

CHAPTER 5

No Man's Land

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

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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 Act¹ 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 extent 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 they 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 mediated 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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