Screen and Film University in Birmingham and Associate Director of the Institute for Creative Enterprise.

Index