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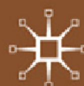
Transnational Feminism in Film and Media

Edited by
Katarzyna Marciniak,
Anikó Imre, and Áine O'Healy



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María under Hollywood Sign. Triptych, 2007. © Kamil Turowski.

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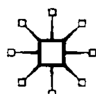

TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISM IN FILM AND MEDIA

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Series Editor's Foreword

The Comparative Feminist Studies (CFS) series foregrounds writing, organizing, and reflection on feminist trajectories across the historical and cultural borders of nation-states. It takes up fundamental analytic and political issues involved in the cross-cultural production of knowledge about women and feminism, examining the politics of scholarship and knowledge in relation to feminist organizing and social movements. Drawing on feminist thinking in a number of fields, the CFS series targets innovative, comparative feminist scholarship, pedagogical and curricular strategies, and community organizing and political education. It explores and engenders a comparative feminist praxis that addresses some of the most urgent questions facing progressive critical thinkers and activists today. *Transnational Feminism in Film and Media* is an excellent example of such comparative feminist praxis. It is located at the intersection of transnational feminist and transnational media studies, and draws on the interdisciplinary scholarship in postcolonial, cultural, race and ethnic, and diaspora studies. As such this book carefully and provocatively engages some of the central interconnected issues in the newly configured field of transnational feminist media studies.

Over the past many decades, feminists across the globe have been variously successful—however, we inherit a number of the challenges our mothers and grandmothers faced. But there are also new challenges to face as we attempt to make sense of a world indelibly marked by the failure of postcolonial capitalist and communist nation-states to provide for the social, economic, spiritual, and psychic needs of the majority of the world's population. In the year 2007, globalization has come to represent the interests of corporations and the free market rather than self-determination and freedom from political, cultural, and economic domination for all the world's peoples. The project of U.S. Empire building, alongside the dominance of corporate capitalism kills, disenfranchises, and impoverishes women everywhere, and leads to various kinds of border crossings. Militarization, environmental degradation, heterosexist State practices, religious fundamentalisms, and the exploitation of women's labor by capital all pose profound challenges for feminists at this time. Recovering and remembering

insurgent histories has never been so important, at a time marked by social amnesia, global consumer culture, and the worldwide mobilization of fascist notions of "national security."

These are some of the challenges the CFS series addresses. The series takes as its fundamental premise the need for feminist engagement with global as well as local ideological, historical, economic, and political processes, and the urgency of transnational dialogue in building an ethical culture capable of withstanding and transforming the commodified and exploitative practices of global culture and economics. Individual volumes in the CFS series provide systemic and challenging interventions into the (still) largely Euro-Western feminist studies knowledge base, while simultaneously highlighting the work that can and needs to be done to envision and enact cross-cultural, multiracial feminist solidarity.

Transnational Feminism in Film and Media extends the range of scholarship in the CFS series to new levels by creating a dialogue between transnational feminisms and "transnational, exilic, and diasporic films, which are marked by a concern with borders, migration, and foreignness" (Introduction). The collection as a whole challenges the first-third world focus of much of U.S.-based transnational feminism by bringing analyses of post-socialist (second world) cultural production into the theoretical conversation. Essays by Anikó Imre on work by a lesbian collective from Budapest, by Ginette Verstraete on "new" migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees to an increasingly fortified Europe, and Ursula Biemann's reflections on her own ethnographic films offer cutting-edge analyses of post-socialist transnational media production.

This collection is organized around the following three interlocking analytic paradigms central to transnational feminist media studies: (1) The New Frontiers of Migration, (2) Circulation of Bodies, and (3) Modalities of Foreignness. Foregrounding the work of numerous filmmakers, video and visual artists around the world, the essays focus on some of the most crucial political issues of our times: illegal border crossing, forced economic migration, racism, xenophobia, the traffic in women and children, questions of home and belonging, sexuality and sexual politics, women's agency, resistance, and of course questions of economic and social justice. Raising questions about power, surveillance, and legitimacy in the numerous border crossings encapsulated by transnational, exilic, and diasporic films, the editors draw on an essay by Bruce Bennett and Imogen Tyler to ask important ethical questions about spectatorship and consumption: "What does it mean for those of us who live our lives protected by borders to consume such

films? Don't we inevitably partake in the process of fetishizing different experiences of the border, erasing the specificity and materiality of lived experience? Is there a risk that both filmmakers and audiences become border tourists, making cinematic forays into 'non-American culture' that are still presented from the position of a Eurocentric gaze?" (see Introduction).

The project thus opens up a number of important theoretical and political questions regarding production and consumption of (alternative) transnational media, and the politics of knowledge and the limitations of analytic paradigms in transnational feminist studies. This is the kind of scholarship that can create the ground for cross-racial dialogue among and between feminist scholars and activists in regional as well as global contexts. The book will be of interest to a wide range of feminist scholars, media and visual studies scholars, and cultural critics. It embodies the comparative praxis and vision of transnational knowledge production that is a hallmark of the CFS series.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty
Series Editor, Ithaca,
New York

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Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Series Editor of the Comparative Feminist Studies series, who read our book proposal, and whose enthusiastic response has invigorated and sustained our efforts throughout the process of completing the collection. The work of Amanda Moon at Palgrave Macmillan has been indispensable to this project. We greatly benefited from the report of an anonymous reader, who offered us thoughtful advice and strong support.

Our book is the result of a feminist collaboration. For all its intellectual and political merits, credit goes to our contributors, who generously shared with us their commitment, ideas, and time and who patiently endured our outpouring of editorial suggestions through several phases of revisions. It has been an exciting challenge for us to bring together scholars and artists of many cultural origins, languages, and backgrounds, from which we will all continue to benefit. The many ways in which voices from across the world have crossed and interwoven in this collection have not ceased to amaze us throughout this project.

Our special thanks to Marguerite Waller for her inspiration in the early, conceptual stages of our project. We are grateful for her initiative in organizing the panel we presented at the 2005 Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference in London, which prompted our collective endeavor in this new and exciting field in the first place.

For the cover photograph and frontispiece triptych we thank Kamil Turowski and María García Javier, the cocreators of the "María under Hollywood Sign" photo series. There are many institutions and individuals whose support and inspiration have sustained this project. We single out among them Mickey Lin and Natalie Machida for their help with the index, the Center for Feminist Research at the University of Southern California, Mara Holt at Ohio University, Katrin Kremmler and the Budapest Lesbian Filmmaking Collective, and Theresia de Vroom, director of the Marymount Institute at Loyola Marymount University.

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Introduction

Mapping Transnational Feminist Media Studies

Katarzyna Marciniak, Anikó Imre, and Áine O'Healy

Babel's Foreign Currency

We were putting the finishing touches to this collection as the 2007 Oscar season was nearing its grand finale. Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006) was an especially intriguing contender for seven of the Academy Awards. True to its title, *Babel,* though financed mainly by U.S. production funds, was made by a "foreigner" in several different "foreign countries," involving a multilingual cast and production team. Furthermore, like the other films discussed in this volume, it provokes explicit reflection on foreignness and the gendered and racialized discourses of transnationality. But *Babel* is not simply another *English Patient*, an earlier Oscar contender made by a foreigner. Instead, it brings foreignness home to "America."

The "foreign" has been the key operative term of the Bush administration, employed almost exclusively to demonize, and thereby to provoke defensive patriotism. The growing anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States in the post–9/11 era ever more vigilantly target "aliens," specifically nonwhite aliens, as a source of national worry. The issues of immigrant "contamination" are constantly in the foreground of national consciousness as the subject of "undocumented" aliens is debated in the context of vitriolic propositions to construct a wall that would secure the United States from Latin America. The post–9/11 anxiety, and the subsequent "war on terror," have amplified a desire of global proportions to police and discipline those who are classified as questionable others. In the fear-mongering campaign that had fueled the war in Iraq and the racist calls for erecting a wall along the southern borders, Mexico and the Muslim world of the Middle East and North Africa have been cast as especially vicious and sneaky intruders in the serene land of American democracy.

Across the ocean, following the Schengen Agreement and the recent eastward expansion of the European Union, the dissolution of Cold War borders within Europe has been counterbalanced by the systematic tightening of barriers around Fortress Europe, designed to control immigration from the east and the south. This has led to the expulsion of large numbers of non-European nationals or to their indefinite detainment in purpose-built camps that are tantamount to prisons. These events have been accompanied by increasing manifestations of racism and by crudely expressed fears of the threat of a "foreign invasion."

In contrast to this scenario, González Iñárritu, a Mexican director, has his Anglo-American protagonists, played by the star duo Cate Blanchett and Brad Pitt, intrude upon the desert of Morocco along with a group of Western tourists. The two Americans hope to cleanse themselves of their domestic troubles in the foreign land. They are able to do so because they can rely on the dedicated services of their Mexican nanny (Adriana Barraza), who takes care of the children in their absence. These characters are at the center of just two of the four stories the film weaves together, which involve four countries and five languages—English, Arabic, Spanish, Japanese and Sign—and four culturally diverse families: Anglo-American, Mexican, Moroccan, and Japanese.

Self-consciously "global" and dedicated to the exploration of intercultural contrasts and conflicts, the narrative moves back and forth among the Moroccan desert, San Diego, a small Mexican town near Tijuana, and Tokyo, instilling in its audience escalating feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and "liminal panic" (Naficy 1996). This tonality resonates with post–9/11 global tensions in the face of terrorism, illegal immigration, "foreignness," and the perceived need for heightened border security. Highlighting transnational encounters between the so-called first and third worlds, *Babel* submits a critique of U.S. entitlement to unhindered mobility, and delivers its argument with an uncompromising force: no matter who crosses borders, the crossing is potentially risky and difficult. But not all crossings are equal: when privileged first worlders venture abroad, border crossing is a matter of "cosmopolitan" choice; and their trauma can be alleviated by the international apparatus of embassies and rescue helicopters. When the third worlders cross borders in the film, however, there is no aid, only the risk of severe punishment.

In the midst of what one is optimistically inclined to see as the crisis of a particularly damaging era of foreign and domestic policy in the United States, it is appropriate that Hollywood would finally come

to acknowledge and celebrate foreignness as an issue that is always already American. But how should feminists, who have long encouraged a systematic suspicion about nationalism by advocating transnational alliances, evaluate this "mainstreaming" of foreignness and transnationality? *Babel*'s critical attitude to the politics of border crossing and foreignness is very much shared by contributors to this volume. The common goal of the twelve authors of the book, representing so many cultures of origin, is to read film and media culture from transnational feminist perspectives. However, while *Babel* is already familiar to audiences across the world, having rapidly achieved widespread critical attention and multiple nominations and awards,[1] most of the films discussed here have been marginalized by the mechanisms of commercial distribution and have barely registered within canonical film studies. Should we then oppose *Babel* on principle for rendering the global and the transnational "trendy"? Should we dismiss its glossy, hyperreal aesthetic surfaces, its violent spectacle, its star appeal, and its success among limousine liberals? Should we deplore it for its Western-friendly sensibility and deem it a "cinematic McNugget" (Ezra and Rowden 2006, 6), which deprives the transnational of its critical potential and surrenders it to global capital?

These remain important questions to keep on the horizon. But we see *Babel*'s popular success, above all, as an indication that thinking in transnational terms, foregrounding the imbrication of the foreign within the domestic, demystifying the rhetoric of global equality and progress, and questioning the legitimacy of national borders is reaching a level of urgency that cannot be ignored by mainstream audiences. As such, it underscores the urgency of our own project: to unite critical transnational thinking with feminist theory and criticism of film and media culture. Therefore, we would like to foreground the thematic and ideological affinity that *Babel* shows with many of the films our contributors analyze. Our hope is that this will lend more visibility to the work of many filmmakers, video artists, and visual activists worldwide who have been relentlessly exploring and exposing the ugly underbelly of "the global village": racism, illegal border crossing, forced economic migration, xenophobia, and the traffic in women and children.

At the same time, we want to focus on *Babel* and its triumphant entry into mainstream channels of distribution and criticism in order to demonstrate the specific value of a transnational feminist lens. A big-budget film infused with Oscar charisma inevitably obscures the various layers and connotations of the "transnational," which feminists have been keen on sorting out in order to foreground their economic

and political interconnections. Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal identify the primary aspects of the *transnational* as follows: migration flows; the demise or irrelevance of the nation-state and the emergence of alternative identities that are not primarily national; the existence and study of diaspora; a form of neocolonialism that implicates the transnational in movements of capital; and the "NGO-ization" of social movements to supplant the international and the global (Grewal and Kaplan 2001, 664). Such a complex view of the transnationalization of culture is underscored by a set of experiential and methodological factors: the increasing shift from immigrant to transmigrant identities; the opening up of new, post–Cold War frontiers of migration; the emergence of migrant or transnational female artists working in visual media; and the subsequent need to approach heterogeneous representations of foreign and border identities in non-colonizing ways, beyond celebrating and without erasing or domesticating difference.

Given this context, it seems pertinent to apprehend the present global climate as marked by a heightened vigilance about foreignness, by punitive asylum and immigration laws, by the rise of xenophobia and racist violence (Eisenstein 1996) and, as Rosi Braidotti aptly puts it, by "a vampiric consumption of 'others'" (Braidotti 2005, 170). Many contemporary theorists whose work makes critical interventions into discourses of globalization, immigration, refugees, and otherness have already argued that the figure of the asylum-seeker, the refugee, the stranger, the migrant, and the alien are pertinent tropes for theorizing the political dimensions of the present (Agamben 1995, Bauman 1997, Marciniak 2006, Tyler 2006).

We want to introduce this project with reference to *Babel* to argue that a transnational feminist approach to global media culture does not delineate a specialized subfield or set of films for and about women only. Transnational economic developments and the global flow of information, images, and sounds implicate everyone. But they do not create an equal playing field. Feminism, in our understanding, is not a decorative addition or an optional perspective that can be applied to studies of transnational media but an acknowledgment that transnational processes are inherently gendered, sexualized, and racialized. The borders they erase and erect affect different groups differently.

Babel's Transnationalism

Despite its emphasis on events that link people unwittingly to each other across the global map, *Babel* offers a counter-narrative to the

elitist discourse of cosmopolitanism and the cliché of the "global village." The film privileges the site of the family as the affective strategy through which it makes its cross-cultural appeal. While the film's criticism of the celebratory rhetoric of global mobility is not new and has already been explored by other filmmakers,[2] its intensity is particularly disturbing because the most vulnerable victims of the border crossings and transnational interactions in this story are children. The narrative connects four families to one another through the themes of violence, terror, and border crossings. The rifle that a Japanese tourist offers as a gift to his hunting guide in Morocco ends up in the hands of a Moroccan goatherd who, in turn, presents it to his adolescent sons, requesting that they defend the goats from the predatory raids of the jackals. While trying out the gun, one of the boys takes a shot at a bus passing in the distance. The bullet wounds Susan (Blanchett), an American tourist traveling with her husband Richard (Pitt). During their visit to Morocco, the couple's two small children remain in San Diego, entrusted to the care of Amelia, the Mexican nanny, who is due to attend her own grown son's wedding in Mexico immediately after the parents are scheduled to return.

While the white American siblings, blond, angelic and in need of protection, survive and are to be reunited with their family at the film's end, the North African brothers, caught up in antiterrorist hysteria, experience brutal punishment: one is killed, and the other offers himself up to the authorities as a transgressor, leaving the family irrevocably scarred. *Babel* depicts its cross-cultural dramas with striking sensitivity to gender, ethnoracial, economic, national, and (il)legal realities. It de-romanticizes "travel" and, to some extent, de-exoticizes "otherness." While it does so, it suggests that all lives matter, but Anglo-American lives matter differently: they are considered more precious, more worthy of protection and rescue. This is the logic that the film implicitly attempts to deconstruct.

The marriage of the middle-class American couple is emotionally fraught, in need of healing; there is discernible tension between them. Initially, they barely speak to each other, and Susan is perplexed to find herself in Morocco ("Why did we come here?" "Why are we here?"). Their state of alienation changes radically when Susan is shot in what is assumed to be a terrorist attack on the bus. While waiting for an ambulance in the nearby village where they have taken refuge, Richard devotes himself to caring for the heavily bleeding Susan, fighting to keep her alive. For the rest of the narrative, both of them are covered in blood, sweat, and urine. While the story of the American travelers reveals the intense vulnerability that accrues to being a

foreigner in an unknown territory, it nevertheless suggests that characters such as Richard and Susan—white, Western tourists—have the luxury of choosing a distant and "exotic" country such as Morocco as a potential sanctuary for their troubled union.

When the couple is derailed in Morocco as the result of Susan's injury, Amelia in San Diego faces an unexpected dilemma, as she must now determine what to do with the children if she attends, as planned, her own son's imminent wedding in Mexico. Unable to find a replacement to care for the children in her absence, she takes them with her on the short trip across the border. In contrast to the experience of Susan and Richard as tourists (however wounded) in Morocco, Amelia's border crossing reveals the burden of her foreignness by exposing "un-cosmopolitan" realities and highlighting the disjunction between the mobile "citizen" and the restricted "alien." As Ali Behdad's contends: "The border is not just a territorial marker of the modern nation-state—defining its geographical boundary—but an ideological apparatus where notions of national identity, citizenship, and belonging are articulated" (Behdad 1998, 109). That is, Amelia, like the American couple, crosses a border, but her act foregrounds what is well known to many migrants: tactics of surveillance designed to admit or exclude people at the U.S. border are not neutral. They specifically target those who fall outside the paradigm of white Western tourist-travelers. bell hooks succinctly summarizes such differences, arguing that for many nonwhite travelers crossing borders "is not about play but is an encounter with terrorism," the "terrorizing force of white supremacy" (hooks 1992, 343–344).

Leaving the United States by car can be easily accomplished by everyone. However, as the film shows, crossing the border back from Mexico for someone such as Amelia is an ordeal. This difficulty is intensified by the irascible behavior of her nephew (Gael García Bernal) who is driving the car. When provoked by the border guards' belligerent questions and probing flashlight, the young man defies their scrutiny and, with his foot on the accelerator, suddenly speeds across the border. One of the film's most heart-wrenching scenes unfolds in the desert landscape of the border zone, where Amelia finds herself alone with the children after being abandoned by her nephew. The border region, much like the Moroccan desert, is presented visually as a terrain of nightmarish entrapment, disorienting and hostile. At first, Amelia and the children proceed fearfully through darkness. The following day, after they have apparently walked for hours in the blazing sun, the mise-en-scène shifts from enveloping darkness to a vast, open space of confusing multidirectionality. In a poignant moment reminiscent of a

similar scene in Wayne Wang's 1993 *The Joy Luck Club*, Amelia decides to leave the children under a bush while she goes to seek help on her own. Even in daylight, the border zone is a brutal terrain, and the camera stays close to Amelia's body to document this: her torn red dress, the holes in her pantyhose, her parched lips, smeared make-up, her eyes glazed with anguish and the harshness of the sun; her frantic movements, her terror, her pain. Such a relentless focus on the liminal figure of Amelia elicits visceral responses, calling upon the viewer to identify with this disoriented female migrant. The border zone sequences de-aestheticize and de-sexualize Amelia's femaleness and highlight her unbelonging and abjection.

While the predicament of Susan and Richard in Morocco is transformed into an international "terror alert," a situation that eventually allows them to be rescued and assisted, the treatment of Amelia by border authorities offers no emotional relief. When she finally stops a U.S. border patrol car and begs the guard for help to retrieve the children, the guard is unmoved by her plight. His first question is not about the children, but about Amelia's crossing: "When did you cross?" Her response—"I didn't cross, I live here"—is dismissed, as she is immediately handcuffed, treated like a suspect, and taken into the truck full of other presumed "illegals."

The scene of Amelia's interrogation by U.S. immigration officials further reveals the stark antinomies of her position. When the officer informs her that the border patrol has located the missing American children but that their well-being is no longer her concern, she tearfully reveals her bond to these children, her "transnational motherhood" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, 25).[3] Sobbing, she describes how she has nurtured them since they were born, caring for them day and night. "They are like my own children," she says. "But they are *not* your children, ma'am," he bluntly reminds her. The outcome of the interrogation stuns Amelia, for she learns that she will be immediately and definitively deported from the United States, following the discovery that she has been working there illegally for years.

Surprisingly, the interrogation also reveals Amelia's illegal status to the viewers for the first time, retrospectively construing her prolonged employment in the household of Richard and Susan as punishable by law. The ironies and ambivalences abound here: If Amelia is really illegal, why does she attempt to cross the border at an inspection point? If she is illegal, are Susan and Richard unaware that they are committing a crime by keeping her in their employment? More importantly, why does the law seem to punish only Amelia for her transgression and not her employers? What are we to make of the

unjust circumstances through which the migrant's attempt to attend to her family in Mexico results in her punitive expulsion from the American family with whom she has become closely enmeshed?

By privileging the intimate link between the American couple and the Mexican nanny, *Babel* represents the contrast between the cosmopolitan and the migrant, the legitimate citizen and the illegitimate other. It taps into discourses crucial to our collection: female alterity, border crossings, migration, gendered domestic labor, transnational servitude, and racialized structures of power. Questions arise about the exploitation of the clandestine female other by privileged "natives" who may shelter and employ the "alien" as long as she can perform services that sustain the family. *Babel* invites reflection on what Behdad has termed "controlled illegality," that is, the kind of illegality paradoxically sanctioned and produced by a disciplinary apparatus of surveillance that claims to control transgressions of the law (Behdad 1998, 104). The euphoric yet highly deceptive discourse of a "world without borders" takes on a certain poignancy here, forcing the viewers to ponder violence of (il)legality linked, in Amelia's case, to conflicting notions of "home," the restrictive frameworks of national belonging, and the contradictory position of a woman who is supposedly illegal but is simultaneously both useful and necessary to the nation's economic, familial, and affective well-being.

More broadly, the film offers a provocative commentary on encounters that reveal the defensive fragility of citizens who obsessively guard their psychic borders, and who, when willing to venture into contact with those of another culture, demand that the interaction be guarded and aseptic. The scene introducing Susan and Richard in Morocco shows them ordering food and drinks. Here, Susan ostentatiously removes the ice from their glasses, her gesture announcing a fear of pollution or contamination by the presumed "dirt" of the other. Ironically, she is forced to relinquish such hygienic policing later when, wounded and immobile, she is tended to by the villagers in a small hut which, by Western standards, is visibly "unclean." Her bodily boundaries are no longer intact. She submits to the touch of the other and endures the experience of her own blood, sweat, and urine mingling with the impurities of the other.

En route to the wedding in Mexico, Susan's young son remarks that his mother has told him that Mexico is dangerous. Amelia's nephew mischievously responds: "Yeah…It's full of Mexicans." His statement draws attention to the racist underpinnings of the assumption that Mexico is a dangerous place; it implies that Susan's fears have already been transmitted to her children, conditioning their responses and

shaping their future rejection of the other a priori. It also reveals the young Mexican's awareness of his own abjected difference as a third worlder who is constructed by the U.S. citizen as dirty and unsafe, and thus foreshadows his ultimate defiance in choosing to act "like a Mexican" when provoked by the U.S. border police.

Why Transnational Feminist Media Studies?

Increasingly, in film studies, we find references to such categories as "cinema of the borders," "cinema of migration," and "cinema of displacement," terms that are intimately linked to the experiences and discourses of exile, immigration, and border crossings.[4] These labels attempt to classify new filmic narratives which, because of their thematic foci and complicated production contexts, cannot be linked exclusively to a single national culture. Furthermore, these new terms consciously depart from the ghettoizing rubrics of "ethnic cinema," "minority cinema," or "immigrant cinema."[5] In our reading, *Babel* provides further evidence for the claim that film studies needs to transcend the compartmentalizing effects that result from the critical dominance of the category of national cinemas. This argument follows the pioneering work of Hamid Naficy who identifies a "transnational exilic genre," which "cuts across previously defined geographic, national, cultural, cinematic, and metacinematic boundaries" (Naficy 1996, 119). Naficy's *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001) has been extremely influential in drawing attention to the "cinema *of* exile and cinema *in* exile," specifically as it pertains to the work of filmmakers in the post-1945 era of massive displacements of people across the globe.

Most contributions in this collection move within the conceptual territory identified by *Babel* and, more broadly, transnational, exilic, and diasporic films, which are marked by a concern with borders, migration, and foreignness. Our decision to divide the book into three sections built around these three concepts is an indication of where the emphasis falls in individual essays, rather than of their exclusive focus. Unlike *Babel*, however, whose blockbuster hyperrealism and star pedigree accommodate American sensibilities, particularly evident in the film's Japanese sequence, some of the films analyzed in this book, created with much smaller production budgets, aspire to construct an explicitly counter-hegemonic or even feminist mode of

address. In doing so, they point to the necessity of approaching a "transnational genre" from perspectives of feminist politics and aesthetics and of opening up a dialogue between transnational feminism and transnational media studies. Our collection is indebted to a rich legacy in both fields.

The emphasis on "transnational feminism" has been steadily and ever more urgently developing since its initial conception by such U.S.-based feminists as Jacqui Alexander, Gloria Anzaldúa, Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, Chandra Mohanty, Ella Shohat, and Gayatri Spivak in the early 1990s. While these scholars have vigorously argued for the critical need to move beyond the confining frame of a single nation, they also introduced different ways of understanding transnational feminist positionalities and practices. Mohanty, for example, chooses "feminism without borders" "to stress that our most expansive and inclusive visions of feminism need to be attentive to borders while learning to transcend them" (2003, 2). Addressing the question of why we need a theory of transnational feminist practices, Grewal and Kaplan argue for the importance of critiquing the traditional methodological divides between Marxism, feminism, and post-structuralism, divides that foreclose intersectionality and, as a result, often validate "the cosmopolitan masculine subject" as the desired space of intellectual agency while all too often ignoring decades of feminist research (1999, 355). They map the emergence of "transnational feminist cultural studies," an interdisciplinary global endeavor, which they define as "a practice of resistance and critique" (350). This practice has a potential to transform traditional methodological approaches by engaging complex accounts of gender in the national, global, and diasporic contexts situated within histories of imperialism and decolonization. Ella Shohat, whose ground-breaking discussions of media have galvanized feminist research over the years, advocates "multicultural feminism," which needs to be grounded in transnational perspectives: "The global nature of the colonizing process, the global flow of transnational capital, and the global reach of contemporary communications technologies virtually oblige the multicultural feminist critic to move beyond the restrictive framework of the nation-state as a unit for analysis" (1998, 7).

These ongoing feminist efforts, locating the importance of transnationalism within activist, pedagogical, or methodological frameworks, have not yet systematically crossed into the field of transnational studies of film and other media. Instead, current transnational feminist discourses tend to take place mainly in the social sciences and cultural studies, focusing on the issues of human rights, political economy, and feminist activism.[6] Furthermore, the most recent publications in

transnational cinema have not yet formed a consistent bridge with the perspectives offered by transnational feminist studies. In *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader* (2006), Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden argue for the importance of the "transnational" designator:

> The transnational comprises both globalization—in cinematic terms, Hollywood's domination of world film markets—and the counterhegemonic responses of filmmakers from former colonial and Third World countries. The concept of transnationalism enables us to better understand the changing ways in which the contemporary world is being imagined by an increasing number of filmmakers across genres as a global system rather than as a collection of more or less autonomous nations. (2006, 1)

Drawing on these ideas, our project hopes to forge a conceptual bridge between transnational feminism and transnational media, offering in the process a concerted contribution to what we describe as "transnational feminist media studies." In different ways, all of our contributors locate their analyses within this field. Some of the essays also argue for the need to broaden the scope of the field by cutting across the divide of West/non-West as well as north/south and by offering critical interactions that include often neglected voices addressing the post-socialist second world and the global south. The focus on the post-socialist region is particularly compelling, as this area is frequently omitted in transnational feminist studies. Up to this juncture, voices from the post-socialist regions have been typically positioned under the rubrics of Balkan Studies, Slavic Studies, Eastern European Studies, Postsocialist Cultural Studies, and so on, thereby setting them apart from the political and aesthetic prisms of "transnational feminisms."[7] A significant predecessor to our collection in this regard is Katarzyna Marciniak's recent volume, *Alienhood: Citizenship, Exile, and the Logic of Difference*. This book provides a model for the kind of feminist transnational media analysis that actively demystifies the first-third world paradigm and brings the so-called second world into critical and theoretical circulation.

Feminist Translations and the Global Tower of Babel

Transnational feminist media studies thus draws on the interdisciplinarity and intersectionality evidenced in the writing of feminists working

in the field of postcolonial theory, similarly concerned with issues of incommensurability, counter-hegemonic interpretation, and modes of address. However, this new field broadens the terrain of inquiry to examine the contemporary manifestations and mutations of "empire" and the intricacies of post–Cold War geopolitics. Several contributions are directly concerned with identifying and translating a counter-hegemonic address into the terms of transnational feminism.

Patricia Pisters's essay discusses the work of a new, transnational, female generation of filmmakers of Maghrebi descent. The films of Bouchra Khalili, Leila Kilani, Rhama el Madani, or Dalila Ennadre offer a rethinking of the question of feminine aesthetics and female address articulated by an earlier wave of feminist film theory. The migrant "bodies on the move" featured by these films, Pisters argues, can also be productively understood through the lens of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of "becoming-woman." In a similar vein, Asuman Suner draws on but also revises the notion of "accented cinema" with reference to the work of Iranian Samira Makhmalbaf's *Blackboards* (2000) and Turkish Yeşim Ustaoğlu's *Waiting for the Clouds* (2004). Suner argues that, although neither director identifies herself as a feminist, these films articulate a kind of transnational gender politics that critiques both nationalist and fundamentalist ideologies and contemporary global neoliberalism. The gendered transnational "accent" with which the films speak also critiques Western, even Western feminist, prejudices against the Middle East and Islam.

Priya Jaikumar writes about *Khamosh Pani* (*Silent Waters*, 2002), made by Pakistani filmmaker Sabiha Sumar. The film centers on a Sikh-born woman displaced into Pakistan after the 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent and living her adult life as a Muslim. When her son turns to religious fundamentalism, she is forced to rethink her identity and face the kind of incommensurable alternatives often presented to South Asian women: between religion and secularism, between rights based on identity politics and rights based on a national universalism, between tradition and modernity. As Jaikumar shows, the film suggests that metropolitan feminism, without a critical transnational dimension, does not offer a feasible way out of such a dilemma.

Lan Duong's essay documents the ongoing shift in Vietnam from a nationalized and centralized system to an increasingly transnational economy and film industry. She analyzes emerging new, popular sensibilities evident in box-office hits such as Vu Ngoc Dang's *Long-Legged Girls* (2004), whose youthful representations of sexuality and gender undermine not only the state's insistence on the "high cultural" values of nationalism but the very borders of the state. Such

popular films circulate through transnational avenues of distribution in the Vietnamese diaspora. Anikó Imre describes changing representations and spectatorial addresses from post-socialist Eastern Europe, where the rapid cultural and political changes show some similarities with those of postcommunist Vietnam. By focusing on the work of a Budapest-based lesbian filmmaking collective, she explores the region-wide ambivalence that lesbian visual activists, freshly emerged from the closet in the last few decades, feel toward nationalisms and Western liberal feminism alike.

Imre's is one of several chapters to critique simplistic ideas of global sisterhood and to open up the first-third world binary divide from the point of view of the often-forgotten "second world." Other contributions examine films and media representations that reflect on the inherently transnational landscape of post–Cold War Europe, marked by mass migration from east to west, and then back to the east when migrants are turned back at the gates of an increasingly restrictive Fortress Europe. Several chapters analyze films and other visual texts that take up one of the most striking manifestations of economic migration from the south and east: the indentured prostitution and sexual trafficking of female migrants. Ginette Verstraete provides an engaging introduction to the situation of "new" migrants, who are entering Europe as asylum seekers or illegal labor migrants from the former Soviet Union, the post-Yugoslav countries, Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. A large number of these migrants are women, who leave behind their families to find work in service fields such as nursing, cleaning, and prostitution. This is a significant change from the male-dominated migrations of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. While *Babel*'s portrayal of Amelia limits the illegal immigrant's position to that of a helpless, disoriented victim, Verstraete is particularly interested in the technologically mediated strategies that female migrants use to evade high-tech surveillance in Europe and to create spaces of agency for themselves. Media artist and researcher Ursula Biemann's two video projects, *Remote Sensing* (2001) and *Contained Mobility* (2004) serve as points of textual reference to a global visual culture from which to rethink tourism, migration, and smuggling in a Europe of high-tech movement and "scientific" border control.

Placed next to Verstraete's essay, Ursula Biemann's own reflection on the making of her ethnographic multimedia projects *Black Sea Files*, *Remote Sensing,* and *Europlex* offers a close-up perspective on how capitalism addresses women and their labor but also the inventive personal worlds that women develop within and around such an address. *Black Sea Files* follows post-Soviet prostitutes in the Turkish

Black Sea basin, a major hub of trafficking and prostitution. Biemann reads the women's mobility in relation to the flow of the new Caspian oil. *Remote Sensing* similarly captures women in movement in the digitalized terrain of the global sex trade. Women in this video are actively traversing geographies, sleeping in bushes and dashing by on motorbikes, while they are sensed, recorded, identified, and rerouted. *Europlex* enters the Spanish-Moroccan border circuits of the Strait of Gibraltar, where smuggling *domesticas* from Morocco enter Spain daily. Crossing the border is also a form of time travel as the women move back and forth between Moroccan and European time zones, mustering some measure of agency in creating their own livelihood in the process.

Áine O'Healy's essay examines a range of Italian films that ostensibly seek to counter the sensationalist and often xenophobic response of the media to recent immigration from the east and the global south. Interrogating the representational strategies of these realist dramas that collectively construct the migrant as an eroticized victimary figure, the essay also analyzes Roberta Torre's contrasting effort to transcend the limitations of realist representation in her satirical musical, *South Side Story* (1999), which was made with the collaboration of a group of Nigerian prostitutes working in the cities of Italy. Alice Bardan draws upon feminist theorizations of spectatorship and identification to compare two films that investigate female migration and prostitution: Paweł Pawlikowski's *Last Resort* (2000) and Lukas Moodysson's *Lilya 4-Ever* (2002). Unlike Moodysson's film, Bardan argues, *Last Resort* exercises an ethics of vision that facilitates identification with Tanya, the film's Russian protagonist, who is stuck in the twilight zone of an English refugee camp. Pawlikowski thus makes a compelling contribution to the way in which spectators engage with traditional narratives about "the displaced" and rewrites the stereotypical representations of Russian and East European women who, like Amelia in *Babel*, are generally thought to be desperate to escape the "wasteland" of their countries.

The essay by Imogen Tyler and Bruce Bennett focuses on two recent films directed by Michael Winterbottom, which resonate with some of the ideological preoccupations and themes of *Babel*. The authors draw on a body of transnational feminist writing, including those of Chandra Mohanty and Sara Ahmed, to analyze Winterbottom's *In This World* (2003) and *Road to Guantánamo* (2006) as films that exemplify what they call the "new cinema of borders." Naficy's characterization of transnational cinema could also embrace films of this category, which display fragmentation, multilingualism, liminal characters,

journeying, identity, and displacement. Both of Winterbottom's films take a docu-fictional lens to the misadventures of actual liminal figures, whose lives do not fit within legitimate borders and boundaries. Much like *Babel*, his films refuse to depict the world as the borderless global village of the cosmopolitan subject. Rather, as for Amelia, for the Afghan refugees who set off for Britain in *In This World* and for the British-born Pakistani trio who are mistaken for terrorists and end up in the infamous U.S. prison in Cuba in *Road to Guantánamo*, the world is one of barriers, fences, checkpoints, exploitation, and death. The films raise the same ethical questions about spectatorship that a critical approach should raise about *Babel*: what does it mean for those of us who live our lives protected by borders to consume such films? Do we not inevitably partake in the process of fetishizing different experiences of the border, erasing the specificity and materiality of lived experiences? Is there a risk that both filmmakers and audiences become border tourists, making cinematic forays into "non-American cultures" that are still presented from the position of a Eurocentric gaze?

Marguerite Waller focuses on Hungarian director Ibolya Fekete's *Chico* (1996), another manifestation of the global genre of "border cinema." Its eponymous protagonist, born in Latin America to a Jewish Hungarian artist father and Spanish Catholic mother, has to leave the postcolonial communism of Che Guevara and Salvador Allende, and finds himself in the Budapest of Hungarian communism. From there he continues to Albania, Israel, and Croatia, where he throws himself into the war of post-Yugoslav succession. What makes Chico's border crossings especially intriguing is that, much like in Winterbottom's films, the boundaries of fiction and documentary are mutually permeable since this character is played by the same Eduardo Rózsa Flores on whose life the film is based.

Katarzyna Marciniak weaves together autobiographical narrative, pedagogical practice, and film analysis to reflect on the paradigm of what she calls "palatable foreignness." The essay traces the author's own stages of reclassification in the United States, first as "foreign," followed by "international" and then "transnational" subject. This personal trajectory parallels changes in institutional and pedagogical paradigms in U.S. academia. Marciniak presents the strategies she has developed, along with other transnational feminists, to demystify the discourses of harmlessness through which both classroom practices and mainstream representations strive to tame and contain foreign bodies, particularly those of women. The chapter focuses on three such representations: Joel Zwick's *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*

(2002), James L. Brooks's *Spanglish* (2004), and Theresa Connelly's *Polish Wedding* (1998). In the analysis, pedagogy emerges as a crucial field where one can push past what Ella Shohat calls an "additive approach" to ethnicity, which tends to package and isolate increasingly differentiated ethnic representations. The more difficult but more productive alternative is to put into practice a dialogical, relational approach to representations and experiences across borders.

This collection itself is an attempt to advocate such a relational feminist practice, which "assumes a nonfinalized and conjunctural definition of feminism as a polysemic site of contradictory positionalities" and assumes that "genders, sexualities, races, classes nations, and even continents coexist not as hermetically sealed entities but rather as part of a permeable interwoven relationality" (Shohat 2002, 68). The metaphor of the Tower of Babel is equally appropriate for the global foreignness depicted in González Iñárritu's film and for the multiplicity of interwoven feminisms that our collection represents. However, our collective project asserts something that is at best implicit in the film: that translation among different languages, as among contradictory feminist positionalities and incommensurable female experiences, is a crucial strategy to envision and enact.

Notes

1. *Babel* is a U.S.-Mexican coproduction, and González Iñárritu is a Mexican director who now resides in the United States. He won in the category of Best Director at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival; the film also won the 2007 Golden Globe in the Best Motion Picture Drama category. *Babel* also garnered seven Academy Award Nominations.
2. There are many recent, less widely distributed films of various national origins, which foreground the difficulties of border crossing and transnational mobility. See, e.g., Ursula Biemann's *Performing the Border* (1999), Ibolya Fekete's *Bolse Vita* (1993), Marco Tullio Giordana's *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide* (2005), Damjan Kožole's *Spare Parts* (2003), Lukas Moodysson's *Lilja 4-Ever* (2002), Francesco Munzi's *Saimir* (2004), Gregory Nava's *My Family, Mi Familia* (1995), Paweł Pawlikowski's *Last Resort* (2000), Michele Placido's *Pummarò* (1992), Anayansi Prado's *Maid in America* (2004), Nancy Savoca's *Dirt* (2003), Hans-Christian Schmid's *Distant Lights* (2003), Michael Winterbottom's *In This World* (2002), and Xavier Zoller's *Journey of Hope* (1991).
3. See *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadow of Affluence*, especially "Social Reproduction and New Regimes of Inequality: Transnational Motherhood": "Women raised in another

nation are using their own adult capacities to fulfill the reproductive work of more privileged American women, subsidizing the careers and social opportunities of their employers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, 25).

4. See, e.g., Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli's *Crossing New Europe: Postmodern Travel and the European Road Movie* (2006); Eva Rueschmann's *Moving Pictures, Migrating Identities* (2003).
5. Shohat's discussion of ethnicity in this context is particularly useful here. In the context of American cinema, she argues: "The disciplinary assumption that some films are 'ethnic' whereas others are not is ultimately based on the view that certain groups are ethnic whereas others are not. The marginalization of 'ethnicity' reflects the imaginary of the dominant group which envisions itself as the 'universal' or the 'essential' American nation, and thus somehow 'beyond' or 'above' ethnicity" (1991, 215).
6. See, e.g., Wendy S. Hesford and Wendy Kozol's *Just Advocacy? Women's Human Rights, Transnational Feminisms, and the Politics of Representation* (2005); Chandra Talpade Mohanty's *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (2003); and Marguerite Waller and Sylvia Marcos's *Dialogue and Difference: Feminisms Challenge Globalization* (2005).
7. See, e.g., Dušan I. Bjelić and Obrad Savić's *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (2002), and Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska, and Elena Gapova's *Over the Wall/After the Fall: Post-Communist Cultures through an East-West Gaze* (2004).

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Part I

New Frontiers of Migration

Chapter 1

Screening Unlivable Lives: The Cinema of Borders

Bruce Bennett and Imogen Tyler

Border anxiety currently dominates the political rhetoric of Western governments and is dutifully amplified by the corporate news media. In the United States, Australia, and Europe ever-tighter national and international border controls have accompanied the implementation of harsh and punitive asylum, immigration, and terror laws. A significant body of "border theory" has emerged during the last decade in response to the new politics of the border, exposing the ways in which the geopolitical landscape impacts unequally on the movement and flow of people, objects, and images (Ahmed 2000, 115).[1] In bringing feminist concerns with the "micro-political" to bear upon critiques of global capital, transnational feminist theory has produced some of the most vital accounts of the border politics of the present.[2] What is important about this scholarship is that it theorizes the asymmetrical relations of power *and* knowledge that characterize international borders through a focus on the complex border zones of racial, sexual, and economic exploitation. In this essay we bring a transnational feminist approach to bear in analysis of border cinema.

The border has become a central theme within a range of international films that might be categorized as "the cinema of borders" due to their central preoccupation with border crossing. Hamid Naficy suggests that "border films" are characterized formally by fragmentation, multilingualism, and liminal characters, and explore themes that "involve journeying, historicity, identity, and displacement" (2001, 4). Far from depicting the world as a borderless global village, border films depict the underside of cosmopolitanism, a world of barriers, fences, checkpoints, exploitation, and death. This is a cinema concerned with what Judith Butler describes as "those 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life" that are nevertheless "densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject" (1993, 3).

However, the risk of any relatively mainstream film about borders is that both the filmmakers and the film's audiences become border tourists. This essay draws upon Butler's critical account of the constitutive role of the abjected lives of sexual, ethnic, and economic others in securing and valorizing normative and privileged subject positions, as a means of exploring Western cinematic attempts to render the border politics of the present visible. Focusing on an analysis of the ways in which immigrants, refugees, and detainees are made visible and knowable within two highly acclaimed "British" border films, *In This World* (2002) and *The Road to Guantánamo* (2006), we probe the extent to which these films problematize the hegemonic politics of the border. Throughout we draw on transnational feminist theory to examine critically the ways in which issues of gender circumscribe what kinds of "border subjects" and "border visibility" are able to materialize "under Western eyes" (Mohanty 1991).

In This World

Michael Winterbottom's[3] *In This World* is a highly affecting film that recounts the attempt of two Afghan refugees, the teenage Jamal (Jamal Udin Torabi) and his older cousin, Enayatullah (Enayatullah Jumaudin), to travel illegally to Britain from the massive Shamshatoo refugee camp near Peshawar in Pakistan in search of a livable life.[4] A transnational feminist critical approach to the analysis of cinema requires a consideration of a film within various contexts; hence we discuss the contextual material that routinely accompanies the release of a film, such as production notes, the "electronic press kit," interviews with the director, and DVD commentaries. This supplementary promotional material is not only revealing of the specific economic, social, and political contexts of a film's production, but also constitutes layers of extended narrative that work to shape its reception and meaning. In November 2001, during the preproduction process of *In This World*, Winterbottom and screenwriter Tony Grisoni traveled to Pakistan on tourist visas where they visited refugee camps, including Shamshatoo, which is home to 70,000 Pashtun Afghan refugees. They then embarked on the journey from Peshawar to London, tracing the people-smuggling route that was to be taken by the film's central characters. In December 2001, casting director Wendy Brazington flew to Pakistan to identify two Afghan refugees to play the principal roles. She found Enayatullah in a chance encounter in one of Peshawar's Afghan markets, and came across Jamal (born in the Shamshatoo

camp) in a school where she held auditions. Filming began early in 2002, and the story was shot like a documentary using small, handheld DV cameras. The final cut was edited from over 200 hours of footage shot as the three-man crew (Winterbottom, cinematographer Marcel Zyskind, and sound recordist, Stuart Wilson) traveled with the two nonprofessional actors along a route through Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Italy, and France to the United Kingdom.

The differential power relations involved in cross-border mobility were evident from the outset in the difficulty faced by the production team in acquiring visas for Jamal and Enayatullah. As Afghan refugees in Pakistan, they had precarious citizenship status, and since they were recognized as neither Afghanis nor Pakistani nationals, it was almost impossible to acquire travel documents for them. The problems faced in gaining official permission for these two actors to travel across borders encapsulates the issue of unequal access to mobility at the heart of the film; the filmmakers, as (white) European citizens, were able to cross national borders with little difficulty, while the actors found their movement endlessly and forcibly curtailed. Even with tourist visas, Jamal and Enayatullah's bodies simply cannot fit the available "touristic" subject positions.

The difficulties encountered in cross-border travel during production leak into and shape the meaning of the finished film in a number of ways. The actors, for instance, play characters who share their names. Furthermore, the difficulty in getting permission to shoot the film resulted in more improvisation than originally intended. The filmmakers resorted to "guerrilla filmmaking" without permits, recording sound with discreet radio microphones hidden in the actors' clothes. Indeed, it was only when the extemporized dialogue between Jamal and Enayatullah—who spoke Farsi—was translated during postproduction that the filmmakers discovered what the two actors had been saying.[5] Although this blurring of the boundary between "fiction" and "reality" is partly a consequence of contingent circumstances of production, it serves to amplify both the film's attention to the politics of border crossing and its affective power.

The film opens with few credits and no incidental music. An expository voice-over (in English) provides background information about the Shamshattoo camp to accompany the initial montage of shots of the camp and its occupants. This opening sequence introduces the central character, Jamal, who is shown manufacturing bricks with a group of other children. The voice-over informs us that Jamal, an orphan, faces a life stranded in the refugee camp earning less than one dollar a day. Born in the camp, Jamal cannot leave it for Afghanistan,

nor can he legitimately travel across other national borders. If Jamal belongs anywhere, it is within this densely populated interzone. Jamal's cousin, Enayatullah (otherwise known as Enayat), lives with many other Afghan refugees in nearby Peshawar and when Jamal learns that Enayat's uncle has decided to pay people-smugglers to take him to London, Jamal introduces them to a man who can arrange this. Faced with no future in the refugee camp, Jamal, who can speak English, persuades Enayat to accept him as a traveling companion and interpreter, and in February 2002 they embark on their search for a livable life.

The narrative follows Jamal and Enayat's arduous, disorienting, and increasingly desperate 4,000-mile journey, in which they travel variously in pickups, buses, trucks, shipping containers, ferries, trains, and on foot. Periods of frustrating and tedious immobility are interspersed with frantic periods of movement in which they try to evade border patrols and negotiate checkpoints. The film's most harrowing sequence depicts the journey from Istanbul to Trieste, when, along with a number of other refugees, Jamal and Enayat are sealed inside an air-tight metal box, hidden on a container truck that then boards a ferry for Italy. During this two-day trip all of the passengers suffocate, except for Jamal and Mehti, the infant child of a couple they had befriended earlier in their journey. The screen is almost entirely black during this brief scene, the only illumination the weak light of a torch, and all we can see are glimpses of faces in the darkness, accompanied by the travelers' voices. The scene takes us from the initial friendly small talk between the travelers to their angry, panic-stricken shouts for help as they pound on the walls and demand to be let out, until finally only Jamal's desperate voice can be heard, trying to elicit a response from his unconscious cousin. The fragmentary editing of the sequence powerfully conveys the disorientation and growing panic of the refugees, giving us little sense of how much time has passed. The short scene does not linger on the awful experience—the cutaway to an image of an animated map showing the ferry's route and the caption, "40 Hours Later," spares us much of the horror—but it is no less upsetting because of this elision. Although we can see almost nothing, the dark images invite us to imagine what it must feel like for Jamal and the other refugees (and also the fifty-eight Chinese illegal immigrants who died in identical circumstances traveling to the United Kingdom from Belgium in 2000).[6]

Toward the end of the film, Jamal finally arrives at the Sangatte refugee center in Calais on the north coast of France. He makes the last stage of his journey from France to Britain by stowing away

underneath a truck. The final scene of *In This World* depicts an enervated, world-weary Jamal washing dishes in a London café months after setting out on his hellish journey. Jamal phones Peshawar from the café to report that he has arrived, and to tell Enayat's father that his son is no longer "in this world." The phone call is followed by a montage sequence showing young children in the Shamshattoo camp peering at the camera, posing and playing in front of it, before the film concludes with shots of Jamal walking on his own through London and arriving at a mosque to pray.

The sentimental shots of the children at Shamshattoo, richly colored with yellow filters make a striking contrast with the grey, wintry light of London, accompanied by plaintive music, emphasize what Jamal has lost in making his horrific journey: his family—especially his younger brother to whom he is shown saying goodbye at the beginning—and his childhood. Another upsetting implication of this sequence is that the trajectories traced by Jamal and Enayat represent the only lines of flight available to the children left behind at Shamshattoo: trauma and/or death. With regard to the question of which life is more livable for a refugee, the borderlands of Shamshattoo or an "illegal" life in London among strangers, the ending is decidedly ambiguous.

In This World concludes with a series of intertitles explaining that after being refused asylum in Britain in 2002, Jamal was granted "exceptional leave" to stay but is due to be expelled from Britain on the day before his eighteenth birthday. What remains unclear from this epilogue is that this information pertains to the real Jamal, who returned to London by himself after the filming was completed, following a similar route to that taken by the film crew. This raises disturbing questions about the extent to which the filmmakers intervened in the course of Jamal's life. Writing about the film, Winterbottom notes: "In one sense, the film is not his story—we set up that journey, after all, and who knows if he would have made it on his own steam. But I like the confusion that exists now between Jamal the character and Jamal the person (2003)."

Winterbottom's decision to use this extra-diegetic information in order to add affective weight to his film is revealing. He has made clear in interviews and press releases that he set out to make the film as a direct response to the overwhelmingly negative representations of asylum seekers by politicians and in the British news media. *In This World* aims explicitly to inspire empathy in an (imagined) European audience for the economic migrants and refugees pushing toward European ports and checkpoints. Although xenophobic discourses

within the news media consistently depict refugees as a dehumanized, undifferentiated foreign mass pressing against and breaching national borders, *In This World* asks its audience to recognize "the human face" of specific, individual refugees, aiming to demonstrate reassuringly that, "close-up," they are "just like us." The aim to inspire empathy through identification is a favored device of Western humanitarian literature on refugees, which draws on photographic close-ups of refugees' faces, and documentaries that employ first-person accounts of refugee experiences to provoke sympathetic responses in first-world audiences. This "rhetoric of the close-up" is intended to move audiences in ways that will enable "us" to identify with the victims of repressive asylum laws and border controls (see Tyler 2006). *In This World* mixes these humanitarian devices with the familiar generic conventions of melodrama to create a highly emotive film—one that moves its audience to tears.

In This World generates its political affect through the central figure of Jamal, the refugee child. Two of Winterbottom's other films, *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997) and *I Want You* (1998), also represent the refugee experience through the figure of the child—and, more particularly, the orphan. The figure of the abandoned child is an especially powerful rhetorical device because it connotes innocence and victimhood. The child represents the lack of agency and self-determination associated with the refugee in ways that enable powerlessness to be valorized as morally good. In terms of cinematic conventions, figuring the refugee as an orphan child opens up a possibility of narrative resolution for (liberal) European audiences in which they can imagine themselves as benevolent saviors, the potential adoptive parents of these border children. It is Jamal and the infant who survive suffocation in the freight container, after all, and through the figure of the orphan, the refugee is universalized as one we can choose to "embrace" and welcome into our "home." An inevitable consequence of employing this orphan figure is that *In This World* infantilizes the groups it seeks to represent. This limited frame of visibility arguably reproduces the displacement of refugees and the sense that they are not authorized to speak for themselves. Although Jamal and Enayat *do* speak, they are subtitled, edited, directed, and packaged for consumption within a particular humanitarian frame of visibility. The role of the intermittent voice-over, which is male, middle class, and English-accented, is particularly significant in this regard, bestowing the film with authority from a particular and problematic English perspective.

Within mainstream Western representations, the refugee is most often represented either, in humanitarian literature, as a child-like,

solitary, destitute, and helpless figure or, in hostile news media and political rhetoric, as a mute, threatening, and undifferentiated mass of men pressing at the border. *In This World* focuses almost exclusively on the experience of refugee boys and men and in so doing repeats the overdetermined humanitarian representation of the refugee as a helpless, infantilized, and feminized male figure. Our identification with the figure of Jamal is crucially dependent upon the absence of women and, most notably, a mother figure. Indeed, through its focus on the patriarchal social, familial, and economic relations of Afghani culture, refugee women are marginalized throughout *In This World*. All the significant relationships depicted in the film are between men, despite the fact that, in reality, the vast majority of refugees at Shamshatoo are women and their children. Bans on Afghani women working outside the home, and restrictions on education for girls have compounded the dire situation facing women and female children in these border camps. This situation, contrary to Western media reports, has not changed since the U.S.-backed war on the Taliban.[7] The social mobility of adult women in these camps is extremely limited. They are largely confined to the cramped spaces of makeshift homes and tents, while in public spaces they are often compelled to be fully veiled. The ways in which women are veiled from sight, both within the public spaces of the camp and again through their elision from the film, implies a spectral layer of (in)visibility that the film is unable to address. If a particular set of social and cultural regulatory codes marginalizes women in these camps, within the film another set of Western heteronormative imperatives and cinematic conventions work together to reinforce the marginalization of these women by enabling some identifications while foreclosing and/or disavowing others (see Butler 1993, 3). Certainly, in so far as *In This World* sets out to elicit Western compassion for refugees, it does so through a silent complicity with the patriarchal and economic oppression of female refugees within this violent interzone, as though a focus on the oppression of women might complicate the sympathy that the film elicits through the figure of the orphaned protagonist Jamal.

Accompanied by Dario Marianelli's swelling, melancholic score, *In This World* exploits the emotional conventions of cinematic melodrama and the most sentimental conventions of humanitarianist discourse in order to communicate with emotional power something of the unlivable lives of male refugees. This film offers no solutions or, indeed, even factual insight into the refugee crisis that engulfs this region. It does not operate at the level, then, of political effect but works within a register of political *affect*—a register that is decidedly

more ambiguous. Its central aim is to move its audience to recognize the enormous inequalities that divide "them" from "us." However, not only is the frame of visibility that circumscribes this film limited and gender-specific, it also fails to address the larger complicity of Western governments, and by extension the film's audience, in creating and enabling the conditions it depicts. As we have noted, the danger of films such as *In This World* is that the filmmakers and the film's Western audience become border tourists. In this process, "brief forays are made into non-Euro-American Cultures" in ways that elicit cathartic spectatorial experiences of compassion without radically challenging the forms of visibility that frame contemporary border politics, and without fundamentally upsetting the audience's expectations of easy mobility (Mohanty 2003, 518).

The Road to Guantánamo (codirected by Winterbottom with Mat Whitecross, 2006) operates both as a companion piece and in many ways as an important counterpoint to *In This World*. It returns us to the same global crisis-point, the troubled border zone between Afghanistan and Pakistan, at the same historical moment—the early stages of the bombing of Afghanistan by U.S. and British forces. It adopts similar formal strategies to *In This World*, such as a documentary style and the use of nonprofessional actors, but tells the "true" story of three British-Asian men, Asif Iqbal, Shafiq Rasul, and Ruhel Ahmed (known as "The Tipton three" by the British press), who were apprehended in Afghanistan in 2001 by the Afghan Northern Alliance (United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan) and then imprisoned and tortured in the U.S. detention camps at Guantánamo Bay in Cuba. They were finally released without charge in 2004. *The Road to Guantánamo*, like *In This World*, focuses exclusively on the border-crossing experiences of men. However, by foregrounding the experience of nonwhite British citizens, the film enables a perspective on border politics and border crossings that differs from the more conventional "touristic" and humanitarian perspectives of *In This World*, and problematizes the tendency toward a (singular) Eurocentric gaze.

The Road to Guantánamo

The Road to Guantánamo interweaves interviews with archival news footage and a dramatized reconstruction of the journey of Asif Iqbal, Shafiq Rasul, and Ruhel Ahmed to the nightmarish interstitial destination of the U.S. Naval Base on the island of Cuba, and their subsequent detention there. The narrative begins in September 2001 with

nineteen-year-old Asif's trip to Pakistan to meet a possible bride in the Punjab. He decides to get married and invites his friends Ruhel (Farhad Harun), Shafiq (Riz Ahmed), and Monir (Waqar Siddiqui), to fly out and attend the wedding. The four men meet in Karachi and enjoy a sightseeing trip, going to the beach, shopping, and visiting a local mosque with Shafiq's Pakistani cousin, Zahid. After hearing a preacher at the mosque calling for volunteers to help the Afghani people, the five men decide, partly for "the experience," to visit Afghanistan. They make their way across the Pakistan/Afghanistan border and after a few days reach Kabul, where U.S. bombs have begun to fall. The men spend their time wandering around the city, "not doing anything" and struggling to communicate—Urdu is their third language and none of them speaks Pashtu or Dari. As the bombing continues in the nearby mountains, they grow anxious to return to Pakistan but end up in Kunduz province where they are stranded with an international group of soldiers on the frontline between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance. Afghanistan is descending into chaos under heavy bombardment by the U.S. forces, who are supporting the Northern Alliance against the Taliban. In the chaotic evacuation of Kunduz, they lose Monir (now presumed dead). They are captured by the Northern Alliance who take them for pro-Taliban fighters, and are searched, robbed, marched through the mountains at gunpoint with scores of other foreign fighters and Afghans, and then herded into container trucks. Asif only avoids suffocation when the soldiers strafe the metal trailer he is held in with machine guns, peppering it with bullet holes and killing most of the occupants. The men are then transferred to a rudimentary overcrowded Northern Alliance prison, before being handed over to the custody of U.S. troops. Again, suspected of being foreign pro-Taliban fighters, they are forced to endure weeks of physical abuse and interrogation by British and American soldiers at a U.S. detention camp in Kandahar, before being flown in January 2002 to the makeshift detention center at the U.S. Naval base in Guantánamo Bay. Several months later they are transferred to the purpose-built prison, Camp Delta, where they are incarcerated, interrogated, and tortured for hundreds of hours, only to be released without charge in March 2004. The film's second half is given over to recounting the conditions of imprisonment and isolation and the crushingly repetitive processes of interrogation and physical abuse suffered by the three men. The film concludes with Shafiq and Ruhel (rather than the actors who play them) returning to Pakistan in June 2005 for Asif's wedding to an (anonymous) Pakistani bride chosen by his parents, an event that is uncritically presented in wholly affirmative terms.

The Road to Guantánamo employs the formal model of the docudrama, and is almost casual in its interlacing of fiction and documentary. It does not labor over the establishment of distinctions between archive footage, interviews with the three men, and documentary reconstruction with the actors who play them, and is striking for the facility and economy with which it moves between different types of material. Like *In This World, The Road to Guantánamo* distances itself from the transparency sought by cinematic naturalism, but draws on the "authentic" charge of documentary footage. However, it adopts a quite different representational strategy from *In This World*, as its protagonists are British citizens and not "foreign others" in relation either to other characters in the film or to the film's primary intended audience. These individuals appear to speak for themselves (insofar as they are permitted to by scripting and editing) as well as through their dramatic avatars. Also, they speak English, and their statements are not mediated through subtitled translations. The fact that they are British-Asian, rather than Afghans or Pakistanis, means also that the film does not invite the spectator to identify with the oppressed or subaltern subjects of those countries in a liberal gesture toward common experience. Instead, the film tells a story of Western tourists (albeit of Asian origin) who, apparently inadvertently, get into trouble while visiting another country. Much of the film's black humor is derived from the disparity between the "ordinariness" of the three young men and the absurdity of their imprisonment—that they are arrested, interrogated, and tortured for months as if they were hardened guerrilla fighters.

The decision to represent the bombing and invasion of Afghanistan and imprisonment at Guantánamo Bay through the experiences of these men means that the film offers a provisional and narrowly selective account. This does not pretend to be a comprehensive historical record, although the narrative connotes historical accuracy with TV news footage and captions indicating dates and locations. Instead, the film makes its argument about the incompetence, ignorance, and racist Islamophobic violence of the British and American military operation through the (apparent) misrecognition of these men as Taliban soldiers or al-Qaeda or al-Majaroun terrorists. Winterbottom intersperses newsreel accounts with interviews and dramatized footage in order to highlight the "contrast between their experiences on the ground as three individuals caught up in it compared to us watching it from the outside" (Winterbottom 2006). The visual style of the interviews is unvarying throughout the film, as the three are shot in close-up against a mottled beige background with high-key lighting.

In the absence of dramatic visual effects, this formal minimalism seems designed to neutralize the emotional impact of the interviews so that the emphasis is placed on the factual details of the men's incarceration, rather than an evocation of the psychological consequences of their experiences. In contrast to the earlier film, *The Road to Guantánamo* does not draw extensively on melodramatic devices for its political affect. Indeed, despite depicting extreme acts of violence and torture, it deliberately distances the spectator from the emotional impact of the events it evokes. As they tell their story, their delivery is at times cheerful, at times deadpan (when, e.g., they coolly downplay the effects of the abusive treatment they received) and at others, reflective and despondent.

A sequence toward the end of the film recounts the experiences undergone by Shafiq and Ruhel when transferred to isolation cells in 2003. The actors are shown in the steel-walled punishment cells, and there is a cut to Ruhel who explains, "It was a whole different story for us there: we was getting punished. I was in 'iso' for ages. I was there for two or three months." This is followed by a jarring cut to an almost black room in which one of the actors is chained to the floor in a stress position while thrash metal plays very loudly. There is a cut to Shafiq who calmly explains that he was shackled to the hook on the floor. The image then cuts back and forth between Shafiq's explanation of the mechanics of abuse—that he might be held there for six hours, and left to soil himself—and brief sequences showing the manacled actor screaming, being berated, and manhandled by a marine, and subjected to strobe lights while the music continues. The sequence finishes by returning to shots of the actors slumped in the isolation cells. What is notable here is that although the sequence exploits the striking or disruptive effect of parallel editing—intercutting Shafiq's calm account with extreme music that sounds like an expression of sheer desperation or rage—this disjunctive editing is not employed to make us feel what it was like for Shafiq and Ruhel as they underwent this shattering abuse. It is difficult to see the face of the manacled figure or hear his voice; the cues for spectator-identification are absent from these brief bursts of sound and image. Moreover, the dispassionate delivery of Shafiq and Ruhel as they recount their experiences betrays no traces of the trauma they suffered. The film thus eschews the conventional shot in which a subject breaks down on camera while relating a particularly upsetting episode to the interviewer. This shot typically acts as a guarantee both of the veracity of the subject's account and the incisiveness of the film's investigative reporting, and in refusing it, the film also refuses to offer the spectator the emotional

drama and, perhaps, the voyeuristic/sadistic pleasure she/he expects and desires. Affect is conveyed not through gratifying spectacular and emotive representational devices, or through a humanitarian appeal to empathy, but by provoking in the spectator a residual sense of bemusement and politicized anger at the illegality and injustice of Guantánamo and the wider "war on terror" represented synecdochically by the film. The promotional website for the film's U.S. release functions both as a marketing tool and a tool for political agitation with a page entitled "Get Active," containing links to Amnesty International, the American Civil Liberties Union, and other anti-Guantánamo humanitarian organizations. It also includes "*The Road to Guantánamo*: Action Guide," which contains extensive details of the three men's detention and advice on how to pursue protests against the camp. This supplementary material underscores the explicit aim of the film—*to move people to action* (rather than to tears).

Like *In This World*, *The Road to Guantánamo* is a film about the uncertainty of being in the borderlands—those geopolitical zones where citizenship, sovereignty, and law have minimal purchase. As Butler notes, "The prisoners indefinitely detained in Guantánamo Bay are not considered 'subjects' protected by international law . . . the humans who are imprisoned in Guantánamo do not count as human . . . they are not subjects in any legal normative sense" (2004, xv–xvi). The layers of dehumanization integral to Guantánamo are countered in *The Road to Guantánamo* in several ways. The film refuses Guantánamo's existence as "out of place," "out of time," and outside the legal strictures of international law, by telling us how these specific individuals arrived at the specific time/place that is Guantánamo and how easily one can become identified as an "enemy combatant." The film's explicit aim is to counter the supposedly extraordinary legal status of Guantánamo, situated "outside" any legal or accountable domain, an invisible and practically inaccessible utopia, or literally, *no place*. Moreover, by telling the story of Guantánamo through the experiences of first-world, English-speaking, British citizens, *The Road to Guantánamo* reveals much more about "multicultural" Britain than the "happy face" of multiculturalism promoted within the British Film industry, through films such as the hugely successful *Bend it Like Beckham* directed by Gurinder Chadha (2002).[8] Rather than reproducing commodified national stereotypes for international consumption, *The Road to Guantánamo* forces us to recognize Britishness and the tentative right to recognition as a British citizen—even for native Britons, like the Tipton three—as a matter of struggle, violent repression, and resistance that is at once shocking and banal. As with

In This World, events outside the film also shape and reinforce the questions it raises about who counts fully as a citizen, and who can and cannot move freely across borders. In February 2006, along with the actors and film crew, Iqbal, Ahmed, and Rasul attended the film's premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival where Winterbottom and Whitecross won the "Best Director" prize. On their arrival back in the United Kingdom, Ahmed and Rasul as well as the actors who played them in the film—Rizwan Ahmed and Farhad Harun—were detained by police at Luton airport for questioning under counterterror legislation. This shocking "epilogue" to the film, reveals the pivotal role of "visible ethnic difference" in forming contemporary Islamophobic border politics in the West.

Conclusion

While *In This World* and *The Road to Guantánamo* engender Western perspectives of the border, they also exemplify a form of transnational cinema to the extent that they are concerned both with the politics of the border and with the politics of racial and ethnic visibility. This is evident in the graphic and structural properties of the films, as well as in their resistance to ideological and narrative resolution. A striking feature of both films is their incoherent, heterogeneous graphic style that lurches discontinuously from scene to scene or shot to shot, and their fragmentary, elliptical editing strategy that gives the impression that we are viewing snatches of the real events. However, Butler's emphasis on the constitutive role of (in)visibility draws attention to the processes of filtering that take place in making abject border zones and those who inhabit them palatable for Western audiences. There is always another "outside," which is beyond the frame of even the most politically self-conscious cinematic gaze. In the case of *In this World* and *The Road to Guantánamo* we need to consider what and who remain outside, marginal, and unrepresented, which borders and which "border lives" remain unrepresentable or screened from view. Certainly the absence and marginality of women within both of these films and the failure to interrogate the status of the nameless mass of non-European victims of war and torture in *The Road to Guantánamo* is evidence of the cinematic and ideological limits that constrain how the displaced, imprisoned, and tortured materialize in Western border cinema. At some points, these films rely upon the production of "desirable" and "undesirable" others in ways that uneasily replicate the exclusionary governance of immigration and "security" in the West.

As Gloria Anzaldúa suggests, some of the most "uncrossable borders" are delineated not by national geographies, but by economic class, gender, ethnic, and/or religious differences *within* the borders of nation-states (1987). The challenge for Western filmmakers is to represent the "intimate others of globalization" in ways that can attend to the specificity and materiality of lived experiences of borders and problematize, rather than reinforce, dominant Western tropes of visibility (Chang and Ling 2000). Here the films of Swiss feminist video artist Ursula Biemann are notable for what Imre Szeman describes as their "sustained and thorough investigations of the complex intersection of new technologies, gender, the body, and labor in the context of the numerous border zones generated by the rapacious economy of global neoliberalism" (2002, 92). Of course peripheral feminist border cinemas such as Biemann's have a limited circulation, whilst mainstream films such as Winterbottom's unashamedly utilize the infrastructures of the global entertainment industry and as a consequence garner audiences of many millions. This raises further questions about the politics of mobility, and reminds us that border cinema is not only *about* border crossings, as border films are themselves sucked into the image flow that characterizes global corporate capitalism. In other words, the cinema of borders is forced to negotiate some of the same processes of unequal (im)mobility (and unequal distribution) that they describe. Despite their limitations, *In this World* and *The Road to Guantánamo,* are provocative examples of the ways in which mainstream border cinema might negotiate the boundaries that too often segregate political films from mass audiences, for they offer "us," as Western border tourists, a glimpse of the abject "unlivability" of life at the border (Naficy 2001, 31).

Notes

1. This writing exists primarily at the margins of cultural studies, ethnic studies, multicultural studies, and anthropology; feminist examples include Anzaldúa (1987), Behar (1993), and Castillo and Córdoba (2002).
2. Noteworthy transnational feminist texts include Grewal and Kaplan (1994), Shohat and Stam (1994), and Mohanty (2003).
3. Michael Winterbottom was born in the north of England in 1961 and began directing television dramas in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since 1995, he has directed fourteen generically and stylistically diverse feature films. Winterbottom's filmmaking practice frequently traverses the

institutional, infrastructural, and aesthetic boundaries between film and television. *In This World* was coproduced and distributed by the U.K. broadcaster BBC while *The Road to Guantánamo* (coproduced by broadcaster Channel Four) was screened on U.K. network television simultaneously with its release in cinemas, on DVD, and via the Internet for streaming or downloading—a release schedule that is unprecedented. Perhaps as a result of these connections, Winterbottom's films also often employ a televisual aesthetic, one that betrays the comparatively limited budgets of his films.

4. With 70,000 Pashtun-Afghan refugees, Shamshatoo is one of the largest refugee camps in the world. Another million Afghan refugees live in and around Peshawar. While the film was being made there were widespread anti-U.S. demonstrations against the bombing of Afghanistan in this region, and new refugees were arriving daily from the nearby border with Afghanistan.
5. For details see the *In This World* Electronic Press Kit, 2002, Anon. (*In This World,* UK, DVD).
6. For an account of the significance of this event for the filmmakers, see the production notes, http://www.milestonefilms.com/pdf/InThisWorld.pdf.
7. See Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) at http://www.rawa.org for reports on the current status of women in this region.
8. See Sara Ahmed on *Bend It Like Beckham* and happiness (forthcoming *New Formations* 2007).

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Chapter 2

Border Traffic: Reimagining the Voyage to Italy

Áine O'Healy

In the course of his journey through Albania in 1991, immediately following the historic opening of its borders to the West, the Italian protagonist of Gianni Amelio's *Lamerica* (1994) finds temporary accommodation in a dilapidated hotel that is occupied by large crowds of displaced people. Here he comes across the spectacle of a young girl—perhaps seven or eight years old—dancing to music that echoes through the building from a radio or a tape recorder. Driven by the music's pounding beat and surrounded by a throng of fascinated spectators, the girl bends, sways, and twists her body with extraordinary frenzy, ostensibly in imitation of Michael Jackson's energetic routines. As he pauses to observe the eroticized movements of this precocious child, a woman standing nearby suggests to the Italian visitor that he take the girl to Italy "to put her on television." Although the scene has no decisive narrative function, it is acutely disquieting, given the contrast between the girl's energetically contrived performance and the drab, inhospitable setting, the inscrutable fascination of the assembled viewers, and the blunt invitation issued by the woman. Revisited today, the woman's words also possess an eerily predictive resonance, as the smuggling of women and children from Albania to Italy for exploitation in prostitution and pornography began to flourish in the mid-1990s, often facilitated by false promises of legal employment in various sectors of the labor market, and nurtured by the fantasies of plenitude offered by television programs transmitted from Italy across the Adriatic Sea.

Thanks to its crucial geographical setting, its relatively newfound prosperity, and its longtime status as a member of the European Community, Italy became in the final decade of the twentieth century the unwitting host to almost two million migrants from the former Communist bloc and the global south. As increasing numbers of foreigners poured into the country attempting to escape poverty or

political catastrophe, the popular media began to articulate alarmist reports of an imputed invasion by immigrant "hordes," echoing the xenophobic attitudes expressed in the public pronouncements of the political right.[1] Almost simultaneously, images of migration, displacement, and liminality began to appear with striking insistence in the work of several Italian filmmakers and have continued to do so up to the present. To a large extent, this body of work aspires to subvert the increasingly racist tone of the dominant media discourse by replacing demeaning stereotypes of the foreigner with images of the migrant—and particularly the female migrant—as a victim of prejudice, exploitation, and abuse.

This essay examines how specific Italian films have begun to explore the meaning and effects of migration in the post–Cold War era. I am particularly interested in the role played by sexual difference in this representational economy, for, as I show, the dominant figure that emerges in what constitutes Italy's "cinema of migration" is that of a young, vulnerable, and ambivalently eroticized female. Paying special attention to the power relations inscribed in this configuration, I explore the unspoken fears or investments that inform the racialized or sexualized image of the female foreigner who seeks her place on Italian soil at the present, transnational juncture. Ultimately, I wish to determine what phantasmatic investments are imbricated in the emergence of this female figure in the cinematic imaginary.

Cultural Context

Contemporary Italy provides a particularly interesting case study both with regard to discourses of transnationality—thanks to the country's complex history of migration and colonization—and discourses of gender and sexuality. Throughout most of the twentieth century, Italy was an emigrant nation, with millions of people migrating to different countries across the globe. For a briefer period, it was also a colonial power, creating Italian settlements in sub-Saharan Africa and in the Mediterranean basin. Later, during the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s, it witnessed vast internal migrations from the impoverished south to the industrial north. And finally, toward the end of the century, it dramatically reversed its historical status as an emigrant country thanks to the influx of migration from the former Eastern bloc and the developing world, a phenomenon that rapidly transformed the demographic face of the larger metropolitan areas. To further complicate the cultural consequences of these

substantial waves of human mobility, Italy has a weak sense of national identity, thanks to late unification, different regional histories of domination by external powers, intractable economic disparities between north and south, and a tradition of strong provincial or regional loyalties over a sense of national belonging.

Although Italy is currently among the most prosperous countries in the world and a founding member of the supranational entity now known as the European Union, its "imagined community" is still fraught by interregional animosities, and particularly by age-old tensions between north and south. It is also still perceived by many outsiders not so much as part of the main stage of European life, but rather as Mediterranean culture that functions as a bridge to Africa. This perception is deeply troubling to many northern Italians, and particularly to members of the northern populist party, the Lega Nord, who earnestly seek to distinguish their own Europeanness from the Mediterranean "incivility" of regions further to the south.[2] Finally, because of its extensive—and until recently relatively unguarded—coastline and proximity to the Maghreb and the Balkan peninsula, it has been the destination point of large numbers of clandestine migrants who make their journey by boat and ship, thus earning the country's reputation as "the soft underbelly of Europe" (Fielding 1993, 64).

The role of women in Italian social life has also undergone profound changes in the course of the past fifty years. From a country where women were largely confined to the domestic sphere, where divorce and abortion were legally unavailable, and where, in some cases, men enjoyed legal rights that eclipsed those of women, Italy has come a long way in a relatively short span of time. In the ultimately successful struggle to reform family law and to ease the social restrictions placed on women by custom and tradition, the Italian women's movement played no small part. Italian feminists in the 1970s were, in fact, among the most vocal and politically effective in the world.[3] Although the voice of feminism has been muted in Italy in recent years (to the point that the term "feminism" itself is regarded as a pejorative one by many younger women who take for granted the hard-won gains of the feminist battles of the 1970s), there is no turning back. Traditionally associated with a powerful maternal stereotype (the nurturing, larger-than-life matriarch who ruled domestic affairs with an iron fist, but wielded no real power beyond the domain of the family), Italy can now claim one of the lowest birthrates in the world, substantial numbers of divorced or single women living independently of men, and a high rate of female participation in the national workforce. In the meantime, since Italian women have largely abandoned

the most menial forms of labor, foreign women have stepped into the breach, working as cleaners and housekeepers, as providers of personal care for the elderly and for the children of working mothers, and, finally, as prostitutes.

The visible presence of foreign-born prostitutes, who live on the margins of the law and are sometimes subjected to conditions that are tantamount to slavery, has been a prominent concern in Italian public discourse for the past several years, inspiring a host of competing reactions. Assuming that there will always be a demand for sex workers, some public commentators have called for the reinstitution of state-controlled brothels as a way of eliminating prostitution from the streets (Aghatise 2004, Trappolin 2005). Supporters of this proposal generally explain their motivation in terms of a humanitarian concern for the safety of the women themselves or as a preoccupation about public health. Other members of the public regard these women uniformly as victims, and thus in need of rescue, oblivious of the fact that some choose prostitution as the initial phase of a migratory project and do not wish to be "rescued" (Andrijasevic 2003).

Since the early 1990s, when unprecedented numbers of women from locations beyond Italy's borders first began to work the streets of the country's largest cities, the foreign prostitute has become a recurrent presence in Italian films, where she is occasionally coded as African, but more frequently as Eastern European. Although the figure of the resolutely independent yet simultaneously vulnerable *Italian* prostitute was a staple of the heyday of the national cinema,[4] she has now virtually disappeared from Italian screens, just as Italian prostitutes have disappeared from the city streets. In her place, the foreign woman who offers sex in exchange for money, or who is coerced into sexually compromising relationships with strangers, has emerged to the forefront of cinematic representation. She is not, however, a symbolic substitute for the earlier figure, and is constructed with very different signifying strategies.

Wounded Bodies from the East

Most of the earliest films that explore in fictionalized form the encounter between Italians and their Eastern European counterparts in the post–Cold War era construct narratives involving a young, beautiful, female migrant, almost always embodied by an alluring Slavic actress.[5] Linked to this figure are questions of power and agency that find expression through images of compromised bodily

integrity and ambivalent eroticism. In short, the nexus of representational strategies recurring in films such as Carlo Mazzacurati's *Un'altra vita* (1992) and *Vesna va veloce* (1996), Gianluca Maria Tavarelli's *Portami via* (1994), Armando Manni's *Elvjs & Merilijn* (1998), Corso Salani's *Occidente* (1998), and Giuseppe Tornatore's *La Sconosciuta* (2006) serves both to eroticize and render abject the suffering of this Eastern European female migrant.

In each of these films, the female protagonist has embarked on a difficult process of displacement and discovery, and in each case, her perilous journey is enabled at least in part by an Italian male, whose participation may prove benevolent, futile, or simply destructive. The ostensible perspective that dominates these narratives is generally high-minded, and most of the films allude critically to the kinds of exploitation and cruelty that confront vulnerable female migrants in unfamiliar surroundings and bereft of material resources. Simultaneously, however, the films' visual strategies are ambivalent, even contradictory, since, in almost all of the films, the woman is configured by the logic of the gaze as both innocent victim and alluring erotic object. The thematic element that unites the narratives is violence—an entirely plausible element in scenarios of illegal migration, yet deployed in ways that suggest the films' complicity with the sadistic logic of the diegetically placed perpetrators. There is also an implicit suggestion in many of the films that the woman herself is partially compliant in her victimization.

In a path-breaking essay written twenty-five years ago, Teresa de Lauretis draws on narrative semiotics, Freudian psychoanalysis, and feminist film theory to demonstrate the epistemic violence that subtends the deep structure of the Oedipal narrative. Invoking Laura Mulvey's claim that "sadism demands a story" and its provocative variant, "a story demands sadism" (de Lauretis 1982, 132–133), she argues convincingly that the conventions of patriarchal narrative serve to immobilize the figure of woman as image, mute object, or terrain and—in the process—occlude the possibility of female subjectivity. Italian films on female migration made in the 1990s certainly resonate with this paradigm. At the same time, they each offer striking images of injury or debasement enacted against the woman immigrant, who is alternately fetishized and abjected by the signifying strategies of the filmic text. Yet, the violence perpetuated against her is carefully "justified" by the patriarchal logic of narrative realism, ostensibly appealing to the spectator as compassionate witness to her abuse.

Un'altra vita (Another Life), chronologically the first of the films listed earlier, was made in 1992, and recounts the relationship between

Saverio, a kind but timid Roman dentist, and Alia, the young Russian migrant who seeks his help. In the film's opening scene, Alia shows up at Saverio's dental office late one evening with a frantic request that he immediately replace the front tooth she had lost in a violent confrontation. There are traces of blood on her face, and the bleeding gap in her mouth is visible when she speaks. The good Saverio immediately sets about healing the woman's disfiguring loss, working all night to create a dental implant that will conceal the evidence of her injury. He subsequently becomes romantically obsessed with her, and pursues her with reckless insistence even after she has tried to disappear from his life. As we might have known, despite Saverio's attempt to heal all traces of her injury, she is far from healed, as she is submitted to repeated violence at the hands of a shady boyfriend and her physical safety is perpetually under threat. His efforts to win her over, to rescue or save her, are doomed from the start, and the violence he seeks to protect her from is inevitably turned against him in the film's bloody concluding scene.

In *Vesna va veloce* (Vesna Runs Fast), the second film directed by Mazzacurati featuring a Slavic immigrant, the protagonist is a young, educated Czech woman who arrives by bus in Trieste in the north of Italy on a one-day excursion. Lured by the display of glamor and wealth in the city's elegant streets, she spontaneously decides to stay in Italy at the end of the day, and soon begins working as a prostitute on the streets of Rimini, a popular resort on the Adriatic coast. The film's construction of Vesna is ostensibly sympathetic, and some care is taken to create a sense of her subjectivity through the use of voice-over. The letters she writes home, full of fanciful inventions, suggest that she is both strong-willed and needy, independent, and vulnerable. Ultimately, however, her actions remain enigmatic, inscrutable.

The real center of the film is not Vesna but Antonio, an unemployed Italian construction worker with whom she eventually becomes involved, and whose subjectivity is developed with greater consistency in the film's signifying strategies. Although she initially rejects Antonio's interest in her, Vesna seeks out his help when she is assaulted and stabbed by a local pimp. Following her refusal to be treated at a hospital since she is without a passport, Antonio enlists the help of an African doctor who discreetly takes care of needy clandestine immigrants. In an important scene, the men collaborate in treating Vesna's injury. Here, the close-up of Vesna's bleeding knife-wound—the woman's "castration" made visible—is framed by two pairs of hands and arms, black and white, working together to make her whole. In effect, the scene evokes a ritual bonding of the two men in a homosocial

pact—symbolically endorsing an ideal solidarity between men in a demographically altered Italy—with the woman's wounded body serving visually as the terrain upon which this bond is sealed.

What becomes evident in these and other, similar films of the same period—such as Tavarelli's *Portami via* and Salani's *Occidente,* for example—is that the relationship between the Italian male "rescuer" and the foreign female migrant is instantiated by her woundedness, which generates a dynamic ambivalence in the unfolding of the narrative events. The visualization of female injury in all of these films is surprisingly consistent, making explicit the symbolic discourse of female abjection. I refer, of course, to the concept of abjection formulated by Julia Kristeva in her influential study *Powers of Horror.* In this formulation, disgust and desire, repulsion and attraction, struggle against each other in delineating the borders that give the subject an identity. Kristeva asserts that a sense of boundaries and a sense of otherness are established in early childhood at the point when the child must separate from its mother. This occurs partly through feelings of revulsion toward bodily residue—blood, sweat, pus, and so on—which become symbols of defilement, separate from the "pure" self. The emotion evoked by bodily residues is a deep sense of repulsion or nausea. The experience of abjection, or the reliving of abjection, is always connected to the trauma of separation from the mother. Furthermore, the conflicting feelings activated by the abject are easily transferred to others during childhood and later life, and—as Kristeva suggests—can be linked to the misogynistic effects of culture. Yet it is abjection that lays the psychic foundations for the division between self and other—subject and object—and which establishes the conditions for entry into language. In this sense the abject is constitutive of subjectivity.

Though the discourse of abjection is played out in the majority of Italian films about women migrants from Eastern and South Central Europe, it is particularly striking in Armando Manni's *Elvjs & Merilijn*, where it is linked to the symbolic abjection of the Balkans in the Western imaginary. Here, a young Marilyn Monroe look-alike and amateur singer, Ileana, who lives in Bucharest, wins the opportunity to perform at a night club in Italy. After an arduous journey through the desolate Balkan landscape in the company of her fellow performer Nikolai, an Elvis impersonator from Bulgaria, she discovers that the only work really available to her in Italy is to perform in a pornographic floor show.

To some extent, *Elvjs & Merilijn* might be described as the most "transnational" film to emerge from Italy to date. Set in Romania,

Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Italy, and shot in several languages (Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, French, and Italian), the narrative opens at a theater in Bucharest, where Nikolai and Ileana are competing in a contest organized by an Italian impresario. As amateur celebrity impersonators both on and off the stage, Nikolai and Ileana are living, breathing, singing, dancing simulacra, holding on for sheer life to the trappings of the invented identities that propel them forward even at the bleakest moments. In Ileana's case, this masquerade is presented as a necessity, since her life in Romania is hellish in the extreme. Working in the most menial capacity at the city dump, she lives with a pathologically depressed, incontinent mother who tells her, "You think you're different from me because you're beautiful. But you're not different; you're just the same." Rather than confronting her own likeness in the face of the abject Balkan (m)other, however, Ileana carefully reconstructs herself as the glamorous Marilyn Monroe, and whenever she is frightened or downcast, she summons up an image of herself as Marilyn, gliding serenely along a white, sandy beach in a striking red ball gown.

In the opening shots, a series of tight close-ups of Ileana's body are presented in slow motion as she sings on the Bucharest stage. These are intercut with traveling shots from the vantage point of a garbage truck moving through the filthy city streets at night. Dressed in her strapless red gown, with matching lipstick and glittering jewelry, Ileana is clearly a spectacle to be looked at, recognizable as "Marilyn" even before she is interpellated as such by the onscreen host. Throughout the sequence, however, we see her only in isolated fragments—creamy shoulders, scarlet lips, blonde curls, and the alluring curve of a breast revealed by a plunging neckline—all of which are presented without diegetic sound. These images of the "body in pieces" are accompanied by a faint echo of the clanking garbage truck, before Ileana's own voice filters onto the audio track at the very end of the sequence. It is significant, however, that we are not sutured to the spectacle of Ileana's performance through the point of view of a specific onscreen observer. The source of the gaze here could be described instead as that of the phantasmatic Big Other that has been internalized by Ileana herself, who submits to constant vigilance her own performance as the ideal female body—the body as a commodity constructed for others.

As neither Ileana nor Nicolai knows the other's language, they are obliged to communicate in Italian, which they have picked up in the course of watching Italian television over the years. Here, as in Amelio's *Lamerica*, we sense the filmmaker's critique of the increasing power and reach of Italian television, now available not only to Albanian audiences but also to viewers in other parts of the Balkans.

Television is in fact presented by many contemporary Italian directors as an alluring siren that numbs its viewers to the effects of the actual social conditions in which they live, deadening their capacity to initiate informed resistance against the exploitative forces of neoliberal capitalism. It is clear in *Elvjs & Merilijn* that the protagonists' fascination with the popular culture of the West is entirely gleaned from television, but they are crucially unaware that their points of reference are by now completely out of date.

Refusing to be deterred by a bureaucratic hitch at Bucharest airport, where Ileana's passport is confiscated, the two aspiring performers are convinced that fame and fortune await them in Italy, and decide to make their way there by land and sea. They thus proceed through the challenging terrain of the Balkan peninsula, partly thanks to the help of a Roma woman who enables them to pass without difficulty though an unguarded border crossing. The scene darkens progressively as they move westward through Yugoslavia, devastated by recent war. Frequently, however, the film cuts to an idealized image of Ileana as the blonde Marilyn, gliding along at the water's edge, her face radiant and smiling—a glamor shot that could have been extracted from a television commercial or a music video.

The most intense sequence in the film occurs when the pair stop on their journey at an isolated garrison occupied by Serbian soldiers, during which the young woman is subjected to a traumatic encounter with a depressed and unstable colonel—clearly a Dracula figure—who becomes riveted by her beauty. "You are too luminous," he tells her, consolidating for the film's audience the associations with the world of the vampire, "We have no use for the sun here. Those of us who have survived are only shadows." When the colonel shoots himself to death while alone in her presence, the soldiers decide that Ileana is responsible for the loss of their beloved leader. Taking revenge, they force her to mimic fellatio with a loaded gun forcibly stuck in her mouth before throwing her from their truck in the middle of a desolate rural landscape.

And this is not the end of her suffering. When Ileana and Nikolai finally manage to arrive in Italy, in time for their scheduled audition, they find the promised land no less bleak and garbage-strewn than the scene they have left behind. The dream that sustained their struggle is quickly crushed by the ruthless, profit-driven managers of the night club who underwrote their journey to Italy, and who now offer them the possibility of performing in a pornographic cabaret rather than participating in the kind of entertainment they had auditioned for in Bucharest. It turns out, ironically, that Italy's human and physical

landscape—as it is constructed in Manni's film—is not very different from that of the Balkans.

In the final sequence, which unfolds on a sunless Adriatic beach, the young Romanian is driven to suicidal despair, and collapses into Nikolai's arms, her hands bloodied from the broken glass with which he had tried to cut her veins. The scene is pure melodrama, in which the image of Ileana as an abject, bleeding victim at the water's edge, trapped impossibly in a no man's land, is juxtaposed with the image of her idealized incarnation as Marilyn Monroe. It is important to point out, however, that her attractiveness and her victimization are symbiotically linked, in a way that is reminiscent of a similar process at work in the posthumous construction of her iconic namesake, Marilyn Monroe.

The final scene of Manni's *Elvjs & Meriljn* resonates with Slavoj Žižek's criticism of dominant Western representations of South Eastern Europe and his concomitant critique of the universalization of the notion of the victim that has accompanied the worldwide triumph of liberal democracy (Žižek 1998). For Žižek, the image of the victim, since it is presented as existing outside of ideology, exerts an immobilizing fascination on the witness, inciting compassion while thwarting the ability to act. I would argue that it is precisely this kind of immobilizing fascination that the spectacle of woman-as-victim demands in the films I have discussed here, since each of them refuses to problematize the sexual politics of its own representational strategies, attempting instead to evoke the dutifully compassionate though ultimately complicit gaze of the passive cinema spectator.

In recent years there is some evidence that Italian filmmakers are complicating the paradigm found in previous films that focused on female migration. Two new films depicting the traffic of young girls from South Eastern Europe to Italy abandon the combination of spectacularized suffering and ambivalent eroticism found in the earlier body of work, though they still give some prominence to a scenario of female victimhood. Both *Saimir* (Francesco Munzi 2004)—which culminates with the rescue of a teenage Russian girl (see figure 2.1) held captive by smugglers in a coastal town near Rome—and *Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide* (Marco Tullio Giordana 2005)—which ends with the rescue of an adolescent Romanian prostitute in a sinister urban squa—refuse to deploy the juvenile victim of trafficking in a sexualized manner. However, the narrative focus of each of these films is less on the girl's wretched predicament than on the courageous assertiveness of the young male protagonist, whose defiance of a paternal injunction marks his passage to ethical responsibility and lonely maturity. On closer inspection, what we find in these films is a variant

Figure 2.1 Wounded Russian girl in *Saimir* (Francesco Munzi 2004)

of the Oedipal paradigm deconstructed by de Lauretis, where the girl's plight is only of secondary interest to the thrust of the narrative. Instead, her captivity ultimately functions as the ground on which the young hero must take action in defiance of his father's wishes, becoming, in the process, a man in his own right.

Migration as Carnival

Roberta Torre's *South Side Story* (1999) takes a very different approach to representing migration from the films I have described earlier. Moving away from the dominant configuration of the immigrant as an Eastern European woman, the film acknowledges Italy's contemporary status as a dynamic borderland between Africa and the north of Europe. Like other films of migration, it constructs a story of "impossible" transnational romance, but without any suggestion of pathos, since the film is structured not as a realist drama but as a carnivalesque musical. Torre's only previous feature-length film, *Tano da morire* (1997), also a musical, offered an exuberant send up of Mafia culture. Though blatantly unflattering to Sicilian society, the film was a huge hit with local audiences. Nonetheless, when Torre applied the same approach to a story of interracial tension in Palermo, which was shot with the help of Sicilian locals and actual Nigerian prostitutes recruited from the city streets, her effort was met with much less enthusiasm by audiences and critics alike.

Like the Hollywood classics that they parody, Torre's two musicals rely significantly on solo and choral song numbers, dance routines, and a major set piece at the center of each which slows down the narrative, subordinating plot to spectacle. The settings in which these stories unfold—animated, run-down urban neighborhoods—are also reminiscent of the earlier tradition, suggesting in particular the hugely popular Hollywood musical *West Side Story* (Robert Wise, 1961), to which both of Torre's musicals allude intertextually. Yet, unlike the streamlined spectacle of the American model, Torre's visual style is a postmodern feast of hybrid influences, from comic strips to absurdist theater, from cabaret to folk art, from trash aesthetics to religious iconography. Her use of music reveals a similar mishmash of sources and influences. The soundtrack of *South Side Story* includes rap, heavy metal, the rockabilly music of the "Italian Elvis," better known as Little Tony, and the African rhythms presumably brought to Italy by the new immigrants. However, it is the popular tradition of sentimental Neapolitan songs, so beloved in Palermo, that dominates the film. Intense colors, bizarre lighting effects, manic camera movements, and digitally manipulated editing add to the sensory overload set in motion by the music. In addition to these scenes characterized by visual excess, there is also some documentary footage of street-side interaction between a prostitute and a male client.

Chronicling the encounter between the local people of Palermo and a large group of recently arrived Nigerian prostitutes, *South Side Story* involved bringing together two communities that were still in the throes of a real sociocultural conflict in order to enact a parodic version of their mutual incomprehension. In spite of, and perhaps because of, the difficulties inherent in this project, Torre has made what is undoubtedly one of the most original films on immigration produced in Italy in recent years.

The child-like voice-over narration by Palermo's patron saint, Santa Rosalia, is heard on the sound track in the opening moments of the film, commenting on the mayor's purported decision to revive the city's other patron saint, Benedict the Moor, in the name of multiculturalism. This is followed by scenes of grotesque comedy, wherein the male protagonist's aunts, the Giulietto sisters, reveal their deep-seated racism. These moments of comedy are intercut in turn with video images that record encounters between a male client and the Nigerian sex workers he accosts on the streets, prostitutes whose knowledge of Italian seems limited to the most rudimentary language of

commerce—the vocabulary of the body parts they are willing to rent and the fees for each service. There are also scenes in which Torre's Nigerian performers restage in English their nightly interactions with the African madam and middleman, turning in their evening's wages along with a statement of their net takings, only to be scolded by the older woman when these earnings do not measure up to her expectations. In the scenes reconstructed within the local African community, the appalling conditions of the women's lives are thus sketched tou—circumstances that are confirmed in recent studies of prostitution among Nigerian immigrants to Italy (Achebe). As Torre has insisted in her interviews, the Nigerian women effectively work as indentured slaves. After their initial journey to Italy at the expense of the middlemen, they are obliged to surrender their passports to their immediate boss, the Nigerian "Maman," or madam. These documents can be retrieved only after they have paid a huge sum of money to their handlers. With sexual encounters commanding only about thirty thousand lire a shot at the time the film was made, the retrieval of a woman's passport might take years of labor on the streets. These circumstances lend particular poignancy to the central song and dance number performed by the women in the film, the title of which is "Trentamila lire" (Thirty Thousand Liras).

Despite its intertextual allusions to *Romeo and Juliet* (Torre's protagonists are named Romea and Toni Giulietto) and to *West Side Story*, *South Side Story* is above all the story of an encounter between two Souths—the south of Italy and sub-Saharan Africa—both seething with resentment toward the other. Much of the film crosscuts from one community to the other, highlighting the unsuspected parallels between them. Prominent in each group is a stubborn attitude of racial prejudice. The African women, appalled to learn of Romea's affection for the Sicilian street singer Toni Giulietto, warn her away from him, telling her that he is a *mangiasalsiccia* (sausage eater), that white men stink of cheese, that their music is unbearable, and that their women grow absurdly fat. Toni, in the meantime is treated to similar warnings from his shrewish aunts who describe the young Nigerian woman as "una Turca fitusa" (roughly translatable as "nasty Turkish female") and do everything in their power to alienate him from her and lead him back toward his obese Sicilian girlfriend. Also present in both communities is a reliance on magic and superstitious practices. While a black witch is enlisted by Romea's colleagues to resolve the problem of the young woman's fatal attraction, Toni's aunts consult a white witch, played with particular relish by a real-life

Sicilian *maga*. Finally, music is central to the experience of both communities, though the film gives more prominence to Toni's musical tastes—especially in his alcohol-induced hallucinations featuring appearances by popular Italian singers Mario Merola and Little Tony—than to the African rhythms of their Nigerian counterparts. Ultimately, it becomes clear that Torre's effort to construct a tale of two Souths risks being overburdened by visions of parallel exotica, before the narrative takes its inevitable turn toward the *deus ex machina* solution of the Shakespearean double-suicide.

The uneven results achieved by *South Side Story*, despite its remarkable visual accomplishments, are due at least in part to the director's strained relationship with the African women employed to participate in the film. Torre reports, in fact, that the Nigerians were unwilling to invest themselves too wholeheartedly in the performance of their own "identities." While the local Sicilian performers were able to enter at will the liminal state of being and yet not quite being themselves, the Nigerians were not entirely convinced of a qualitative difference between their performance on the set and the work they performed for clients solicited on the street.[6] Once again, Gayatri Spivak's provocative question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" seems apt. These Nigerian women, while revealing their relative lack of access to speech, are at the same time exhibiting some reluctance at being spoken for, even by the sympathetic Torre and her crew. Their performance also calls into question the presumed power of parody as social critique. Torre's send up of Sicily's contemporary human landscape simultaneously destablizies and reinscribes the dominant ideology. Her images are transgressive to the extent that they unsettle old ideas and invite fresh perspectives on troubling contemporary issues. Yet, like other films that represent in a contrastingly realist vein the conditions experienced by female migrants to Italy, they scarcely constitute a genuinely subversive threat to established gender arrangements or the implacable demands of global capital.

Although the films I have discussed highlight in a critical way some of the hardships and abuses endured by impoverished "foreign" women who have entered the increasingly challenging terrain of Fortress Europe in recent years, most of them reveal unresolved anxieties regarding the boundaries of the Italian body politic in relation to its internal and external others. The current fascination with the figure of the vulnerable or wounded female migrant may, in fact, bear a troubling relationship to the image—and actual presence—of powerful and resourceful women of contemporary Italy whose lives have been radically altered by the experience of the feminist movement of

the 1970s. It may thus be productive to consider these narratives of female migration as serving an unconscious, compensatory function, where the sadistic mechanisms of cinematic narrative are "logically" redeployed to alleviate the anxieties of a beleaguered Italian masculinity in an increasingly transnational and purportedly "postfeminist" social landscape.

Notes

1. For a thorough analysis of xenophobic discourses in contemporary Italy, see Dal Lago. The image of the "hordes" is taken up ironically by Gian Antonio Stella in the title of his book, *L'orda: Quando gli albanesi eravamo noi* ("The Horde: When *we* were the Albanians"), an exploration of the massive emigration of Italians across the globe in the not too distant past.
2. The Lega Nord (Northern League) has not only reinvigorated the long-standing prejudice that "northern Italian culture" is threatened by the presence and continuing influx of southerners in the north, but has encouraged similar fears about the arrival of new migrants from non-EU countries. As Jaro Stacul has observed, an Italian understanding of what it means to be European entails "[not only] emphasizing the distinction between West and East, Christianity and Islam [but also] contesting the inner 'cultural' boundaries of Europe by casting southerners as the 'other.'" (Stacul 2006, 213).
3. For a concise history of Italian feminism, see *Liberazione della donna* (Birnbaum 1986).
4. Some of the most memorable examples are found in Luigi Zampa's *La Romana* (1956), Antonio Pietrangeli's *Adua and Her Friends* (1956), Federico Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria* (1957), Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers* (1960), Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Mamma Roma* (1963), and Lina Wertmuller's *Love and Anarchy* (1973).
5. It should be observed, however, that the nationality of the actress rarely coincides with the roles she plays. For example, we find a Polish actress playing the part of the Romanian Ileana in *Elvjs & Merilijn*, and another Polish actress is cast as the Russian Alia in *Un'altra vita*. While the dialogue is always in a language appropriate to the character and the specific narrative situation, knowledgeable viewers immediately recognize a "foreign accent" in the speech of the miscast actors attempting to approximate their character's "native" pronunciation. While the linguistic aspect of these films signals a shift away from the long-established Italian preference for dubbing over subtitling, little attention is being paid to the differences within the category of "the foreign."
6. Personal communication with Roberta Torre, Palermo, July 2001.

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Chapter 3

Cinema without Frontiers: Transnational Women's Filmmaking in Iran and Turkey

Asuman Suner

Critical attention in current film scholarship increasingly focuses on a recently discerned mode of filmmaking that is described as "exilic/ diasporic." Theorists of exilic/diasporic cinema argue that new cinematic languages articulated by members of diasporic communities in the West can be conceived of as a distinct body of work with particular cultural, aesthetic, and political attributes. Hamid Naficy's *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001) offers arguably the most comprehensive account of the transnational films produced since the 1960s by exilic/diasporic directors working in the West. "Accented cinema"—a term invented by Naficy—refers to the new category that cuts across previously defined geographic, national, cultural, cinematic, and metacinematic boundaries.

The emergent theory of exilic/diasporic cinema makes an important critical contribution not only to film studies but also to the broader field of cultural theory. Although I acknowledge the critical importance of this body of work, my intention in this essay is to challenge the formulations of exilic/diasporic filmmaking on the basis of a straightforward observation: the cinematic styles and thematic preoccupations that are associated with exilic/diasporic films also consistently appear in wide-ranging examples of contemporary "world cinema"[1] that are often classified under the rubric of "national cinemas." I have argued elsewhere for the opening up of Naficy's category of "accented cinema" by engaging the reciprocal entanglements between conceptions of exilic/diasporic filmmaking on the one hand and national cinema on the other (Suner 2006). More importantly for my argument here, I show how this model can be further expanded to allow for an articulation of transnational feminist filmmaking.

To this end, I engage in a critical discussion of the work of two internationally acclaimed female directors, Yeşim Ustaoğlu and Samira Makhmalbaf, from Turkey and Iran respectively. A parallel reading of Ustaoğlu's *Waiting for the Clouds* (2004) and Makhmalbaf's *Blackboards* (2000) will demonstrate that the cinematic styles and thematic concerns associated with exilic/diasporic cinema manifestly prevail in both films, although their directors are associated exclusively with their respective national cinemas. Each of these films develops a subtle critique of the question of national belonging, which is informed by a subversive construction of female subjectivity. Ustaoğlu and Makhmalbaf also offer in their work an example of what Ella Shohat describes as "a simultaneous critique both of Third-Worldist anti-colonial nationalism and of First World Eurocentric feminism" as they resist the official nationalist ideology of their home countries and refuse a Eurocentric universalizing of womanhood at the same time (Shohat 2003, 52).

Although neither filmmaker identifies herself as a feminist director, both *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards* articulate a new transnational gender politics that implies a criticism of both a nationalist/fundamentalist position and the ideology of contemporary neocolonialism. At the same time, they adopt a similarly critical stance vis-à-vis patriarchal ideology and the prejudices in hegemonic Western feminism against the Middle East and Islam. The subversiveness of the filmmakers' gender politics arises, however, not from the presence of easily identifiable feminist voices in their films, but from the ambiguity of their female characters, who defy all preestablished expectations and clichés associated with the category of the "Middle Eastern woman." Exploring the issues of displacement, mobility, and migrancy from unconventional perspectives, both films problematize the category of the "national" on the one hand and speak with a heavy accent to both national and transnational audiences on the other. Articulating a "transnational imaginary" in relation to the question of belonging, they direct our attention to the interconnectedness between what appear to be very local and specific conditions of living and global power relations.

The new "transnational imaginary," according to Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, comprises the "*as-yet-unfigured* horizon of contemporary cultural production by which national spaces/identities of political allegiance and economic regulation are being undone and imagined communities of modernity are being reshaped at the macropolitical (global) and micropolitical (cultural) levels of everyday existence" (Wilson and Dissanayake 1996, 6). Entailing a consciousness

about the multiplicity of localities, histories, communities, and selves, this imaginary serves not only to challenge the authority of the West as the universal norm, but also to expose repressive local and global situations, and to mobilize resistance against them. Having traced the outlines of a "transnational imaginary" in the works of Ustaoğlu and Makhmalbaf, I argue in conclusion that these films indicate how the concept of "accented cinema" might be expanded to include not only exilic/diasporic, but also "national" directors. Ultimately, in probing their attempt to question the rigid boundaries between national and transnational, interrogate the relations of belonging and identity, and problematize the presumptions of hegemonic Western feminism about Middle Eastern women, I hope to demonstrate that *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards* are films that also constitute potent examples of a "transnational *feminist* cinema."

Yeşim Ustaoğlu and Samira Makhmalbaf: (Trans)National Directors

"Accented cinema" is an extension of auteur theory in the sense that "accented" films are informed by their directors' autobiographies and marked by their stylistic signatures (Naficy 2001, 12). The dominant characteristic of accented authors is the way in which they undergo and express the experience of exile. Naficy distinguishes three types of accented authors on the basis of the different forms of geographical and cultural displacement that they each experience (Naficy 2001, 12). "Exilic" authors, who take up residence in the West after being expelled or set free from their places of origin, tend to maintain an ambivalent relation to both their home and host societies. "Diasporic" filmmakers, by contrast, are members of diasporic communities in the West and tend to maintain a long-term sense of ethnic consciousness and distinctiveness about their cultural origins. "Postcolonial ethnic and identity" filmmakers, finally, express their identities with a hyphen, since, unlike their "diasporic" counterparts, they tend to place little emphasis on bonds with their original homeland. Different types of accented films, then, are created by diverse experiences of displacement and disparate emphases on the relationship vis-à-vis the home as well as the host society. Yet, regardless of these variations, accented cinema on the whole embodies a peculiar style that can be observed in its thematic preoccupations, narrative structure, and visual form.

Both *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards* symptomatically display the characteristics attributed to "accented cinema," though

their directors do not fit into the categories of “exilic,” “diasporic,” or “postcolonial ethnic and identity” filmmakers. Unlike the directors examined by Naficy, Ustaoğlu and Makhmalbaf do not reside in Western metropolitan centers, nor have they obtained passports from North American or European countries. Instead, each of them resides in the country of her birth, and, for this reason, their films are usually discussed in the context of the “national” cinemas to which they supposedly belong.

Born in a small town in eastern Turkey in 1960, Ustaoğlu spent her early childhood traveling around the provinces because of her father’s job. When she was eight, her family settled in Trabzon, a town in the Black Sea region of northern Turkey, where she lived until she moved to Istanbul in her mid-twenties. Educated in the field of architecture, Ustaoğlu infuses her films with a keen sense of space. *Waiting for the Clouds* is her third feature. She wrote the screenplay, inspired by George Andreadis’s story “Tamama,” in collaboration with Petros Markaris. Financed by Eurimages and Japanese National Television, the production company hired a film crew that included accomplished European artists and technicians, such as cinematographer Jacek Petrycki and editors Timo Linasolle and Nicolas Gaster. The cast, however, is composed mainly of nonprofessional actors, with the significant exception of the Turkish actress Rüçhan Çalışkur in the leading role.

Born in Tehran in 1980, Samira Makhmalbaf is the daughter of the internationally acclaimed Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Her involvement in cinema began in childhood. At seven, she appeared in *The Cyclist*, which was directed by her father. At fourteen she abandoned formal schooling in order to study filmmaking at the Makhmalbaf Film House. She directed her first film, *The Apple* (1997), at seventeen and became the youngest director in the world to participate in the official selection of the 1998 Cannes Film Festival. *Blackboards* (1999), her second feature film, won the Jury Special Prize in Cannes Film Festival in 2000. Like her other films, *Blackboards* is basically a “family production.” While her father wrote the story, Samira developed the screenplay. Although Mohsen Makhmalbaf took charge of the technical part of the editing process, his daughter made vital decisions about the final cut. The film was coproduced by Makhmalbaf Film House with Fabrika Cinema, financed by Benetton Communication in Italy and Takeshi Kitano’s Production Company, Office Kitano in Japan. The cast of *Blackboards* is composed mainly of nonprofessionals, with the exception of the actress Behnaz Jafari—the only woman who appears on screen—and

the renowned Iranian/Kurdish director/actor Bahman Ghobadi, who plays one of the teachers.

Despite the fact that both *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards* are regarded as films that belong to their respective national cinemas (Turkey and Iran), they are clearly transnational productions, financed by local, regional, and international corporations. Also, as in the case of "accented" films, the directors took on several functions in the production process, developing the screenplay, directing, and assisting with cinematography and editing. Finally, both films feature a cast of predominantly nonprofessional actors, recruited for the most part from local communities and possessing firsthand knowledge of the social conditions that the films attempt to describe.

The topos of journeying is a major preoccupation of accented cinema (Naficy 2001, 222). Themes of home-seeking, homelessness, and/or homecoming journeys prevail in these films, which are deeply invested in issues of territoriality, rootedness, and geography. The preoccupation with place is inscribed in three modalities of narrative "chronotopes" or "time-space" configurations: "Open" chronotopes, emphasizing boundlessness and timelessness, are usually reserved for the representation of an idealized homeland (with a visual emphasis on nature, landscape, landmarks, and ancient monuments). Foregrounding claustrophobia and temporality, "closed" chronotopes, on the other hand, are often utilized to depict life in exile and diaspora. "Thirdspace" chronotopes, finally, involve transitional and transnational sites such as borders, tunnels, seaports, airports, hotels, and transportation vehicles. Functioning as the organizing centers of films, these three chronotopes are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Instead, each accented film may contain a primary chronotope or multiple mutually inclusive chronotopes, which may coexist with or contradict one another (Naficy 2001, 153).

Both films that I examine in this essay revolve around journeying and intense experiences of space, but they entail different configurations of open and thirdspace chronotopes. *Waiting for the Clouds* is set among the mountainous villages of the Black Sea region in northern Turkey, where Ustaoğlu spent most of her childhood. The narrative revolves around both outward and inward journeys of quest. The inward journey concerns the main character's attempt to come to terms with her traumatized past and suppressed memories after years of silence. This journey ultimately gives way to an outward journey, as she sets out to find her long-lost loved ones and the places to which she thinks she belongs.

Ustaoğlu's film opens with the arrival of a census clerk at the small port town of Tirebolu in the Black Sea region in the 1970s, a period of great social and political upheaval in Turkey because of continual clashes between leftist and rightist groups. During those years, as paranoia and suspicion prevailed in Turkish society, members of leftist organizations, or anyone else deemed as "other," were watched closely by the government. Ayşe/Eleni, the main character of the film, is an old woman who lives with her sick, elderly sister. Ayşe gets anxious when the clerk wants to see her official identification card, since she is not really of "Turkish origin" but is the daughter of a Greek family evacuated from the region in 1916. Ayşe's true identity is a secret that she and her beloved adoptive sister have kept throughout their entire lives. That day, the two women manage to get away with the census control without having to reveal Ayşe's identity. A couple of weeks later, the older sister dies and Ayşe is left alone in life. She begins to feel her loneliness even more intensely when she moves to their country house in the mountains for the summer. In eerie landscapes near the gorgeous Black Sea mountains covered by the swirling mists of low-lying clouds, she slowly isolates herself from everyone. First she stops talking to her neighbors, spending her days watching the movement of the clouds by herself. The only person who can approach her is the eight-year-old son of a neighbor. After days of silence, one morning Ayşe suddenly begins to talk in Greek, a language the boy cannot understand. As forgotten memories burst out of her mouth in her native tongue, the suppressed part of her identity gradually takes over. In long monologue scenes, she tells the story of the forced evacuation of her family with other villagers of Greek origin, how they spent days walking barefoot toward the south, and how hundreds of people around her, including her own parents, died of hunger and disease in the course of this journey. The historical episode that she is purportedly remembering occurred during the turbulent period that marked the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Having been at the crossroads of Greek and Turkish cultures for centuries, the town of Tirebolu witnessed violent unrest during World War I.[2] During this period, Greek villagers residing around the Russian-occupied cities were forced to suffer hasty, haphazard, and often deadly deportations by the Ottoman army. Eleni survived this traumatic incident because she was rescued and hidden by a benevolent Turkish family, who later adopted her. Eleni's younger brother, meanwhile, joined a group of Greek villagers who sought to escape from Turkey by taking refuge on a Russian boat. Not having had the courage to follow her brother, Eleni never hears from him again. The price

she pays for survival, then, is the suppression of her former identity. Known by her new name "Ayşe," she pretends to be the daughter of a Turkish family throughout her adult life. As an old woman, she must now come to terms with painful memories from her childhood, and endure feelings of guilt that she was unable to protect her younger brother. In the end, Ayşe/Eleni finds the courage to travel to Greece to look for her brother and make peace with her past. When she finally finds him in Salonika, however, what she experiences is not a warm reunion, but bitterness and disappointment.

If the narrative of *Waiting for the Clouds* primarily revolves around an inward journey, *Blackboards* is about a series of restless, recurrent, and unending outward journeys. The film is set near Halabchec, the city on the Iran-Iraq border where the Iraqi government used chemical bombardment to repress the Iraqi Kurds during the Iran-Iraq War. The story involves two teachers from a bombed-out school who wander around mountain villages with their blackboards on their backs while looking for students. At one point they separate: one of the teachers heads toward the villages, while the other goes into the hills with the hope of finding shepherds wishing to learn to write. The first teacher comes across a group of old men, the second a cluster of boys engaged in smuggling. We come to learn that the old men are Iraqi Kurdish villagers who took refuge in Iran during the eight-year-old war in order to escape the chemical bombardments. Now, wanting to die where they were born, they seek to cross the border to reach their native village in Iraq. The teenagers, on the other hand, illegally cross the Iran-Iraq border every day to smuggle all kinds of goods for their basic survival. The only woman in the film is a young widow who is the daughter of an old sick man in the first group.

Waiting for the Clouds employs open chronotopes, as most scenes take place in the landscape of the Black Sea mountains. In accented films "open" chronotopes are usually reserved for the representation of an idealized homeland, and they generate a sense of boundlessness and timelessness (Naficy 2001, 152). In this aspect, Ustaoğlu's film seems consistent with "accented" cinema, since it employs the "open" chronotope in the representation of the main character's homeland. Ayşe/Eleni, after all, was born in northern Turkey, the landscape that she still inhabits. Her sense of belonging is twisted, however, since she is in exile in her own homeland.

Blackboards, by contrast, is organized around a peculiar articulation of open and thirdspace chronotopes. The film is shot entirely in open spaces, as the mountainous landscape with its steep, winding roads is the primary setting. Consistent with open chronotopes, the

mise-en-scene favors external locations and open landscapes, bright natural lighting, and mobile, wandering characters. Openness is also suggested by long shots, mobile framing, and long takes. Yet *Blackboards* also employs a thirdspace chronotope, as the story is set at the border zone between Iran and Iraq, and is structured around the act of border crossing. Producing a sense of spatial disruption and disorientation, the film's articulation of open and thirdspace chronotopes takes on a political dimension, as the narrative is driven by the characters' attempts to cross the border between the two countries. In this process, as Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn indicate, "the landscape gradually dissolves into disconnected spaces: the border ceases to be an identifiable, recognizable place and instead signifies a nightmarish unstable zone of inexplicable military atrocity" (Chaudhuri and Finn 2003, 48). The articulation of open and thirdspace chronotopes in *Blackboards* creates a sense of "spatial indeterminacy" that involves barren mountain landscapes and labyinthine pathways. The characters' circuitous quest renders concrete places "fleetingly uncanny" (Chaudhuri and Finn 2003, 45).

In contrast to the dominant cinema, which is driven by a strict alignment of speaker and voice, "accented" films tend to de-emphasize synchronous sound. They create a slippage between voice and speaker by using various strategies such as voice-over or the inscription of everyday nondramatic pauses and long silences (Naficy 2001, 24). Considered in this light, we can suggest that both *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards* employ multilinguality and accented speech, along with strategies that render language unfamiliar and alien. Both films poignantly present the characters' relation to language as troublesome; and in each case the narrative is driven by this problem.

Waiting for the Clouds is dominated by nondramatic pauses and long silences since its main character stops speaking early in the film. The repressed past of the old woman, then, returns in the form of a long-forgotten language. After years of forgetting and denial, one day she suddenly begins to speak in her native language, remembering painful childhood events. The revelation of suppressed memories, however, does not bring the old woman's problem of belonging to an end. Facing the reality that she is indeed a stranger in the place where she was born, Ayşe/Eleni decides to travel to Greece. When she sets foot in Salonika for the first time, however, she is disappointed to find that no one, other than a few old people, can actually understand her language, since what she speaks is a forgotten local dialect. Once again she feels like an alien, although she is now among the people of her own community.

According to Stuart Hall, cultural identity is shaped through differences and discontinuities (Hall 1994, 395). Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, cultural identities are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power. Ayşe/Eleni's identity, in this sense, is shaped around a rupture, a paradoxical tension, and the haunting memory of her forced evacuation during childhood. Having had to conceal her past and her "true" identity, she longs for elsewhere, an imaginary place where she can feel a sense of belonging. When she goes to Greece, however, with the hope of finding not only her brother but also her "true" home, what she discovers is just another mode of isolation and estrangement.

If *Waiting for the Clouds* addresses the issues of belonging and identity through the tension between speech and silence, *Blackboards* does this by creating a tension between spoken and written language. All the characters in the film speak Kurdish. Apart from the two wandering teachers, however, no one can read and write, or is even willing to learn these skills. The film calls attention to the irreducible gap between the utility of the written language and concrete needs of everyday life within the particular social/historical context. For the teenagers who risk their lives every day to cross the Iran-Iraq border covered by landmines, learning how to read and write is just an unnecessary drudgery. The old men who seek to reach their native village are interested only in finding a place where they can peacefully die. Having lived their entire lives under the guidance of traditional values, they cannot imagine how education might benefit them. The young widow who is traveling with the old men is not in the least interested in the idea of learning anything new. Preoccupied with the need to protect her child in a harsh environment, she resists the romantic advances of the teacher, who offers to marry her, supposedly in order to help her.

The film testifies to the gap between the basic requirements of living and the promises of education with a dark sense of irony. The only instance where knowing how to read seems to have a useful function for one of the film's characters occurs early in the narrative, when an old man asks the first teacher to read a letter from his son, who is a prisoner of war at Iraq. The letter, however, is in Arabic, which is unintelligible to the teacher. Upon the old man's insistence, the teacher then invents the contents of the letter, attempting to offer a sense of hope. Imagination seems to be more functional than education. Toward the end of the film, the teacher who meets up with the teenage smugglers finally finds someone in the group who is interested in learning to write his own name. When the boy, Ribvar,

succeeds in inscribing his name on the blackboard and happily shouts "I did it, I did it, I actually wrote my name," he is instantly killed by a bullet that comes roaring through the air. Under the conditions described in the film, the inscription of one's name/identity equals death. In the end, the teacher who has married the widowed woman agrees to divorce her, perceiving her stubborn lack of interest in him. After the abrupt divorce ceremony, the blackboard that was offered to the woman as a wedding gift earlier in the narrative now becomes her possession. As she walks away with the board on her back, we read the Persian words "I love you" inscribed upon it, words once written by the teacher in an unsuccessful attempt to kindle the emotions of his reluctant new bride. Since she is still unaware of the meaning of the inscription she now carries on her back, the film suggests, once again, that written language is irrelevant to life.

Situating *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards*

How can we situate films like *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards*? How can we account for their obvious affinity with the "accented genre" on the basis of their thematic preoccupations and cinematic style? What do we make of the fact that they are directed by women directors from the Middle East?

It is obvious that *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards* defy existing categories and classifications. Though both films are associated with the "national cinemas" of their directors' countries of origin, their thematic preoccupations and cinematic styles challenge the very notion of "national cinema." The foundational problem with the concept of "national cinema," Andrew Higson points out, is its tendency to assume national identity as already fully formed and fixed in place (Higson 2000, 67). Also, it tends to take borders for granted and assume that they are effective in containing political and economic developments, cultural practice, and identity. The cinemas established in specific nation-states, however, can rarely be autonomous establishments as the film business has long operated on a regional, national, and transnational basis. The experience of border crossing, in this sense, takes place at the level of the production, distribution, and reception of films (Higson 2000, 69). Instead of taking "national cinema" as a fixed and uniform totality, a new reading of the concept that goes against the grain of its conventional understanding has been gaining increasing prevalence in current film studies. Ella Shohat, for

example, indicates that the topos of a unitary nation often camouflages the possible contradictions among different sectors of society. She suggests that any definition of nationality in film studies "must see nationality as partly discursive in nature, must take class, gender and sexuality into account, must allow for racial difference and cultural heterogeneity, and must be dynamic, seeing 'the nation' as an evolving, imaginary construct rather than an originary essence" (Shohat 2003, 57). In a similar vein, Susan Hayward points to the necessity of developing a renewed understanding of national cinemas in the context of processes of globalization that give rise to the multiplication of points of differentiation within and across nations (Hayward 2000, 93). *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards* challenge the idea of unitary nation because they call attention to the experience of ethnic/religious/cultural minorities in national formations and to specific conditions of women's lives within these contexts. As such, they show that far from being fixed and self-integrated entities, national boundaries are constantly defined and redefined by global economic and political forces.

Another category with which we might associate *Waiting for the Cloud* and *Blackboards* is "women's cinema," a genre that is assumed to be concerned primarily with questions of "sexual difference," gender relations, and the oppression of women. Seeking a more specific classification, one could even categorize *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards* as films by "Middle-Eastern women directors" or "Muslim women directors." Both Ustaoğlu and Makhmalbaf, however, avoid identifying themselves solely according to such categories. Their films, moreover, seem to downplay the question of gender. They do not represent female characters as oppressed victims of patriarchal society in ways that might be expected of women filmmakers from the Middle East. Samira Makhmalbaf describes the only female character in *Blackboards* as "a bit strange." Located between two extremes, this figure is represented as "a woman who could not decide during poverty, displacement, war, and even her own marriage, but…would express herself and give vent to her feelings and ideas when she got the chance" (Makhmalbaf 2000, 18). The female character in *Waiting for the Clouds* is also a "strange" woman, who seems to be paralyzed by a traumatic historical experience and a life spent in secrecy. Despite her condition of emotional paralysis, however, she finds a voice to express herself when she gets the chance. Neither woman can be characterized as a victim of patriarchy in a clichéd way.

Although they downplay the question of gender, both films can be said to call attention in a subtle way to the constraints of being a

woman in specific social/historical contexts. In each film, the fact of being a woman who is living without a man requires the characters to live under the guardianship of their communities. This supposedly provides protection, but can also easily involve surveillance and control. As a result, both characters seem to adopt a humble, reserved, and asexual style. In this way, both films can be said to articulate a subtle critique of patriarchy by touching upon the restrained lives of women. In both films, it seems, unwritten codes of patriarchal order require women to adopt a self-effacing existence to survive in communities dominated by men. In *Blackboards*, for example, the marriage between the young widow and the teacher is mainly arranged by men. One of the elderly men in the group explains to the teacher that the woman's sick old father wishes to marry her off in order to go to his grave in peace. The teacher asks how much the father wants for her dowry, and adds he does not have anything to offer but his blackboard. The father accepts it, and the marriage is decided between the father and the prospective husband without the woman's involvement. The religious marriage ceremony is conducted by an old man while the bride tries to make her son urinate. She does not show the slightest interest in the words of the old man asking for her agreement to take the teacher as her husband. This scene obviously demonstrates the domination of men and the subordinate status of women in the community, and gives us a hint about why the female character chooses a solitary and detached mode of living.

Yet, I think, we could read the women's detached existence in both films also as a form of resistance to patriarchal order. One common characteristic of both female characters is their preferred mutism, that is, their refusal to explain themselves to others. This mutism, however, is not a result of women's incapacity to express themselves to the outside world. Despite their asocial and distant attitude toward their community, both women are perfectly communicative and affectionate in their relations with children. Also, as I explained earlier, they speak up when they get a chance. In *Blackboards*, after their divorce, the woman tells the teacher that her heart is like a train where men get on and off every station, but there is only one person who never gets off, her son. In *Waiting for the Clouds*, the female character succeeds finally in coming to terms with her suppressed identity. The choice of mutism, then, can be seen as a strategy of shutting oneself off from the outside world; and as such it makes the characters impenetrable. In *Blackboards,* the alluring words of the teacher cannot penetrate and seduce the female character, just as in *Waiting for the Clouds* the attempts of the community to heal the female character from the

symptoms of her strange "madness" cannot get into her. In both films, then, the women's solitary and detached existence serves to make their identity unfixable and unnamable. Their mutism and asocial behavior can be read as a strategy of resistance to a symbolic order that denies them a voice. Despite these small allusions to the condition of women, however, we cannot suggest that the stories of *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards* revolve around the issue of gender.

In several interviews, Ustaoğlu expresses a decided distaste in being confined to the category of the "third world woman director" and indicates that she considers herself solely as a "filmmaker." Similarly, Makhmalbaf avoids being categorized as a "third world woman director." The source of this resistance may be found in the restrictions and expectations that often characterize Western attitudes to third-world female artists, which are eloquently articulated by Trinh T. Minh-ha in a discussion of the condition of contemporary women writers:

> Imputing race or sex to the creative act has long been a means by which the literary establishment cheapens and discredits the achievements of non-mainstream women writers. She who "happens-to-be" a (non-white) Third World member, a woman, and a writer is bound to go through the ordeal of exposing her work to the abuse of praises and criticisms that either ignore, dispense with, or overemphasize her racial and sexual attributes. (Trinh 1989, 6)

In a similar vein, Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj (2000) talk about the reception of third-world women writers, particularly those of Muslim origin, in the West. Although third-world women and their writings seem to be granted more and more space within first-world contexts, Amireh and Majaj assert, this gesture of inclusion does not challenge the already-defined discursive landscape that continued to assign to third-world women a specific and confined role (Amireh and Majaj 2000, 7). Instead, this gesture has often functioned to contain the voices of third-world women within a predefined space. Discursive, institutional, and ideological structures preempt their discourse and determine both what they can say and whether they would be heard when they speak. Moreover, instead of being received as art works, third-world women's texts are viewed primarily as sociological accounts granting Western readers a glimpse into the "oppression" of third-world women. According to Amireh and Majaj, this is true especially for Muslim women artists who usually find themselves occupying the role of a "native informant." Islamic women of the Middle East

are typically seen as victims of religion, patriarchy, tradition, and poverty in the West. Women artists from the same region are expected to testify to this presumed condition. Although they do not see themselves merely as Middle Eastern, Muslim, third-world women, they are viewed as only that, and denied an identity in the plural (Amireh and Majaj 2000, 1–2).

In the light of this discussion, we can begin to understand why neither Ustaoğlu nor Makhmalbaf is willing to see herself as a spokesperson for Middle Eastern or Muslim women. Nonetheless, they both take a critical position with regard to the issues of gender oppression, nationalism, fundamentalism, authoritarianism, and neocolonialism; and their films aim to make a critical intervention into the social/political condition they describe.

Once again, we need to raise the question how to "situate" in this frame films such as *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards*, which, though made by "third world women directors," do not make a direct reference to "women's oppression," but engage in a critical interrogation of the questions of belonging and identity. I suggest that despite their distance from an overtly expressed feminist position, the category of "transnational *feminist* cinema" would still accommodate these films.

Waiting for the Clouds and *Blackboards* are "transnational" films in the sense that they problematize the question of national identity and belonging by directing attention to the multiplicity of the experiences of displacement, de-territorialization, and migration within and across the non-Western world. Testifying to the complexity of the question of displacement in their own geopolitical contexts, they effectively prove that the problematization of the relations of belonging and identity is not the monopoly of the exilic/diasporic subjects residing in the West. The theory of "accented cinema" could accommodate these films as long as it does not take a narrowly defined exilic/diasporic position, requiring emigration from third-world and postcolonial societies to Western cosmopolitan centers as the precondition of the "situatedness" of accented directors. I believe "accented cinema" could be a more effective concept if it were understood as enabling the parallel readings of films such as *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards* not only with reference to their national contexts, but also in relation to each other and to films by other independent transnational filmmakers ("national" and "exilic" alike) as products of a new "transnational imaginary." The directors of these films themselves do not perceive their filmmaking practice as limited to the national boundaries of their countries of origin. Instead, they seek to

articulate a transnational position that calls attention to the interconnectedness between specific local realities and global power relations. Defining herself as a "filmmaker without frontiers," Samira Makhmalbaf asks, for instance: "If the USA, on the pretext of the destruction of a building, can attack targets anywhere on earth to further American interests, why shouldn't a filmmaker make movies for the people who are victims of expansionist policies, profiteering economics and fanatic culture?"[3] Calling attention to the fault lines of gender, ethnicity, and generation, the work of Makhmalbaf and Ustaoğlu explores the complex condition of exile from one's own geography, community, history, and language. *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards,* to refer again to Shohat's formulation,

> do not so much reject "nation" as interrogate its repressions and limits, passing nationalist discourse through the grids of class, gender, sexuality and diasporic identities. [In both films], the boundaries between the personal and communal, like the generic boundaries between documentary and fiction, the biographic and the ethnographic, are constantly blurred. . . . Rather than fleeing from contradiction, they install doubt and crisis at their very core. (Shohat 2003, 74)

I believe *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards* can also be situated within a "transnational feminist" framework, if feminism is not conceived solely on the basis of the assumptions of hegemonic Western feminism. In an interrogation of the power relations between first- and third-world women, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) problematizes the "production of the 'third world woman' as a singular monolithic subject" in some Western feminist texts.[4] Suggesting that colonization almost invariably implies "a relation of structural domination, a suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question," she argues that some feminist writings "discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular third world woman" (Mohanty 1991, 52–53). In a similar vein, Marnia Lazreg (2000) suggests that hegemonic Western feminism is based on the assumption that Western women belong to perfectible societies, whereas Other women's societies are by definition "traditional" and impervious to change from within. In this way, Western feminists tend to perceive themselves as fundamentally different from Other women, whom they tend to define as "oppressed" and in need of liberation. Such an assumption will empower Western feminists when they encounter women from other societies, especially

those from the "Muslim" world, "whom they understand only through the reductive categories of religion, which dissolve their individuality, if not humanity" (Lazreg 2000, 31).

Challenging the assumptions of hegemonic Western feminism, "transnational feminism" conceives the construction of gender not only in terms of the relations between men and women, but also the relations among women of various classes, races, and ethnicities. As Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal (1999) suggest, transnational feminism entails a critique of not only different forms of patriarchal oppression, but also of feminist cultural hegemony: for example, a hegemonic approach that demonizes non-Western, especially Middle Eastern and Muslim cultures as more oppressive than their first-world counterparts. Seeking to form strategic coalitions across class, ethnic, and national boundaries, "(t)ransnational feminist cultural studies recognize that practices are always negotiated in both a connected and a specific field of conflict and contradiction and that feminist agendas must be viewed as a formulation and reformulation that is contingent on historically specific conditions" (Kaplan and Grewal 1999, 358). Given this framework, we can suggest that "transnational *feminist* cinema" can accommodate *Waiting for the Clouds* and *Blackboards* precisely because of their refusal to comply with the expectations of Western neocolonial ideology in general and hegemonic Western feminism in particular. The gender politics of these films is subversive to the extent that they frustrate the Western desire to reveal the "truth" of the Middle Eastern woman, lifting her veil and liberating her. Instead of reproducing stereotyped representations of Middle Eastern women, they offer new ways of seeing and thinking about relations of belonging and identity (including gender identity) in specific social and historical contexts as well as in the contemporary globalized world.

Notes

1. The scope and meaning of the term "world cinema" seems to be quite unclear. Though it sounds like a concept designating all cinemas in the world, in practice the term "world cinema" is employed to include only a set of selected cinemas determined on the basis of usually arbitrary criteria.
2. In the words of Arzu Öztürkmen, a scholar working on the history of the city of Tirebolu in Northern Turkey, "Although sporadic migration had begun among the Greeks and Armenians of Tirebolu before the 1900s, the more drastic experience of displacement came with the First World

War, when exile policies touched the non-Muslim communities of the town and when simultaneously many Muslim families escaped to Western towns, fearing a Russian invasion" (Öztürkmen 2006, 95).

3. Quotation is taken from the following internet site: http://www.makhmalbaf.com/articles.php?a=379 (accessed May 23, 2006).
4. Mohanty indicates that her reference to Western feminism does not imply that it is a monolithic discourse. Yet, she points out to similar effects of various textual strategies used by writers who codify others as non-Western and hence themselves as implicitly Western (Mohanty 1991, 51–52).

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Chapter 4

Refusal of Reproduction: Paradoxes of Becoming-Woman in Transnational Moroccan Filmmaking

Patricia Pisters

> We are not going to refuse (…) the unsurpassed pleasures of pregnancy which have actually been always exaggerated or conjured away—or cursed—in the classic texts. For if there's one thing that's been repressed here's just the place to find it: in the taboo of the pregnant woman.
>
> Hélène Cixous, 1976

> [The myth of] the sleeping child consists of putting the fetus to sleep, by way of white magic, a child that the mother does not want to be born immediately. This can be because she has too many children and wants to postpone the arrival of the next one. Or because she is a widow or repudiated and not yet remarried. Or because her husband has immigrated to another country and she wants to wait for his return to deliver the child, like in the film. (…) Everybody believes in it.
>
> Yasmine Kassari, 2005[1]

Introduction

The female body has always had a double function with respect to reproduction. By becoming pregnant and giving birth the female body literally reproduces life. At the same time, metaphorically it is often seen as the safeguard of the nation, the reproduction of national values, tradition, and patriarchal history. However, both these reproductive functions have often worked at the cost of the body of the woman, who disappears in the shadow of her offspring and of history. Since the 1970s both French feminist theory and Anglo-American feminist film theory and practice have begun to reclaim the female body and rewrite history. A young generation of transnational women directors of Maghrebin descent, who live and work between the Maghreb and Europe, now seems to continue this feminist project in their films,

albeit with some new dimensions.[2] In this essay I argue that contemporary concerns with the female body in transnational Moroccan cinema are most productively understood in relation to the Deleuzian concepts of "becoming-woman" and "becoming-minoritarian." Although initially critically received by feminist philosophers, these concepts in fact relate very well to feminist concerns and provide new and paradoxical ways of understanding postcolonial transnational cinema in relation to the nation, minorities, and the body of women.

Writing the Body: Overflowing with Life and Creativity

In the 1970s and 1980s French feminists such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva developed a feminine discourse, a language that seemed to derive from the female body and female sexuality. In spite of significant differences among their various writings, the common project of these feminists was to develop a different language and tell different stories. As Irigaray argues, woman is enveloped in her own skin, but she does not own her body. And "if we continue to speak to each other as men have spoken for centuries, as they taught us to speak, we will fail each other. Again. Words will pass through our bodies, above our heads, disappear, make us disappear" (Irigaray 1980, 69). By writing, woman has to put herself not only into the text, but also into the world and into history, Cixous argues (1976, 875).

Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva all share a focus on the value of the pregnant body, maternity, and the pre-Oedipal phase in the constitution of subjectivity. As the quote at the beginning of this chapter indicates, Cixous rejects the taboo of the pregnant body, inviting women to choose this experience if they wish. Both her fiction and academic writing are saturated with maternal metaphors, referring to mother's milk as "white ink" and talking about overflowing "breasts with an urge to come to language" (Cixous 1976, 882). Irigaray writes about the suffocating symbiotic relationship between mother and daughter in her essay, "And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other" (Irigaray 1981). Here mother's milk is compared to ice that freezes the individuality of the daughter, where the daughter has to stand in for the lack of the mother's subjectivity. For Irigaray mothering, as long as it is the single function of woman, is a cage that she wants to open by writing the feminine body so that both mother and daughter can live. Kristeva has written extensively on the pre-Oedipal bond with the body of the

mother and the bodily drives as they are discharged in language, which she calls "the semiotic" (associated with rhythms, tones, and nonsignifying sounds). The maternal semiotic and the paternal symbolic together create signification, Kristeva argues (1984). In her essay "Stabat Mater," she writes about her own experience of giving birth, and calls for more reflection on maternity (Kristeva 1985).

Pregnancy and the reproductive function of women thus have several meanings in feminine discourse. On the one hand, it is something to demand and make visible and valuable, by giving the pregnant body visibility in society and by giving a place to the maternal in language. On the other hand, it is a trap, a cage that keeps the bodies of both the mother and the daughter imprisoned. But in any case, it is through writing that the feminine body could reclaim a voice and a place. The works mentioned here have been very influential, but have also met serious criticism. Most importantly, they have been criticized for their implied essentialism (see, e.g., Culler 1982). Although in the end the aim of feminine writing is to overcome binary oppositions and not to create new ones, it cannot be denied that women are addressed as (biological) women with the aim to oppose the male order of things: "A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written to bring about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there's no other way" (Cixous 1976, 888).

Filming the Body: Addressing the Spectator as Female

The same militancy against patriarchy and the male point of view is found in feminist film theory and women's film practice in the 1970s and 1980s. Most famously, Laura Mulvey proposed to destroy man-centered vision and traditional forms of visual pleasure in her 1975 essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (Mulvey 1975). In her article "Rethinking Woman's Cinema: Aesthetics and Feminist Theory," Teresa de Lauretis looks at the development of feminist film criticism and argues that the disruption of patriarchal norms of representation also asks for the construction of other objects and subjects of vision:

> The project of women's cinema, therefore, is no longer that of destroying or disrupting a man-centered vision by representing its blind spots, its gaps, or its repressed. The effort and challenge are now to effect another vision. (…) The idea that *a film may address the spectator as*

> *female*, rather than portray women positively or negatively, seems very important to me in the critical endeavor to characterize women's cinema as a cinema for, not only by, women. (…) [The re-vision] refers to the project of reclaiming vision, of "seeing difference differently," of displacing the critical emphasis of "images of" women "to the axis of vision itself—to the modes of organizing vision and hearing which result in the production of that "image." (de Lauretis 2000)

This shift from an attack on representations of women to "the axis of vision itself" implies a new film practice in which women start to make films that address the spectator differently. De Lauretis discusses Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975) as an example. In a style very different from that of classical cinema, the film shows the daily routines of a housewife in Brussels. Narrative suspense is created by tiny slips in these routines, such as forgetting the potatoes on the stove and small hesitations in daily gestures such as making coffee. "What the film constructs is a picture of female experience, of duration, perceptions, events, relationships, and silences, which feels immediately and unquestionable true. (…) Akerman's film addresses the spectator as female," de Lauretis argues (2000, 321). Regardless of the spectator's actual sex, the film invites one to enter into a world of feminine sensibility.

De Lauretis addresses another important development in feminism: In discussing another film, Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* (1983), she demonstrates a feminist understanding of the heterogeneity of the female social subject. She argues that *Born in Flames* also addresses the spectator as female but does so across multiple representations of class, race, language and social relations: "For there are, after all, different histories of women. There are women who masquerade and women who wear the veil; women invisible to men, in their society, but also women who are invisible to other women" (de Lauretis 2000, 325). Where the earlier feminists tended to talk about Woman as a universal category (similar to many of the French feminists), there is now an emphasis on the particular differences among and within women. This leads me to some of the questions that postcolonial theory and postcolonial feminism have brought up with respect to the cinema.

Political Cinema, Nation, Women

In the wake of independence struggles all over the third world, the importance of culture, especially cinema, for the building of the new nations has been emphasized by many. In the chapter "On National

Culture" in his *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon argued in the 1950s that the rediscovery or recreation of national culture goes hand in hand with the fight for freedom (Fanon 1963). In the 1960s, cinema played a significant role in the decolonization of culture and the recreation of national culture. In their "Manifesto for Third Cinema," Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino argued for a militant political cinema in which the camera is compared to a gun (Solanas and Getino 2000). In the documentaries *Camera d'Afrique* (1983) and *Camera Arabe* (1983), Ferid Boughdedir interviews filmmakers who emphasize the unifying role of cinema in the new African and Arab nations that before colonization and independence had not yet existed as nations.[3] This so-called Third Cinema is a new type of political and postcolonial cinema, which emerged everywhere in the former colonies. It is political because its aim is to emancipate the people. As Gilles Deleuze argues, the first postcolonial films after the independence waves in the third world are "classical" in the sense that they refer to a unified idea of the people and the nation (Deleuze 1989).[4]

As already indicated, women have played an important role in the construction and safeguarding of the nation and its traditional values. Umm Kalthoum as "the Voice of Egypt" is a clear case in point. During the independence struggles women often played an active role in freeing and uniting their country. But very soon after Independence it became clear that women also became victims of nationalistic discourse. As Deniz Kandiyoti argues in her article "Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation,"

> On the one hand, nationalist movements invite women to participate more fully in collective life by interpellating them as "national" actors: mothers, educators, workers and even fighters. On the other hand, they reaffirm the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct and exert pressure on women to articulate their gender interests within the terms of reference set by nationalist discourse. Feminism is not autonomous but bound to the signifying network of the national context that produces it. (Kandiyoti 1991, 380)

Besides the disappointment for women who after Independence did not gain more rights, the disenchantments of the new regimes and political realities in the third world (corruption, dictatorships, poverty, and by consequence massive migration) undermined the belief in a unified people. "The people are missing," Deleuze declares in *The Time-Image* (Deleuze 1989, 216). This also changed the function of political cinema. Political cinema is no longer a representation of an

already existing reality (a people that exists and that the film can address). Political cinema becomes a speech act that *does* something in reality (create a people by story-telling). As Deleuze indicates, political cinema, the cinema of the "third world," or minority cinema (both in the third world or in the West), is no longer "the myth of a past people, but the story-telling of the people to come. The speech-act must create itself as a foreign language in a dominant language, precisely in order to express an impossibility of living under domination" (Deleuze 1989, 223).

Here we can see a first possible encounter between French and Anglophone feminism of the 1970s and Deleuzian conceptions of minority cinema. The explicit aim of French feminism was to *do* by writing, to introduce itself as a foreign language in dominant language, and change the world and history: "I shall speak about women's writing: about *what it will do*," Cixous announced (1976, 875). This feminist perspective on the performative nature of writing is very close to the minority perspective of modern postcolonial political cinema described by Deleuze. He argues, "Story-telling is not an impersonal myth but neither is it a personal fiction: it is a word in act, a speech-act through which the character continually crosses the boundary which would separate his private business from politics, and which itself produces collective utterances" (Deleuze 1989, 222). I will return to the ways in which Deleuzian concepts would be useful in understanding contemporary transnational feminist concerns in cinema. Let us now first look at the position of women in postcolonial cinema.

Moroccan National Cinema: Women and Berberity, or "Becoming-Minoritarian"

The difficult position of women, whose sexuality and freedom of movement are very often controlled by paternalistic nationalist discourses, is the topic of some postcolonial films from the 1970s onward, especially in the Maghreb countries. A film such as *A Wife for My Son* (Ali Ghalem, 1982) demonstrates how women are forced into strict and suffocating roles of mother and housekeeper (under the severe eyes of a mother-in-law), while the husband is far from home in Europe to earn money. But the films that show the condition of women in the new nations are rare. For a long time women directors were equally rare in the Maghreb countries.[5] However, since the beginning of the new millennium, a new generation of female directors of

Maghrebin descent has emerged. Clearly these women are not representing "a (unified) nation" as was still the case in the classic Independence film *The Battle of Algiers* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1967), for instance. Their stories are too diverse to do so. If we consider the films of these female directors as modern political films, we need to ask how exactly these films function as speech acts that produce collective utterances "as the prefiguration of the people who are missing" (Deleuze 1989, 224).

In this respect, it has to be noted that at the same time that women directors gain importance in Morocco and its transnational communities, another minority group has gained access to audiovisual production modes, namely the large and diverse Berber population in various regions in Morocco.[6] After Independence, Berbers were not recognized as part of the nation as a result of the Arabization of national culture. Until recently, the only official language in education, the media, and other institutions was Arabic.[7] But in the 1990s, with the advent of cheap recording technology, VCR and DVD/VCD, Berber groups started to retell their stories in audiovisual form. These films are locally produced and both nationally and transnationally distributed, through diaspora communities.[8]

Strikingly, in many of the contemporary films made by transnational Moroccan female directors, there is a double focus of women and Berberity. I do not wish to say that all female-authored films also deal with Berber identity (although many do); nor do I want to imply that all Berber cinema is feminine. Instead, I see these two new aspects of Moroccan cinema as two phenomena of "becoming-minoritarian" of national cinema and perhaps of the Moroccan nation. More precisely, I would like to propose that in the new transnational Moroccan cinema, the becoming-minoritarian of national cinema takes place through a "becoming-woman" that can be read first and foremost in the body of the woman. This becoming-woman opens up national discourse from its traditional confinements and creates a possible future that is not yet fixed. Let me first discuss the concept of becoming-woman and the feminist critiques of the concept before looking at the ways in which it can be made operative in contemporary Moroccan cinema.

Feminism, Becoming-Woman, and the Body without Organs

With the concept of becomings Deleuze and Guattari refer to a dynamic conception of the human body. Instead of "being," they

argue that bodies are "becoming."[9] Becomings are neither dreams nor fantasies, but have a reality of their own:

> The becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not, and the becoming-other of the animal is real, even if that something other it becomes is not. (...) Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance. If evolution includes any veritable becomings, it is the domain of symbioses that brings into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation. There is a block of becoming that snaps up the wasp and the orchid, but from which no wasp-orchid can ever descend. (Deleuze and Guattari 1992, 238)

Becomings have to be understood on a micro level of perception, in terms of dynamic affects and kinetic movements: those mostly invisible levels of perception where affective and dynamic connections can be made.[10] This attention to the micro level of perceptions is very important, but also hard to understand with respect to the "macro level" of perception where we distinguish categories of bodies of women, men, children, animals, plants, and so on. I return to these points later. First it is necessary to see that Deleuze and Guattari assign special introductory powers to becomings-woman:

> On the near side, we encounter becomings-woman, becomings-child (becoming-woman, more than any other becoming, possesses a special introductory power; it is not so much that women are witches, but that sorcery proceeds by way of this becoming-woman). On the far side, we find becomings-elementary, -cellular, -molecular, and even becomings-imperceptible. (Deleuze and Guattari 1992, 248)

The concept of becoming-woman has stirred quite some debates among feminists. Some have been very critical and skeptical about it. In "A Thousand Tiny Sexes: Feminism and Rhizomatics," Elizabeth Grosz summarizes the main objections of feminists to this concept. One major problem is the fear that becoming-woman is a male appropriation and the recuperation of women's positions and struggles, which risks the obliteration of the category of women ("being woman") altogether into a "becoming-imperceptible" (Grosz 1993, 1994, Braidotti 1991, 1993).

Another Deleuzian concept that has caused suspicion by feminists is the "Body without Organs" (BwO). As Deleuze and Guattari have argued, the BwO is a body that refuses the traditional functions of the organization of the body. It is an intense body of becoming. It is a body that "constructs flow by flow and segment by segment lines of

experimentation, becoming-animal, becoming-molecular, etc." (Deleuze and Guattari 1992, 161). Irigaray in particular has rejected this notion: "For then isn't the [Body without Organs] a historical condition? And don't we run the risk once more of taking back from women those as yet unterritorialized spaces where her desire might come into being?" (Irigaray 1985, qtd. in Grosz 1993, 168). Feminist body discourse of the 1970s and 1980s did everything to get the female body more valued in society and culture. Therefore, it is quite understandable that ideas that could possibly make the female body yet again "evaporate" in literally molecular, atomist becomings, should be considered dangerous.

However, Grosz and other feminists subsequently have begun to evaluate becoming-woman and the BwO more positively. The discussions are too elaborate for me to do justice to them here (see Buchanan and Colebrook 2000). But in general it can be said that by now the concept of becoming-woman is understood as "a way of understanding transformative possibilities—the ways in which identity might escape from the codes which constitute the subject" (Driscoll 2000). In fact, Deleuzian feminism implies a thinking on several levels at the same time: on a "molar" or "macro level" of identity politics where concepts of man and woman are important to keep as categories (the level of laws, rights, and traditions), and, at the same time, on a "molecular" or "micro level," where fixed identities can be transgressed in becomings (the level of affects and intensities). These levels are not always compatible and often relate to each other in paradoxical ways. As Jerry Aline Flieger argues in "Becoming-Woman: Deleuze, Schreber and Molecular Identifications,"

> Deleuze and feminism may seem to be at odds, from the perspective of the concern of real women. But like the orchid and the wasp, the relation between Deleuzian thought and feminist thought may be mapped and interwoven in a kind of productive disjunction. It is perhaps neither a matter of window-dressing, masquerade or cosmetic solutions, nor of conflict and irreconcilable differences, but a matter of paradox. (Flieger 2000, 62)

This shift toward a *paradoxical* understanding of women's issues in relation to their bodies, their differences, their stories, and history through the concepts of becoming-woman and the BwO is what could be called the Deleuzian dimension of developments in feminist theory.

Let me now move to some recent Moroccan films to see what kind of paradoxes are expressed in the bodies that are filmed by a young

generation of transnational women directors. How is a becoming-woman that escapes traditional codes presented in these films? What kind of bodies do they present? And how is the feminist project related to the "project of the postcolonial nation" and the calling for "a coming people"? I will focus on three films and three different types of female bodies: the aging body in *Fama, Heroism without Glory* by Dalila Ennadre, the waiting body in *The Sleeping Child* by Yasmine Kassari and the angry and destructive body in *Cry No More* by Narjiss Nejjar.

The Aging Body: History and the Future of the Nation

In her documentary *Fama, Heroism without Glory* (2005) Ennadre follows Fama, an old Berber woman who led a life of political activism and resistance.[11] "This is my land. The land of my father and mother," Fama says in the opening scene of the film while she walks in the Rif mountains, the land of Berber resistance against French occupation. She explains how her father was put in jail because of his resistance to the French. She also recalls how her family tried to marry her off and how she refused. Fama's last words of the opening scene are paradoxical, expressing an escape from and attachment to her home at the same time: "I left this land more than fifty years ago. Nothing is more important for me than the land." She now returns for the first time to tell her story to Ennadre's camera.

The film presents a sort of untraditional "road movie," where Fama visits all the places and spaces that have been important in her life. She has always been a fighter for justice. One could say her body contains a whole history of the minoritarian-becoming of contemporary Morocco. In the 1950s she joined the nationalist Independence Party (Istiqlal Party) to fight for the end of colonialism. After Independence, during the harsh dictatorial regime of King Hassan II in the 1970s, she helped the youth movement and visited every young rebel in prison. Around the same time she was a true inspiration for the women's movement in Morocco, of which she was a founding member and to which she is still related at the age of 68. Throughout these movements, the contexts of the struggle for justice changed but the desire for liberation did not.

I would like to emphasize another paradox that Fama embodies. On the one hand, it is striking how much she literally and figuratively blends in with the landscape, with the territory of her country. While

she walks through the landscape she expresses how happy she is: “This is our history, my daughter,” she says to the filmmaker. Significantly, this remark not only refers literally to the places they visit and the stories she tells about them, but could also be seen as a reference to the fact that the land and the stories are now filmed and can start to function as a speech act. Other parts of the film also emphasize how Fama almost literally “dissolves” into the landscape, how her story blends with the history of the nation. Everybody calls her Mother Fama. So in this sense Fama seems to obey the traditional demands of safeguarding tradition and national values imposed on women by post-Independence nations.

On the other hand, this is certainly not as one dimensional a case as is desired by the patriarchal unified story of the nation.[12] After all, the founding act of Fama’s fight for justice (the refusal of colonialism) is based on another refusal: the refusal to marry and have children. This is why she fled from her native Berber land and family when she was eighteen years old. With respect to this refusal of the traditional role of women as safeguards of the (reproduction of) the nation, it is useful to refer briefly to two other documentaries by Ennadre: *Women of the Medina* (2000) and *What I would Like to Tell You* (2004). In *Women of the Medina*, when asked about her wishes for her daughter’s future, one of the women whom Ennadre films in their daily routines of housework in Casablanca, answers that she wishes that “the two inevitable things of life, marriage and death, will be postponed for her as long as possible.” In *What I would Like to Tell You*, poor rural Berber women similarly envision a future for their daughters that is different from their own. By contrast, asked about his daughter’s future, one of the husbands expresses *his* wish for an exact reproduction of the life of the mother (namely, learning how to weave carpets that he can sell, marry and have children).

With respect to the stories of these women, who have no rights, no education, no resources, and no possibility to improve the life of their children, Fama’s initial refusal to marry and have children is a literal creation of a BwO as a body that refuses the designated functions of the female body: the reproduction of life. This refusal of the normal functions of the feminine body is, paradoxically enough, the initial act of becoming-woman. At the same time as the reproduction of the body is refused, the reproduction of dominant and patriarchal history is refused. The paradox is that reproduction is refused not in order to extinguish the nation, but precisely to open it up to the future, creating new possibilities for a less constrained life.

Fama's becoming-woman also dissolves into a becoming-nature when she walks in the woods and recalls how she slept in nature having no house or shelter; into a becoming-animal when she talks about her connection to the animals and makes "wolf-sounds" in the final scene of the film; and a becoming-Morocco without the traditional confinements of the unified idea of the nation. Fama's aging body "contains the before and after" that Deleuze sees as characteristic of the cinematographic body:

> "Give me a body" then is first to mount the camera on an everyday body. The body is never in the present, it contains the before and the after, tiredness and waiting. Tiredness and waiting, even despair are the attitudes of the body. (Deleuze 1989, 189)

Fama's body, even now that she lives in a small apartment and Ennadre films her doing everyday routines, contains the history of her nation and the hopes for a future different from the past. When at the end of the film Fama dissolves into the woods and the image fades to black we read that a few months after the film was made Fama passed away. On the level of address, the film is a speech act in which Ennadre's camera and Fama's story and the image of her body engage in a "double becoming." Ennadre follows Fama. She spent several months with her making the film. And conversely, Fama trusts her words to Ennadre. She was asked several times to tell her story for national television but always refused.[13] This is interesting because in this way Fama actually also refuses to be taken up into the official history of the nation. By filming her story, however, Ennadre-Fama produce a speech act that contributes to a "coming people." It addresses the spectator as female in the sense that it issues an invitation to a "becoming-woman" that moves from the past to the future through the aging body of Fama.

The Waiting Body: Neither Impersonal Myth Nor Personal Story

In *The Sleeping Child* (2004) Kassari presents the waiting bodies of women in a Berber hamlet in the North of Morocco[14] (see figure 4.1). The film is based on a popular myth in the Maghreb related to a ritual that pregnant women perform when they want to postpone the birth of a child. The film begins with a wedding. Unlike in *Fama*, the women in this film initially accept their traditional role.

But very soon the men leave for Europe and the women stay behind. The bride, Zeineb, finds herself pregnant but decides to have the unborn child put to sleep in her womb until the moment the father returns. She travels to town to a marabout (a traditional magician), who puts a spell on the unborn child and gives her an amulet with a prescribed ritual to wake it up. This is a little magic touch in

Figure 4.1 *L'Enfant endormi/The Sleeping Child*: Three women

the otherwise very harsh and realistic mise-en-scene of the film, in which the bodies of the women can only express the traditional passivity of feminine waiting (known as "sabr" in Islamic traditions). For a spectator the terrible longing of these waiting bodies is perceptible through the sober and precise mise-en-scene of the bodies in the landscapes. Zeineb silently and patiently performs her tasks while waiting for her husband. Her friend Halima is more restless. Although these women are part of the land, they do not blend with the landscape harmoniously. Their longing bodies conflict with the land. In one scene Halima, like Fama in the previous film, makes a wolf sound. But here the effect of "becoming-wolf" is not one of blending with nature but one of howling for a sexual partner.

But their husbands are far away and the rare messages they receive are on a video tape that the women watch together on the only television set in the hamlet. Zeineb's and Halima's husbands do not speak to them in these images (see figure 4.2). Yet, it becomes clear that, even in their absence, the men completely control the austere lives of these women. For instance, a picture of Zeineb and her mother-in-law taken in the city and sent to her husband is returned with a warning that she should never leave the house again without his permission. After months and months of waiting without any sign except this warning, Zeineb decides to break the spell of the sleeping child. Without performing the prescribed ritual she opens the amulet, which means that the unborn child will die. While Halima chooses to leave

Figure 4.2 *L'Enfant endormi*: Watching the screen

the mountains with her baby son and leave her daughter behind, Zeineb will stay. Nevertheless, she has begun her trajectory of liberation, of becoming-woman, with this literal refusal to reproduce her own life in another without the opportunity for change.

Although Deleuze specifically argues that the modern political film does not reproduce "impersonal myths," the myth in *The Sleeping Child* is presented so deeply in and through the yearning of the waiting bodies of the women that it becomes a more personalized and embodied story. And yet it is not a "personal fiction" either. Kassari speaks about a region in Morocco that she knows very well, since as a child she spent long summers in the region where the film is shot when her family went back from Europe to visit relatives. By relating her own observations to a more collective experience in the body of the actresses, Kassari too creates a speech act. By now the film has won about forty prizes. It presents a story of refusing reproduction that, paradoxically again, helps to put "a people" on the map or at least to change the conception of the postcolonial Moroccan nation.

The Destructive Body: How to Get Out of the Black Hole of History

In *Cry No More* (2003) by Nejjar reality is even harsher.[15] Here the story is situated in the Berber village Tizi in the Atlas region of Morocco. This village is inhabited entirely by women who are prostitutes. Once a month they are visited by men, but the rest of the time they live in complete isolation on their own. Again the female body is central here. The main character is Hala, the leader of the community, who is so angry and hardened by the conditions of life that she can think of no solution other than self-imposed extinction. This is why all babies are immediately killed at birth and no desire, let alone love, is allowed to enter. The arrival of an older woman, Mina, who returns to the village and appears to be Hala's mother, and a man from the city, Fahd, who only speaks Arabic, will change this situation.

Again we see first of all a literal refusal of reproduction (and even killing of babies), which in this case is also the most dangerous form of a refusing the BwO. Deleuze and Guattari call this self-destructive type of BwO the "empty form of the BwO," comparable to the body of a drug addict: "Instead of making a body without organs sufficiently rich or full for the passage of intensities, drug addicts erect a

vitrified or emptied body, or a cancerous one: the causal line, creative line, or line of flight immediately turns into a line of death and abolition" (Deleuze and Guattari 1992, 285). This form of becoming-woman is destructive and carries the danger of disappearing completely into the black hole of the history of the traditional nation.

However, another form of becoming-woman comes to the rescue here. Paradoxically, it is the becoming-woman of the man who arrives in the village that provides a possible way out. In a traditional feminist reading it could be argued that it is rather a classic patriarchal scenario for a man to rescue the women from their own destruction.[16] However, Fahd does not "rescue" Hala in a heroic action scene. Rather, Fahd loses his traditional masculinity by affectively connecting to the emotions of the women. In particular, his "becoming-woman" takes place through his relationship with the only child in the village, a young girl. He does not understand her Berber language, but tries to communicate by making her laugh, for instance, by dressing up as Charlie Chaplin. In this way he introduces different affects into the village. But he cannot reach Hala. At the very end of the film, he runs up into the mountains in despair, completely undresses, and covers his body in snow and ice, crying out loud. This is the moment where Hala finally decides to leave the village with the other women and to walk into a very open future, where no feminine or masculine identity, no national or minoritarian identity is fixed yet.

Since the theme of Berber identity is made explicit by the arrival of the Arabic-speaking Fahd who cannot communicate with the women, the film can clearly be read allegorically as well. Fahd's becoming-woman also implies a becoming-minoritarian of the Arab part of Morocco. In order to help the country move into the future, this film asks for a becoming-woman of both man and woman (the female characters also have to free themselves from the road to extinction by accepting life and love again) and a becoming-minoritarian of Arabization.

Similar to the two other films, *Cry No More* blends the stories of the filmmaker and the women filmed. The film was initially planned as a documentary. The actual women of the village act as the characters in the fiction film, which is strongly colored by the filmmaker's camera eye and aesthetic vision. The film has caused many debates and controversies in Morocco, both about the position of Berber groups and the position of women. In this way, even if some strongly disagree with the film's portrayal of these women, the film is a speech act that operates in the real discussions about identities in contemporary Morocco and thus helps in the creation of a people.

Conclusion: The Logic of Paradoxical Disjunctions

Teresa de Lauretis already remarked that the construction of a feminine aesthetics in cinema includes a "deaesthetics" and a deconstruction of dominant norms (de Lauretis 2000, 334). Now we can see how this project is continued in contemporary postcolonial cinema, where films made by women are also implicated in postcolonial concerns of the future of the people. In all the films discussed here the issue of reproduction is a recurring theme. Both the reproduction of history and social norms and the reproduction of life are at stake. All the bodies presented in these films create in their own ways a BwO that demonstrates the full paradox of the becoming-woman and becoming-minoritarian of a people to come: *Self-construction* through the performative speech acts of cinema based on a *destructive* decision to refuse reproduction. It is important to see that there is not just one "recipe" for becoming-woman and becoming-minoritarian in transnational Moroccan cinema, even though the films share the production of a refusing BwO; and it is around the body of the woman and its reproductive capacities that choices have to be made.

Furthermore, it is striking that these films are made by women and explicitly deal with Berberity, which implies a molar fight on the level of macro identity politics and fixed categories. At the same time, however, becoming-woman and becoming-minoritarian undermine any molar category of woman or minority group, addressing a much more imperceptible, molecular level of affects and intensities that run through all categories. So another paradox that these films present is best described as the paradoxical understanding of thinking the disjunction between the *molar* and *molecular.*

All the filmmakers that I discussed have been marked in some way or another by transnational movements, either because their parents immigrated to Europe, or because they studied in Europe. In the films discussed here the issues related to transnational movements are not as explicitly addressed as they are in films that deal with migration such as *Inch Allah Dimanche* (Yamina Benguigui, 2001) and *Napoli Central* (Bouchra Khalili, 2002). And yet, the fact that the filmmakers can move transnationally is related to a final paradox, namely the disjunction between the *national* and the *transnational*. It is precisely because these filmmakers can leave (or have left) their country that they can help reconstructing the nation.

Here we can also return to the legacies of the French feminism of the 1970s, which we now might read through a Deleuzian lens. In her

article "Becoming-Woman Now," Verena Conley relates Deleuze's becoming-woman and the BwO to the work of Hélène Cixous and her concept of the Newly Born Woman (NBW): "Both undo the self-identical subject, open the self to metamorphoses and becomings. They write out a set of historical conditions in which terms are caught. (…) In French NBW reads as la-je-une-nais, 'here I give myself birth as one'" (Conley 2000, 22). This "giving birth to oneself as one" should not be seen as an essentialist claim of the female body. Rather it should be seen as the creation of a BwO through the double refusal of reproduction of both history and offspring, in all the variations in which it can impose itself as a choice (including refusing not to reproduce). This refusing BwO paradoxically aims at renewal, change, new possibilities, new life, ultimately a new people that should not fix itself forever in a new majoritarian identity.

If the official narration of the nation aims at fixing in repetition, the time that is preserved in the bodies of the women opens up to becoming and change, both of the past and the future. There is no simple return to the unified nation, which never existed in the first place. It is only through a becoming-minoritarian related to the bodies of women and other minority groups like the Berbers that the nation can invent itself through the transnational speech acts of modern political cinema. As Cixous argues about the NBW: "Not the origin: she does not go back there. A boy's journey is the return to the native land. The Heimweg Freud speaks of, the nostalgia that makes man a being who tends to come back to the point of departure to appropriate it for himself and to die there. A girl's journey is farther—to the unknown, to invent" (Cixous qtd. in Conley 2000, 25).

With the arrival of women filmmakers in Moroccan transnational cinema a new phase in modern political cinema has reached the stage of the invention of the people through the paradoxical act of refusing to reproduce. But as *Cry No More* demonstrates, this should not lead to an act of self-destruction but to a becoming-woman and becoming-minoritarian of man and women alike and the openness of perpetual becomings in times to come.

Notes

1. Yasmine Kassari in an interview about her film *L'Enfant endormi* in *Cinergie,* no. 89 (2004). See also the website http://www.lenfantendormi.be (accessed October 15, 2006). My translation.
2. Other Moroccan transnational filmmakers are Leila Kilani (*Tanger, The Burners Dream*, 2003), Bouchra Khalili (*Napoli Central*, 2002), Fatma

Zohra Zamoum (*The Ball of Wool*, 2006), Rhama El Madani (*Where Home is*, 2003), Dalila Ennadre (*Fama*, 2004), Yasmine Kassari (*The Sleeping Child*, 2004), Narjiss Nejjar (*Cry No More*, 2003), and Laila Marrakchi (*Marock*, 2006). Born in France of Algerian descent, Yamina Benguigui (*Memoires d'Immigrés*, 1998 and *Inch Allah Dimanche*, 2001) lives and works in France, while Yamina Bachir-Chouikh (*Rachida*, 2002) and Damila Sahraoui (*Barakat*, 2006) make their films in Algeria. Nadia El Fani (*Bedouin Hacker*, 2002) and Raja Amari (*Satin Rouge*, 2002) move between France and Tunesia.

3. Very often these new nations were composed out of several clans with different languages and customs. *Camera Arabe/ Camera d' Afrique* is distributed on VHS by the British Film Institute.
4. See for an elaborate discussion of this concept of Third cinema, and its contemporary manifestations in relation to Deleuze, Pisters (2006).
5. Some early exceptions are Assia Djebar in Algeria, Moufida Tlatli, and Nejia Ben Mabrouk in Tunesia, and Farida Ben Lyziad in Morocco.
6. One of the French colonial films that speaks in a relatively nuanced way of the Berber population is the film *Itto*, made in 1934 by Jean Benoit-Levy and his partner Marie Epstein, an early and influential woman filmmaker. See Slavin (1998).
7. One of the reasons for this is related to the French colonial policy of divide and rule. See Burke (1973).
8. See Carter (2001) for an early overview of Berber cinema. Many websites in many different countries in the world are dedicated to Berber culture. See, e.g., http://www.agraw.com. Some Berber activists and Berber groups prefer the term "Amazigh" but since there is no consensus about this, I use the term Berber.
9. For the Bergsonian and Spinozian influences of this concept see, e.g., Hardt (1993). For other useful introductions see Goodchild (1996) and Parnet (2002). For an analysis of the concepts of becoming-woman, becoming-animal, and becoming-music in relation to cinema, see Pisters (2003).
10. It should be remarked that Deleuze is very much influenced by Spinoza for his conception of the body, which Spinoza defines by the affects of which it is capable (both passively and actively) and the speeds and slowness that makes it move.
11. Dalila Ennadre was born in Casablanca and grew up in France. See http://www.bladi.net/7099-dalila-ennadre.html for more information.
12. In "Dissemination, Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation" Homi Bhabha calls this desire for a unified nation the "nationalist pedagogy" of the nation, which is undermined by a recursive strategy of the performative, which allows different (minority) stories to emerge. See Bhabha (1994).
13. Information given by the filmmaker after the screening of her film at the Africa in the Picture Film Festival, Amsterdam, 2005.

14. Yasmine Kassari is of Moroccan origin and lives and works in Belgium. See also: http://www.bladi.net/7108-yasmine-kassari.html. For images and information about the film see the official website http://www.lenfantendormi.be/.
15. Narjiss Nejjar was born in Tanger, went to film school in Paris, and now lives in Morocco. See also: http://www.bladi.net/7040-narjiss-nejjar.html. A synopsis and background information of the film can be found on the website http://www.voices-unabridged.org/format/creat_format.php?id_article=95.
16. The "damsel in distress" phenomenon, the heroine in danger rescued by the hero in classical horror film, is a case in point. In his book *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), Slavoj Žižek gives this rescue scenario a perverse twist: He argues that the violence against Dorothy in *Blue Velvet* is therapeutic because it rescues her from her depression and self-destruction. So she is not depressed because she is treated badly, but she is treated badly because she is depressed: "Frank's terrorizing of Dorothy, far from being the cause of her malaise, is, rather, a desperate 'therapeutic' attempt to prevent the woman from sliding into the abyss of absolute depression, a kind of 'electroshock' therapy that endeavours to focus her attention" 121.

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Chapter 5

"Enter Freely, and of Your Own Will": Cinematic Representations of Post-Socialist Transnational Journeys

Alice Mihaela Bardan

The current literature on what is now called "transnational feminist studies" has recently been taken to task by some critics who point out how its "politics of location" operate primarily within the first/third world axis. Indeed, as Katarzyna Marciniak comments, this literature has little to say about the postcommunist second world, "as if the Second World, as a conceptual category and an actual geopolitical region, did not exist, despite the fact that the second world has changed the most thoroughly and the most rapidly in association with neoliberal globalization" (2006, xv). In light of this concern, my essay seeks to respond to Marciniak's invitation to expand the scope of transnational feminist studies, so that "the voices and perspectives from the Second World may find their way into the field that many consider a radical and indispensable direction for feminist studies" (2005, 4). To do this, I propose an examination of contemporary cinematic representations of three post-socialist journeys. My focus here is primarily on Paweł Pawlikowski's *Last Resort* (United Kingdom, 2000). In analyzing the critical reception and spectatorial investments of this film, I compare it to Lukas Moodysson's *Lilya 4-Ever* (Sweden, 2002) and align its representational practices with those of Michael Haneke's *Code Unknown* (France, 2000).

I situate the films in a larger debate regarding contemporary European cinema and cinematic politics of representation, arguing that *Last Resort* unsettles the homogeneity of established images of national identity which imagine a "we" that is fixed and unchanged by other cultures. Ultimately, by encouraging a rethinking of national space, *Last Resort* can be taken as an example of what Ien Ang calls "post-Utopian" European films. What emerges from this rethinking is a troubling of the concepts of center and margin, whereby England

is viewed through the eyes of the refugees as an imprisoning space "at the end of the world," and as "the armpit of the universe."[1]

The main characters in the films I discuss are women who embark on journeys to the West either alone or with only a child as company. Through the transnational experiences of its female protagonist, each film foregrounds three problematic aspects of contemporary Europe: the influx of immigrants, refugees, or asylum seekers, the trafficking in women from Eastern Europe, and the illegal border crossing of Eastern Europeans who do not have a temporary working permit. Pawlikowski's Tanya travels from Russia to England to meet Mark, her fiancé, but when he does not show up at the airport, she applies for political asylum and becomes a bogus refugee. She and her son Artyom are sent to Stonehaven, a remote and desolate resort where asylum seekers are detained. Alfie, an Englishman who runs the local bingo evenings and manages the amusement arcade "Dreamland" falls in love with her, and helps her and Artyom to escape Stonehaven on a boat.

Moodysson's Lilya is a teenager from "somewhere that was once the Soviet Union." After her mother leaves home to join a Russian man living in America, the girl barely manages to survive. She stops going to school, is raped by some boys from her neighborhood, and is tricked into believing that her new boyfriend will take her to Sweden, where he claims to have found her a job as an agricultural worker. Invoking an excuse at the last minute, he remains behind, and Lilya is kidnapped by a pimp upon arriving at the airport in Sweden. She is then locked into an apartment, brutalized by her captor, and finally forced into prostitution. While Tanya and Lilya are young, traveling primarily for individual reasons, Maria from *Code Unknown* is a much older woman, part of the recent mass labor migration from Eastern Europe. As a Romanian, she is allowed to work in France only if she holds a temporary permit. Not being able to obtain one, she becomes a clandestine migrant, ending up as a beggar in the streets of Paris.

The subject of immigration is a much debated topic in the Western European media, where multiple accounts of the recent migratory movements summon up the image of a dangerous invasion of immigrants and asylum seekers who deprive people of their jobs or exploit the system of social benefits.[2] Although the rhetoric of novelty regarding migration flows in contemporary Europe has been challenged by some scholars, who argue that it should be contextualized and read as a continuation or consolidation of previous patterns, what is increasingly recognized as new about postcommunist migration is the

emergence of a more distinct migratory regime, what Mazierska and Rascaroli call the "feminization of migration" (2006, 140). Whereas in the past men were the ones who first ventured to foreign countries in search of better paid work, nowadays an increasing number of women travel alone, leaving their families behind. Many of these women migrate in response to new demands in the service sector, hoping to work as agricultural laborers, nannies, maids, or as providers of care for the elderly or the disabled. Others, however, are enticed by offers to become the brides of men in other countries or fall prey to prostitution.

An increasing body of work has addressed these issues; yet there seems to be a disconnection between analyses of social, political, and economic patterns and cinematic representations of them.[3] As I argue here, films such as *Last Resort* and *Code Unknown* complicate easy understandings of the transnational journeys undertaken by women from the second world. Through their original style and self-reflexive mode, they invite us to question our assumptions about these women and the extent to which we can gain access to an "authentic" representation of their world. Whereas *Lilya 4-Ever* strives to portray clear causes and effects that allow us an easy access to Lilya's experience, *Last Resort* and *Code Unknown* present us with a type of realism that captures the ambiguity and ambivalence of lived experience. The filmmakers use a modernist, fragmented style that disrupts narrative closure and the notion of a linear, fully comprehensible national or individual destiny.[4] They do not convey the experience of displacement and exile through the spectacle of the migrants' suffering. Rather than presenting us with narrative structures that reach a crescendo through an accumulation of violent acts, *Last Resort* and *Code Unknown* seek to portray violence without explicitly showing it. Intimate confessions, muffled whimpers, or meditative looks emphasize the effects of violence, forcing the audience to reflect on its causes.

Last Resort: A "Post-Utopian" European Film?

I begin my discussion of *Last Resort* by placing it in the context of European cinema and, more specifically, in relation to British cinema. Made by a Polish immigrant to the United Kingdom, the film has an "accented" style, which Hamid Naficy describes as "interstitial," simultaneously global and local, resonating against the prevailing cinematic productions while benefiting from them at the same time

(2001, 4). Reflecting his own experience of migration between cultures and national identities, Pawlikowski's bold evocations of contemporary Britain attest to his own positionality as an outsider in contemporary British cinema. Although attuned to the tensions of marginality and difference, he however avoids exploiting narratives based on predictable notions of victims and victimizers.

Reflecting on the future of European cinema studies, Rosalind Galt argues that "if we are to take seriously the post-Wall European subject's impossible responsibility, we cannot stop with a comfortably liberal celebration of the Other" (2006, 4). She proposes that film studies needs to form the question of Europe as a matter of space and time, which implies a contestation of "the logic by which Europe imagines itself as a spatial and temporal advance-guard for the world" (2006, 4). In a similar vein, Ien Ang has also suggested that Europe has to begin with an altered sense of self, with a Europe that no longer views itself as the center and norm of human civilization putting other cultures and peoples in a relation of subordination to itself. "The task of Europe," in Ang's view, is to become "post-Utopian," "post-European." This means Europe must "stop relating to others by taking itself as the standard," "learn how to marginalize itself," "see its limitedness" and "its culture as relative and permeable" (1991, 25–30). It is from such a stance that I begin problematizing *Last Resort*, which I read as an example of the post-Utopian films Ang anticipated. It enables us to envision a marginalized England at "the end of the world," as Artyom, Tanya's son, puts it, no longer as empire but quite literally as "vampire," an aging body collecting blood from refugees to invigorate itself.[5]

Like many real-life asylum seekers who do not have the right to work in the United Kingdom, Tanya has to go through a Kafkaesque nightmare, having to wait for an official decision that will take her "between twelve and sixteenth months, depending on the case." Unsuccessful in her attempt to sell a fur collar she has brought from Russia, she faces a conundrum: she can either obtain money by "donating" blood to a makeshift donation center for refugees, or accept an offer to prostitute herself in front of a web cam. The film dwells on her ambivalence toward what to choose. Soon, however, we see her lying supine on a bed, looking sideways as her blood is transferred from her body to a collection bag. Its slow ascent through a tube mirrors the backward movement of the airport shuttle that drags Tania from light to dark at the beginning of the film and from dark to light at the end. The exchange of blood for money creates an especially poignant scene, stylized by Pawlikowski through the distortion of the voices of the refugees waiting in line for their turn. While their

conversations are rendered indistinguishable, the babble of their voices slowly acquires the rhythm of a prayer.

Drawing on Didier Bigo's contention that "the securitization of immigration" is grounded in the idea of the nation-state as a body that needs to be protected, Imogen Tyler calls attention to the fact that the consensus necessary to legitimize the detention of asylum seekers is mainly generated through the construction of the nation-state as "a body" under threat (2006, 192). From this perspective, I suggest that *Last Resort* encourages us to perceive, on a symbolic level, England's "body" as "weak," needing the blood of migrants to sustain its existence. Moreover, as Tyler further comments, "the mobilization of the asylum-seeker as 'our' national hate figure bestows 'us' with a collective identity" which "grants 'us' the pleasure of secure identification: we are British, we have a way of life, we must protect it" (2006, 192). The asylum seekers are identified as "not refugees," thus instantly "recognized" as always already "unwelcome."[6] They are needed to reinforce the homogeneous imagined community of the nation-state, but are also perceived as a real threat and, therefore, are placed in detention. The film questions this "normative" procedure in the scene in which Artyom angrily protests when he sees his mother undergoing the same procedures used for suspected criminals: she is assigned an ID number, and her face and profile are photographed.

The shutters of Alfie's arcade (a place where voices may echo each other) rising gradually as immigrants wait outside, may remind one of the slowly drawing back doors to Dracula's castle in Bram Stoker's famous novel. "Dreamland Welcomes You," the advertisement for the desolate amusement park outside the tower where the refugees are kept, echoes Dracula's famous line, "Welcome to my house. Enter freely and of your own will." The discrepancy between the deceptive message and what awaits one "inside" serves as a sardonic commentary on the apparent dissolution of borders in Europe. Tanya and her son are able to enter the United Kingdom freely, since apparently the borders that used to separate East and West have crumbled after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Maria, the Romanian from *Code Unknown* can also enter France, but without money or a permit to work, she is certainly going to have a miserable time there. Lilya traverses the border with a fake passport procured by her boyfriend. After she manages to escape her pimp, her fake identity contributes to her fear of contacting a policewoman she sees at a gas station.

In *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship,* Étienne Balibar argues that nowadays it is the system of identity verifications allowing the triage of travelers who are allowed

to enter a given national territory that constitutes the most decisive borders. Borders, therefore, are no longer conceived primarily as "lines" marking the edge of a given national territory, but more as "detention zones" and "filtering systems." As the poor are systematically regulated at points of entry, borders have become essential institutions in the constitution of social conditions on a global scale, where "the passport functions as a systematic criterion" (Balibar 2003, 113). Tanya's passport instantly alerts the immigration officer, who interrogates her about the duration of her stay and how much money she has in her possession. When she naively admits that she only has eighty-five dollars, and is unsure about how long she might stay in England, her passport and ticket are confiscated. While her luggage is searched for "any documents that may pertain to her stay whilst in the UK," she is asked whether she is "intending to solicit work whilst in the UK." Faced with the possibility of having to go back to Russia immediately, the only solution she finds to gain enough time to locate her fiancé is to "trick the system" by demanding political asylum. Unaware of what this entails, she soon finds herself trapped in a remote resort whose high fences and surveillance cameras prevent escape. When she gives up, admitting to a false claim, she learns that she has to wait for another "three to six months" until her application is processed.

We have long been accustomed to films in which the East is configured as a space where individuals feel trapped, subject to a state of uncertain waiting, or as a space from which they are desperately trying to escape. In *Last Resort*, it is England that is cast in this role. The emphasis does not rest upon the construction of an idealized Western place, strongly desired by outsiders who perceive the West as a magic gateway to happiness. The fact that we do not see London is also politically relevant here, a gesture that Charlotte Brunsdon, in an article on London in film, deems to be in itself "an engagement with stories of national becoming" (2001, 43). A reversal of conventional mechanisms is played out in *Last Resort*, where rather than Westerners trying to escape the East, we see someone from the East desiring to escape the West. The scene in which Tanya and her son go to a local train station hoping to get away from the area where the refugees are kept echoes a similar situation in Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* (United States, 1938), where a number of foreigners are stuck in Bandrika, a fictional country in Eastern Europe. With the same urgency that is displayed by Hitchcock's anxious characters, Tanya asks a station guard where she can buy tickets. "There's no train until further notice, sorry!" says the distracted guard, rather like Boris, the

innkeeper in the mountainous landscape of Bandrika, who tells his customers that "the train is a little bit uphold." Due to an avalanche in the region, Hitchcock's travelers also have to stay put until further notice.

It is evident that *Last Resort* showcases neither the "heritage" version of British national identity nor the "Cool Britannia" of the late 1990s, with its focus on a New British identity fixated on youth, cool, and a metropolitan culture (Monk 2001, 34). The imagined community from *Notting Hill* or *Bridget Jones's Diary,* in which, as Claire Monk emphasizes, "everybody is already a winner—educated, articulate, affluent by birth if not by occupation" (2001, 35), is replaced here with the image of what society has rejected: the elderly and the "fucked up" people such as Alfie. A few scenes in the film focus on elderly British citizens playing bingo, and Alfie points out that this is one of the few things that can still excite them. Just like Spielberg's E.T., who can scour the pages of a book in seconds, rapidly moving his eyes and fingers across the page, they have developed an almost other-worldly hand-eye coordination when reading the numbers on the bingo card. E.T. is also evoked when Artyom reads from a guide book, "Show me the way home, please," and the film seems to suggest that, alongside immigrants, those "socially cleansed" (to use Monk's expression) from British society, are as "Other" to us as aliens.

Last Resort and *Lilya 4-Ever*

Last Resort secured itself a generally positive reception with critics as well as audiences, despite the fact that its portrayal of asylum seekers blatantly betrays one's immediate expectations. After all, the film's protagonist is a bogus refugee, who is given food vouchers, as well as a free apartment to stay in until her application is processed. As such, Tanya is hardly the victim one would expect from a narrative designed to secure certain responses from the audience. From the very beginning, she gets help from a handsome, likeable Englishman, who subsequently falls in love with her. She is not forced, but willingly goes to see Les, the man who offered to hire her as a performer in his cyberporn business. Les proves to be very gentle with her, patient, and respectful. When he is directing her on how to act in front of the camera, he even makes Tanya laugh. By contrast, *Lilya 4-Ever* is a typically earnest and tragic tale of a sexually exploited young girl. Beautiful and vulnerable, she is beaten up by her pimp and coerced into having sexual relationships with much older and repulsive men.

Trapped in an apartment from which there seems to be no escape, she rebels at first by cutting her hair at random and covering herself with excessive makeup to render herself unattractive. When she finally manages to escape, however, she realizes that she is alone, with no documents in a country whose language she cannot speak. Frightened and emotionally distressed, she commits suicide by jumping off a bridge.

The specific alignment of *Last Resort* and *Lilya 4-Ever* has already been made by a number of critics who juxtaposed them in order to reflect on politics of cinematic representation. To a certain extent, the two films stage a similar discrepancy between the young heroines' high expectations of a better life abroad and their betrayed hopes. The trope of imprisonment is pursued to explore Tanya's attempts to escape the "designated holding area" in Stonehaven as well as Lilya's constant desire to leave Russia or to break free from her captivity in the Swedish apartment.

In *Sight and Sound*, Julian Graffy links *Lilya 4-Ever* with *Last Resort,* praising *Lilya 4-Ever* for its "authentic" depiction of Russia's drabness as well as its "suffocating tedium of provincial life." Since *Lilya 4-Ever* was actually filmed in Estonia, one could also "recognize" Pawlikowski's "Stonehaven" as "authentically Russian." But who has the authority to decide what an "authentic" depiction means?[7] Ironically, Margate, the real name of the town where *Last Resort* was filmed, is a famous British resort praised by many artists, the place where T.S. Eliot went to recuperate after mental exhaustion and began writing *The Waste Land*. Given that a significant part of *Lilya 4-Ever* takes place in a Russian "wasteland," where the fallout of state Communism, we are shown, has left everything in a depressing, post-apocalyptic state, the "unbridgeable gap" between East and West is effectively underscored. For viewers who know little about Russia and Eastern Europe, films such as *Lilya 4-Ever* may bear a reassuring message, convincing them that they are just terribly lucky to have been born in the West. The contrast between the affluent West and the bleak East runs the risk of merely perpetuating the abjection of the postcommunist space. Given its reputation in the Western imaginary, this space needs to be probed through cinematic techniques that avoid giving spectators the illusion of authenticity through the usual Manichean opposition.

Peter Bradshaw, writing in *The Guardian,* also compares the two films, but criticizes films such as *Last Resort* for having "softened the blow and sugared the pill with grace notes of compassion and hope." At stake seems to be an issue of representation, of who can "better"

present the audience with "the Other's plight," in this case the experience of two women from post-socialist societies. When Bradshaw suggests that a film such as *Last Resort* "sugars the pill," he seems to imply that it fails to represent Tanya's taken for granted victimization. The all too often implication is, I suspect, that stories about women from Eastern Europe *must* be tragic, as if "by default." When this is not the case, in a "celebration of the Other" mode, they are bound to end with the successful consummation of heterosexual love, in which the heroine from the second world is positioned as the lucky one.[8]

While *Lilya 4-Ever* attempts to put the viewer in Lilya's position, so that, as Moodysson says, one can understand "how it feels to be lying beneath these men with their sweat and smell and big presence" (Noh 2003, 3), *Last Resort* is more cautious about the limits of representation. The emphasis does not fall on what may shock us, or on giving us the impression that we understand "what it must be like" to be a refugee in "fortress Europe." Pawlikowski's film, I contend, gestures more toward the violence implicit in our visualizing strategies, highlighting our complicity as spectators in objectifying the visual field. The director works primarily in an allegorical mode, suggesting rather than showing things. A carefully chosen framing makes us aware of how we see and treat refugees. The image of refugees lined up for inspection by guards with big, howling dogs, has rich connotative powers, recalling representations of the Holocaust in particular. In an interview with Richard Porton, Pawlikowski comments that he does not see his film as one about refugees (2005, 8). Indeed, as a "false documentary" (as Alain Resnais promoted his 1959 film, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*), it resists becoming "just another film" about them, foregrounding certain ethical implications pertaining to the limits of representation. By choosing to portray Tanya's experiences as an asylum seeker in a narrative that does not end in victimization, Pawlikowski eschews appropriating the figure of the other in ways that blur distinctions between different experiences of being displaced from home. In a critique of Giorgio Agamben's fetishization of the refugee, a gesture that risks universalizing the condition of displacement as something we all experience, Imogen Tyler warns that we must be aware of the extent to which the mobilization of the figure of the refugee as "our own," may "offer 'us' resources with which to imagine how 'we,' the already included, might reimagine 'ourselves'" (2006, 198).[9] Moreover, this mobilization is precarious when it serves to point to our "similar" erosion of civil liberties (2006, 198).

Like Michael Haneke's *Code Unknown* (2000) and *Hidden* (2006), *Last Resort* also directs its spectators toward issues of guilt and its

repression. In *Code Unknown* the idea of violence, of what constitutes a traumatic experience for immigrants, is not conveyed through explicit scenes of abuse meant to shock us. The whole narrative unfolds around the apparently minor gesture of a boy who discards a sandwich paper into the hands of the begging Maria, who happens to be sitting on a street corner. For most of us, an incident such as this might appear inconsequential. Potentially, however, for an immigrant such as Maria, this is a traumatic experience, as it might add to her overall feeling of alienation and displacement. In a later scene, she tells a friend how a Frenchman once offered her money, yet was reluctant to touch her. This, in turn, recalled a time when she had done the same thing in trying to help a gypsy woman. Finding herself in the same position was, we learn, deeply humiliating to her. Her dignity wounded, she hid in an attic and cried by herself for the rest of that afternoon. Refraining from positioning Maria solely as victim, Haneke more realistically underscores through this incident how easily one's positionality may shift from subject to abject. Maria experiences her encounter with the Frenchman as his unwillingness, out of fear, disgust, or repulsion, to engage in any bodily contact with her, as if touching the other would contaminate him. As a poor immigrant, irrespective of her skin color, she is coded as dirty and polluted. Yet Maria's story about not wanting to touch the gypsy woman reveals that the abject should not be romanticized, as she herself is not free from prejudice. The hardships endured in France are kept secret by Maria when she is asked by another villager in Romania whether she was able to find a job. Ashamed to admit the truth, she lies, saying that she had managed to get a good job in a school, but had given it up because she missed her family. When he, in turn, informs her that his wife, Mirela, is happily working as a nanny in a doctor's house, one is uncertain whether to believe his story. Later on, we find that a woman named Mirela has just bought, from a woman who left France, the "yellow card" (perhaps an allusion to the yellow star the Jews were once required to wear) she needed in order to work legally.

As with Haneke's benevolent Frenchman, Pawlikowski's "bad guys" are not the usual villains, either. If in *Lilya 4-Ever* spectators are more likely to distance themselves from the action, filled with indignation at the evildoers "out there," in *Last Resort* it is harder to place the blame on somebody else since everyone is generally polite, even the Internet pornographer. Rather than indulging in open didacticism, the film constrains one to realize the illogical aspect of a perfectly rationalized system that quietly follows its routine. The director puts an accent precisely on the normality of its logic, whereby the

"wrongdoers" disavow the negative effects of their actions. In the very act of rummaging through Tanya's suitcase, the airport officer denies what he is doing: "I'm just looking for any documents that might pertain to your stay whilst you are here in the U.K; I'm not interested in what you might have."

Pawlikowski stages a discrepancy between reality and the way it is perceived by the "fortress Europe" ideology. The security guards are not "as frustrated by the system as those to whom it applies," as Amy Sargeant argues in a recent book on British cinema (2005, 349), but rather regard themselves as benefactors. As one immigration officer puts it, "Anyone caught trying to escape from a designated holding area will be returned. If you attempted a second time, there will be no more nice flats, no more vouchers; it would be a prison cell." Immune to the alienation that people suffer for having almost no agency in determining the course of their lives, the prevailing discourse mobilized by the authorities differentiates between prisons and a "designated holding area," as if the two were significantly different. In reality, the system denies the applicants the ability to be meaningfully active without breaking the law: cash benefits are replaced by vouchers that can only be used for food, and when their value is not used up to the value of the purchase, change in cash is forbidden.

Reminiscent of documentaries such as *Safe Haven: The United Nations and the Betrayal of Srebrenica* (dir. Ilan Ziv, 1996), "Stonehaven" is a loaded term that alludes to issues of guilt regarding promised protection. The policy of "safe areas" or "havens" was developed in the early 1990s in an effort to restrict displaced people within the borders of their state of origin. In Bosnia, for instance, several havens established by the United Nations not only became "death zones," but also *held* people wishing to flee to safety. As Philip Marfleet scathingly comments, these "detention centers" were created "in order that they should not become refugees, because a formal claim upon potential host states was undesirable" (2006, 203). A similarly specious logic of safety is also underscored through "Mr. Stonehaven," the pornographer who, in a perfectly polite tone, tries to convince Tanya that cyberprostitution is just "the ultimate safe-sex." While the film captures Tanya's breakdown into tears after posing with a lollipop and teddy bear according to web instructions, the online global audience enjoys "the crying schoolgirl act," demanding to see more of it.[10]

In their analysis of *Code Unknown* and *Last Resort*, Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli argue that these films propose a challenge to the twentieth-century concept of citizenship based on the once prevalent experience of rootedness. In the case of *Last Resort*, they interpret the

first and last scenes showing the two characters traveling in the same direction as conveying the impression of repetition rather than return or homecoming, typifying them as "travelers," since they have no home to go back to. Tanya's decision to return thus "reveals the opposite of what she affirms," "as if she knew that 'home' is a utopia that cannot be achieved in our times" (2006, 148). While the film is open to such an interpretation, I suggest that the circularity of the first and last scene can also be taken as emphasizing the natural fluidity of movement while subverting established perceptions of center and margin. The nation-state is no longer represented as a fixed container whose borders are transgressed from East or South. In this respect, Regina Römhild has pointed out how the logic of the nation-state as unifying a population, a culture, and a territory conceptualizes the world as static. Nation-states, therefore, figure as "territorial containers" into which the immigrants bring their cultures as a sort of luggage. In this view, the world is perceived as compartmentalized into stable arrangements of containers, with sedentary individuals and cultures bound by their own territory. Human and cultural mobility across the borders of the container-states are thus identified as exceptions to the rule, "deemed an irregular, transitory moment that has to come to an end either in terms of return to the original home or in terms of a new settlement in another territory and culture" (Römhild 2005, 5).

Tanya's decision to go back, I suggest, indicates that she has finally had the courage to stop dreaming. She wants to resume her life back in Russia so that she does not repeat the mistake of "marrying the wrong guy." She could stay with Alfie, who could be a caring father, and whom Artyom already loves. The fact that she does not choose to do so is her private decision on what to do with her life. It is rare that a character coming from "the second world" is given this sort of agency and dignity by a filmmaker. In an article about young cinema from Central and Eastern Europe, Christina Stojanova suggests that the main characters embark on serendipitous quests not to learn about the world or themselves but to flee from the responsibility that comes with such knowledge, deliberately avoiding situations where they are forced to make choices. Pawlikowski's film marks a shift in this tendency, and the fact that Tanya is able to make a choice and envision "going back" is important here. More often than not, this is not a luxury typical of filmic representations of women from Eastern Europe. Tanya could have been Ada from Julie Bertuccelli's *Since Otar Left* (2003), who also grew up only with her mother and grandmother. But once in Paris, Ada does not want to return to Georgia,

despite her uncertain future in France and the wonderful relationship she has with the two women. The last image with Ada saying goodbye to them at the airport reinforces the idea that no matter how risky life in the West may be, one is still better off there.

I would like to conclude this essay by invoking a scene from *Last Orders* (dir. Fred Schepisi, United Kingdom, 2001), an adaptation of Graham Swift's novel whose title has, like that of Pawlikowski's film, a double meaning. It is a play on the "last orders" taken by a bartender in the pub and on the last wishes of an old man that his friends scatter his ashes at Margate. When, at the end of the film, the friends finally reach the resort, they see the pier, the sea, the Dreamland amusement arcade. Here, again, is the Margate of Pawlikowski's film: cold and windy, a bleak prospect. "Not good scattering weather," as one character describes it. "Well," replies his friend, "it depends on how you look at it."

Notes

1. The French DVD version of *Last Resort* that I own translates one of the Russian characters' words as "au cul du monde," meaning "the backside of the world." Other English subtitles refer to the same words describing England as "the armpit of the universe."
2. See, e.g., Kofman (2005); Malloch and Stanley (2005); Tyler (2006).
3. See, e.g., Gail Kligman and Stephanie Limoncelli (2005).
4. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam emphasize, films "arrange events and actions in a temporal narrative that moves towards fulfillment, and thus shape thinking about historical time and national history" (1996, 154).
5. For a play on the interrelationship between the words vampire and empire, see Kujundzic (2005).
6. Imogen Tyler notes that the term asylum seeker gained political and popular currency in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s, and was used by the British government "as a way to maneuver around the rights of the refugee as prescribed by international law" (2006, 189). A "refugee" is someone whose official status is recognized under the terms of the Geneva Convention; an "asylum seeker" is seeking asylum on the basis of his or her claim to be a refugee. Asylum seekers are usually not able to work and have to wait while their case is being considered (Bloch 2000, 75).
7. Moodysson once declared that he made *Lilya 4-Ever* as a reaction to Swedish filmmaker Pal Hollender's controversial *Buy Bye Beauty* (2001), a documentary in which he set out to demonstrate that Latvia is a country where most women are prostitutes. However, there is not much difference between Hollender's depiction of Latvian women as prostitutes and Moodysson's portrayal of Lilya as a helpless victim. It is not enough to

substitute a bad representation with an uncomplicated "celebratory" one. In an interview posted on his website, http://www.hollender.se/texts.html#bbbinterview, Hollender comments that in his documentary (sponsored, rather surprisingly, by the Swedish Film institute) he "deliberately played with numbers" to make the claim that "half of all the women in Riga between the age of 13–45 at least once has performed a sexual service in return for money or other benefits."

8. See, e.g., Isabelle Mergault's *Je vous trouve très beau* (*You Are So Beautiful*, France, 2005), about a French balding farmer who "saves" a girl from scrubbing floors in Romania. After his wife dies, he contacts a matrimonial agency and is advised to go to Romania, where, as the DVD cover puts it, "girls are ready to do anything to escape their misery."
9. In his essay "Beyond Human Rights," Agamben argues that since the nation-state is "irrevocably dissolving," in the emerging political condition it is the refugee, not the citizen that constitutes the only political category of being, "the only thinkable figure for the people of our time" (1996, 159). The refugee represents for him a "limit concept" that problematizes the link between nativity, nationality, and citizenship. Imagining "a coming community" premised on the idea of permanent exile, Agamben suggests that we all adopt the status of the refugee in symbolic defiance of the iron hand of the state and its territorial and political claims.
10. Samantha Lay points out that *Last Resort* is the first British realist film to address "the new, privatized world of cyberporn, a social problem for the twenty-first century" (2002, 121).

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Part II

Circulation of Bodies

Chapter 6

Women's Resistance Strategies in a High-Tech Multicultural Europe

Ginette Verstraete

Introduction

Europe today is multicultural but a majority of citizens are unwilling to accept the implications of this reality.[1] A new, transnational imaginary is needed to accommodate the numerous communities that have come to Europe in recent times and for which identity and belonging run along intersecting lines of contact beyond the national borders of Europe. Following centuries of global migration, the "new" Europe consists of a multitude of ethnic groups, religious communities, and national cultures that are constituted by, or identify themselves through, affiliations across national borders. These groups adopt what is known as "hyphenated" identities: Turkish-German, Algerian-French, Indonesian-Dutch. Not only do they identify, or organize themselves, in terms of multiple national belonging, they often also literally cross borders through travel (to family abroad), communication (with friends in the "home country"), or consumption (eating food and wearing clothes not easily available in Europe). To the extent that these movements of people, money, objects, images, and identities are not bound by nation-states we can call them "transnational."

Yet, how is this different from the "transnational"—mostly political and economic—cooperation between the twenty-seven nation-states through which the European Union (EU) characterizes itself? Surely, the official rhetoric of the EU, emphasizing cross-border unity within Europe through commercial and political exchange, cannot simply be equated with the, often less privileged, "transnationalism" at work in the field of migration? "Transnationalism" means indeed different things.

This essay argues for the need to put contextual differences center stage. We must consider, for example, differences of location: linkages

between people living in first- and in third-world nations are different from linkages between people living in Western Europe only. There are differences in the kinds of movement involved as well: are we talking of transnational tourism, or migration, or of the circulation of messages rather than people? Transnationalism also differs with every level of social existence it affects: it would be a great mistake to simply equate the cross-border operations of Pakistani fruit pickers coming to Britain annually, with the way fundamentalist networks between Pakistan and Britain were financed during the Salman Rushdie case, or with the flight of Muslim women to Britain from Kashmir. Differences not only of manner, time, and place, but also of class, religion, ethnicity, and indeed gender and sexuality, structure what we call "transnationalism."

The first studies to incorporate women into the analysis of transnationalism were written in the 1980s and 1990s by Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Mohanty, Cynthia Enloe, Caren Kaplan, Inderpal Grewal, Nira Yuval-Davis, and others. A transnational feminist approach to Europe pays attention to the gendered and sexual differences and inequalities at work within the many social, economic, financial, technological asymmetrical connections linking the European nations to places abroad. One way into such an approach could be the study of women's practices of migration into Europe over the years—with such variables as countries of origin and destination, groups of people involved, degrees of legality of the journey, manner of movement, reception in the new home countries, and links with various parts of the global economy. Added to these time- and place-based social practices of migration to Europe is the crucial question of how migration is conceptualized, represented, and informed about. The way women decide to move, with whom, where they go, and how they are received depends on the information available to or about them, on the language used, and on the concepts and images with which the women migrants themselves give meaning to their experiences. In other words, gendered migration is mediated not only by larger economic, political, and social infrastructures, often on a European or global scale, but also by circuits of meanings, images, and representations. Much of the circulation of verbal and visual discourse happens through the information and communication technologies operating transnationally, in some respects in close conjunction with the flows of migrants, and in other respects at an awkward distance from them.

Indeed, the last three decades have seen the emergence of faster and more widespread means of telecommunication operating on a global scale. As important tools in facilitating the circulation of goods,

people, and capital, information technologies are crucial objects of study in any discussion of transnationalism. We are living at a time when images, messages, producers, and viewers circulate in ways that are no longer bound to a nation or specific place, and that redefine our notion of belonging. Information technologies often provide migrants with new resources for the plotting of movement and for entering a place. However, transnational digital connections are also used against migrants. This occurs, for instance, when border police in Europe use the Schengen information databases and other surveillance systems to combat unwanted migration (Verstraete 2001). Used by media conglomerates, police officers, migrants, smugglers, activists, and intellectuals in various places, the technologies of communication and information create transnational linkages as much as they produce hierarchies, exclusions, and resistance. Rather than simply serving as universally available instruments of global flows, they enable the reinforcement of a Fortified Europe for some, and present a challenge to Europe's assumptions of territoriality for others. In this essay I analyze some of these developments from a transnational feminist perspective. I pay particular attention to the asymmetrical linkages at work within transnational Europe between the circuits of global capital, the movements of women migrants, and the flows of representation, information, and communication. In the case of communication flows, I address both the content (the words and images used) and the social, artistic, and intellectual contexts of production and reception.

Women on the Move

Several books have recently been published on the "new" migrants who, since 1989, have entered the "new"—highly restrictive—Europe, often as clandestine labor migrants, or, increasingly, as asylum seekers fleeing from hunger or war (Kofman et al. 2000, Koser and Lutz 1998). Many of these recent migrants come from a variety of places within the former Soviet Union, ex-Yugoslavia, but also from Africa and the Middle East. New destination countries have also emerged. Former emigrant countries along the Mediterranean Sea—Spain, Italy, Greece—have themselves turned into permanent destinations or, more often, into transit zones for these migrants, which makes the line between old and new migration very thin indeed.

An increasing number of today's migrants are women, who have left behind their families, including their children, in response to

shifts in labor demands throughout the EU. Instead of the male-dominated, industrial labor of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, there is now a shortage of workers in the, often informal, service sector, a field dominated by immigrant women: nursing, teaching, and cleaning. With the increasing participation of European women in their national economies, households with two working partners have had to reorganize their supply of unpaid work in the house, and it is here, according to Jordan and Düvell, that migrant women without a legal status, have begun to play a major role. Research on the situation in Britain shows that in 1999 almost 15,000 non-European domestic employees entered the country legally; an equal number of irregular migrant women arrived on the domestic scene as well:

> Migrant domestic labor is a clear example of how the categories of chosen and forced migration, economic migration and asylum seeking, legal and irregular migration, are extremely difficult to distinguish. Some workers are educated, young and adventurous women, who use the immigration status of *au pair* to gain the advantages of mobility. Others are lone parents, desperate for employment to feed their children and kin back home. Some use the same immigration status to flee political instability; others come as indentured (often virtually slave) labor to wealthy mobile families, including diplomats. (Jordan and Düvell 2002, 68)

Several of these undocumented women migrants also end up in unregulated labor sectors, such as restaurants, coffee shops, hair salons, as well as small textile factories run by migrant networks based on kinship or other, informal ties. This blurring of legality and illegality, migrant entrepreneurs and laborers, formal and informal economies, is an inherent part of a transnational economy characterized by the unlimited mobility of capital, the flexibility of markets, and the constant shifts in demand (Jordan and Düvell 2002, 62–63). Under such uncertain conditions, undocumented, unregulated, and hence flexible, migrant labor becomes attractive and the shadow economy flourishes accordingly. While many irregular migrants thus end up without a fair income and deprived of social rights, others do find support from friends and relatives and manage to move from the status of worker to that of entrepreneur. According to Kofman, the presence of migrant women in the upper echelons of professional life today is higher in those countries with ex-colonial populations, where many women from the ex-colonies have been able to profit from a more relaxed migration regime. She concludes that in London, the Irish-born, Black African and South-East Asian women have a higher proportion

of participation in management than women from other countries (Kofman 2000, 136).

Since it is difficult to regulate the undocumented flows of labor and capital, and because of an increasing shortage in some of the skilled and unskilled labor sectors in Europe, the European Council decided to open up more channels for legal migration from outside the EU at the Tampere Summit in 1999. Simultaneously, however, this selective relaxation was accompanied by the decision to invest more in collective controls over the other, unwanted migratory flows. As Boswell claims, "Indeed, new migration policies have partly been justified by promises to strengthen controls on asylum-seekers and illegal immigrants, especially in the UK" (Boswell 2003, 53).

Resistance Strategies at the Borders

What is equally important—and this is the major focus of this essay—is that this erection of a Fortress Europe mentality directed against the criminalized, transnational "other," has gone hand in hand with, or has even enabled, institutionalized resistance strategies on the part of the old and new migrants. Far from being passive victims, migrants in Europe often have the capacity to mobilize resources and create larger spaces of control. As I have mentioned earlier, the informal economy in which they often work is to a large extent run by networks of relatives and friends who protect them. A good example of a more official social and political network is the Migrants' Forum, which was established in 1986 (dissolved in 2001) to represent on a European level those migrant groups that were already recognized by the host country as well as the country of origin, and which repeatedly campaigned for the right of free movement within Europe for third country nationals (Kofman et al. 2000, 188). Since most of the cross-border political affiliations of migrants in Europe are run by men—labor unions in particular tend to marginalize women—women migrants have begun to organize themselves on a European level as well. Hence we find such lobbying groups as Young Women from Minorities funded by The Council of Europe, *La voix des femmes* in Brussels, and the more mainstream European Women's Lobby. Outside the EU structures one can think of Turkish Women Migrants of Europe, and *Babaylan*—The Network of Philippine Women in Europe (Kofman et al. 2000, 189).

Some additional responses by women migrants to Europe's restrictive immigration policies and other social exclusions are strategies

such as joining up with international or local humanitarian organizations; marriage with national citizens; systematically tampering with identification documents to meet national or EU norms; and the use of trafficking and smuggling industries that function both within and beyond Europe.[2]

While we should make a distinction between smuggling (with the migrant's consent) and sex trafficking (without this consent), the line between voluntary migration and forced trafficking often proves to be very thin indeed. Increasingly, match-making agencies and sex traffickers have become important intermediaries selling entrance into Europe to women who flee from economic poverty, unemployment, war, and sexual violence. According to a report on Azerbaijan by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), "[T]he services offered varied in detail, some simply offered to find a husband through the internet, whereas others offered arranged marriages with citizens of particular countries" (IOM 2001, 21). The weakest groups often fall prey to traffickers in sex slaves.[3] Despite the alarming increase in the forced sex trafficking of women and children in Europe today—Amnesty International (AI) talks of 500,000 women having entered Europe this way in the last years—and despite the violation of human rights involved, it would be a mistake to generalize about the transnational sex industry only in this way. Not all women entering Europe "illegally" through sex end up in horrendous circumstances; not all migrant prostitutes are victims. The connections between voluntary migration, prostitution, and sex trafficking prove to be much more complicated. For instance, quite a number of women already working in the commercial sex industry in the country of origin decide to go abroad because they can earn more within this transnational gendered, highly racialized, and class-based industry. That is how the global economy works: through asymmetries of sex, gender, class, and ethnicity like these. The commercial sex industry often saves these women from forced marriages while enabling them to accumulate a certain capital back home (Watenabe 1998). Depicting these women only as victims of enslavement who are in need of rescue from horrible exploiters in the country of origin, as most of the official reports do,[4] stigmatizes women migrants in the sex industry, while perpetuating the strategies of social control, and of sexual and racial exclusion, to which these women are submitted:

> [T]he whore stigma is an easy tool of state repression and control, such as control over migrants, since flagrant sexism is more acceptable than racism and xenophobia.... Some migrant women traveling from poor

> to rich countries may be automatically accused of prostitution regardless of their activities as an excuse for expulsion or as a control of the means of entry and sustenance of those women and their associates. (Marchand et al. 1998, 980)

As Marchand, Reid, and Berents put it, portraying migrant women as enslaved prostitutes trafficked against their will may function as a sexist tool for refusing immigrant women entry into Europe. The nation-states that exclude them are often the same countries whose military personnel abroad are among the first customers of these transnational operations. This stereotype of migrant women as sexual victims also works to protect the "native" sex industry within Europe. Still, according to these authors, the repeated distinction between migrant women falling victim to their pimps in the brothels of Amsterdam and the emancipated, independent Dutch prostitutes free (read: rich enough) to come and go as they please, shows that the discourse on sex trafficking is embedded in nationalist, racist, and class-based asymmetries. These hierarchies exist not only among official institutions such as AI, but also among women's rights activists.

If one of the keys to understanding migration, as well as smuggling and trafficking, is the extremely complex link between being a forced victim of transnational structures and being a free agent within them, then one way into attaining insight into this link is to pay attention to the recurring power-related *differences* at work within these movements: differences of context, differences of social categories, differences among women. A simultaneous focus on the *intersections* between these kinds of (forced?) movement and other (more privileged) organized forms of mobility—tourism, labor movements, financial transactions—is needed. The circuits of information are also important in this respect. Widely circulating images, information, and discourses on smuggling and sex trafficking are crucial sites upon which the asymmetries of the transnational order are reinscribed. Talking about Thai sex workers in Japan, Watenabe states: "The extent and quality of information a woman had access to before migration seemed to have determined the manner in which she migrated and found work in Japan, and therefore, the degree to which she would be exploited in both Thailand and Japan" (Watenabe 1998, 118). Similarly, the quality of information on women migrants in Europe plays a crucial role in how they are received, detained, and sent back. Viewing sex workers mostly as victims, as the widely available European reports tend to do, may legitimate and even reinforce restrictive immigration controls at the border. It follows that resistance strategies on the part of smugglers

and migrants will often take place within this domain. Tactics designed to circumvent Fortress Europe and its simplified oppositions between insiders and outsiders, legality and illegality, agents and victims, make use of the same channels of communication and information. In the next sections I first demonstrate how migrant networks appropriate the production and reception of information for the purpose of entering Europe informally; then I look at what happens to the information about sex workers, and to the words and images used once women artists get behind the camera.

Information Is Power

The organization of smuggling and trafficking is normally in the hands of hierarchical networks operating on various levels and in different places in and out of Europe. Their structure involves a small number of bosses at the international top and the organizers scattered below them employing male and female advertisers, collectors of money and people, interpreters, transporters, local guides, and in the case of the sex industry, sex-club owners (often women) and pimps in several places. Thus, besides the physical transportation of people, the trafficking involves stages of planning, financial transaction, information gathering, and the implementation of various technical operations along the way. For instance, when borders or gateways into particular countries are temporarily blocked, this information needs to be communicated so that migrants can be rerouted through some other transit country (IOM 2000, 50).

European governments have responded to the "criminal" activities of smugglers and traffickers by stepping up border control, security measures, criminal investigation, and prosecution. For instance, "[l] argely in response to the growth of smuggling in 1997 and 1998, Germany reorganized its border police to combat smugglers better, equipped police with night vision scopes, and lined its borders with motion and infrared detectors" (Kyle and Koslowski 2001, 8). In Italy, heavily reliant on economically beneficial irregular labor, the situation has been more complex, since the harsh measures on illegal entry enforced in 1990 have gone hand in hand with a "relatively lax approach to addressing irregular employment, which is almost certainly a central factor attracting illegal migrants to Italy" (Boswell 2003, 63).

There is little evidence that restrictive measures either stop smugglers, or, more urgently, relieve the plight of those people who fall into

a lifelong debt, often as prostitutes, once they reach Europe. Instead of offering these women and children protection, European governments view them as security threats, or as symptoms of a soft immigration and asylum policy. Hence, the women are often deported, falling back into the hands of their traffickers. And firmer borders are erected.

But as states deploy expensive high technology at their borders, smugglers and migrants use the same technologies to outwit them. As Koslowski claims:

> While states deploy video cameras along their borders, smugglers monitor border patrol radio frequencies, use cell phones and encrypted email to relay information to colleagues on rerouting migrants to avoid crossing points with built-up defenses. While states insert holograms and other security features into travel documents, smugglers, and the counterfeiters that they subcontract, use the same technologies to produce ever better fakes. (Koslowski 2002, 8)

Transnational smuggling organizations often use cheap and simple services to enter Europe: no more than an international telephone call, or a fax is needed to arrange shipments, switch routes, confirm deliveries, much as any legitimate import/export firm would.[5]

Migrants and smugglers gather and process information about the weak links in transportation systems, border controls, liberal visa and asylum policies, which they then provide to their friends and customers. According to the IOM report on Azerbaijan, the main sources of information about life abroad, and about the (illegal) channels that will facilitate access to it, are phone calls to friends and relatives. While for the younger male and female Azeris email communication and Internet provide crucial information, for the older generations phone services, television, and newspapers are important, along with the ads and brochures brought out by the private migration agencies themselves. Low-cost international telephone-, fax- and Internet communication have enabled emigrants to stay in touch with their families and friends in their homelands, thereby contributing to the development of transnational social networks that facilitate migration.

What becomes clear from this is that there is a close connection between high-tech security and information networks, and criminalized migration and asylum, to such an extent that it is extremely naive to presume that international migrants or smugglers alone are confronting Europe with its limits. It is crucial to understand that the organization of irregular migration, including sex trafficking, is an

inherent part of a transnational Europe that wants to be connected economically and technologically but not yet socially, and that stimulates cross-border mobility in some areas but makes it illegal in others. In order to do justice to these complexities, we need to study the transnational flows of capital, information, and migration in close connection with each other even while taking into account the power-related differences generated in these conjunctions.

Artistic Counter-Territories

Several globally operating artists have used the ethnographic techniques of observing everyday life in various locations to explore the complexities of transnationalism today. These artists make "art" out of the daily gathering of information, the creation of connections, the techniques of surveillance, and the plotting of movement. Aided by the proliferation of technologies of travel, communication, and surveillance, they have begun to reorganize their work space across geographical and disciplinary borders. They have at times also invented new ways of collaborating with social activists and migrant groups. Their work problematizes the distinctions between reality and art, real and virtual space, and between flows of migrants, capital, and information. At the center of this work we find unsettling intersections between physical motions, virtual mediations, and transnational belongings.

Ursula Biemann is a Swiss curator and documentary maker whose video work has concentrated on issues of migration, gender, sexuality, and the new media in the context of globalization. In *Remote Sensing* (2001), in particular, Biemann experiments with the very technologies of representation that feed the traditional imageries of women as victims of trafficking networks, profiteers of the Western welfare system, or as seductive erotic objects available for the male sex tourist. At the same time that the video maker problematizes these simplified categories and launches new forms for visually representing the place of migrant women in the global economy, she contextualizes gendered migration within a technological geography of transportation, trafficking, communication, tracking, recording, scanning, and so on. Indeed, as I have suggested, the public images and discourses that depict migrants as in need of protection, or as unwanted and dangerous, are intricately linked to the technologies developed to enhance control over migration, tourism, and border crossing. In this way, the visualizing technologies do much more than simply represent migrants; they also

produce certain movements and forms of containment in the act of picturing them. Thus visualization becomes a way of tracing, even organizing, travel, migration, and the traffic of women.

Distancing herself from these remote visions of captivity and control, Biemann wants to infuse her digital images with the uncertainties, contradictions, and negotiations of the lived realities of migration. What interests her are the grey zones between enforcement and liberation, containment and freedom of movement, which many migrant women inhabit. Were they forced to leave their homes, or was it their own choice within a context of poverty and violence? Are the sex workers from the former Soviet Union being exploited in Western Europe, or do they deliver important remittances for the national economy of the home country? Do the digital instruments hinder the movements of migrant women into Western Europe, or do they also deliver the opportunities for traveling to the West: tracking and remote sensing technologies, for instance, are often used by migrant women to find out where they are, and how to reach their destination. Following the migration of Eastern European sex workers to Germany and Switzerland, and of Philippina prostitutes to Thailand, or Burmese women to Singapore, the video combines images of highly abstract digital information about travel routes, departure times, the density of traffic, the time of sunset, and so on, with close-ups of the daily lives of anonymous sex workers as they move around in bars and streets, pick up tourists and military officers, are shipped to offshore markets, and carve out a living abroad while trying to stay in touch with their families at home.

Setting global visual culture as the arena from which to reconceive sex-related tourism and migration in a world of high-tech movement and "scientific" border control, Biemann's video essay does more than just mirror, or reflect on, current social and geographical developments. In fact, *Remote Sensing* highlights the digital image as a means of producing knowledge about people and their movements through space on the one hand, and offers the artistic image as a new way of looking at and interpreting the visual data on the other. By means of split screens, multi-perspective composition, the layering of images, the conjunction of different times and places, and the fusion of long-distance satellite perspectives with interviews that present the subjects in close-up, Biemann's video images produce new knowledges that run counter to the cultural and political laws of the state. These are laws that posit privileged inclusions over and against criminalized exclusions, and essentialize collectivities and identities both inside and outside the nation. Biemann shows us the complex counter-geographies of movement that emerge once we combine the privilege of distant

mapping with the intimate expertise of NGOs and the artist's view of so-called criminal, or, alternatively, victimized, migrants and sex workers from Eastern Europe and South-Asia, who often act more like global tourists than threatening criminals.

Relating high-tech navigation to the ambiguities of migration may be an effective way to expand, and disturb, the binary space in which we usually picture gendered migration. It is also a good way to begin to "read" differently the complexities of belonging in present-day Europe. *Remote Sensing* is a wonderful aesthetic exploration of the new visual geographies generated by the surprising connections between physical migration and digital telecommunication and surveillance, but let me formulate two minor points of criticism here nevertheless. Despite its intentions, Biemann's video essay shows little of the local specificity of the various migrant lives captured by the camera; and it thus affirms, rather than questions, the hierarchies of power that exist between women involved in the production of images and stories (the Swiss artist), the women experts (mostly spokespersons for NGOs), and those many anonymous figures shot by the artist while being framed, translated, and narrated, mainly as sex workers, although many of the women we see may not have been engaged in work of this kind. The transnational feminist approach that I have elaborated here invites us to pay more attention to the crucial differences between women posing as subjects and those presented as objects, as well as to the continuity of power that exists between feminist producers and consumers on the one hand and the very flows of capital and information that we criticize on the other.

Biemann's *Contained Mobility* (2004), by contrast, pictures the particular situation of one person in more detail. The video engages with the same issues of migration, navigation, globalization, but now the scene is set by the Belarussian refugee Anatol K. Zimmerman who lives in a shipping container. Set up as a double-screen projection, this video installation tells the life story of Anatol, born to a Belorussian mother and a German-Russian father in a labor camp in the Gulag in 1949, and released with his mother in 1951 after the death of his father in the camp. He then lives in Belorussia, where he experiences discrimination against Russians from German descent. After finishing his Ph.D. in biology and ecology in Minsk in 1980 he leaves for the Ukraine, but finally returns to Minsk, where he is harassed by the KGB for his anticommunist activities. Since the mid-1990s, his life has taken on the form of a prolonged state of legal suspension as he moves around Europe in search of legal residence: from Poland, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia he moves into Italy,

France, Germany, Spain, England, on foot, by truck, or swimming across rivers, alternatively sleeping in bushes, or kept like a prisoner in closed transit centers. While each country differs in its reception—in Austria he is sent to prison while in Spain he is offered neither food nor shelter—his application for asylum is rejected everywhere and he is forced to move on. As the artist's voice-over tells us: in this permanent condition of not-belonging, Anatol has come to signify the itinerant body in a Europe without collective asylum procedures, a Europe also that often only pays lip service to the Geneva Convention on Human Rights. As we read the script of his life story in a little window on the bottom right of the screen—sixty years of movement and detainment are condensed into a series of dates, places, and failed requests for asylum in a frame-within-a-frame—we see Anatol move around in slow motion within the confined space of the container. While at times we see him plotting his journeys by consulting maps on the wall, writing at a desk, or making a phone call, most of the time he nervously moves back and forth, steps in and out of view, puts on a jacket to go out or briefly lies down on the bed (see figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1 "Anatol at his desk," video still from *Contained Mobility* (2004) by Ursula Biemann

Anatol never addresses the viewer with words. It seems that in this space of multiple framing he is not entitled to speak up or to settle down. His movements in front of the camera are, like his journeys through Europe, silenced, repetitive, and contained. Conversely, his presence in the container keeps him in a permanent state of motion. When he steps out of view and momentarily transgresses the space of the frame, his freedom "out there" is being scanned by the global surveillance technologies at work on the left-hand screen.

On the left screen, indeed, we see satellite- and radar images of the larger context in which Anatol's experience of motion-in-containment is taking place: the sea, harbors, ships, trailers, containers, and pipe lines (see figure 6.2). Here the complexity of Anatol's trans-local existence is at once enlarged to a global scale and reduced to colored and black-and-white pictures of cubes, circles, and dotted lines in a surveillance center.

In the background we hear repetitive machine-like electronic music, emphasizing the process in which the illegal human body is being technologized, automated, and thus apparently "solved." The advertisement

Figure 6.2 "Tracking the harbor," video still from *Contained Mobility* (2004) by Ursula Biemann

for Biemann's DVD describes this high-tech disciplining of maritime mobility as follows:

> Schengen politics, exasperated by 9/11, has triggered a wave of new technologies in the navigation information systems and vessel and container traffic surveillance. But we see sophisticated methods and technologies develop on either side: on the part of the authorities to discipline the movement of goods and people, and on the part of the passengers to outwit the restrictions and achieve mobility and security.

Biemann's video stages the productive tension between Europe's politics of disciplined mobility and Anatol's ongoing attempt to outwit them by occasionally switching the views on the right- and left-hand screens, and thus by fusing a personal history of crossing Europe illegally with the anonymous technologies meant to prohibit this. A similar effect is produced by disrupting the systematicity of surveying the harbor with personal computerized images of the same satellite pictures, possibly used by Anatol to plan his way out of the harbor. This tension between authorized and unauthorized movement keeps him in a state of exception, at once infinitely mobile and contained. At the same time, the video's tactics of displacement—if we could call it that—results in a certain "unframing" of Europe's surveillance technologies, which now inadvertently begin to chart what they project as external to their global reach: the evicted body of the non-European Other. Witness, for instance, the control towers in the harbor at one point marking the presence of an incoming vessel as "Vagabond." Is this legal or not?

Thus both inside and outside of the parameters of Europe's politics of representation, Anatol's itinerant-imprisoned body becomes a disturbing witness to what the satellite view characteristically overlooks: that there are many links between secured mobility on the one hand and its illegal transgressions on the other. High-tech borders in Europe are seen here to produce what they were supposed to prevent: illegality. The logic of containment underlying the Fortress Europe mentality produces multiple states of exception at the heart of this so-called space of free movement.

It is to the credit of the artist that she puts the figure of the clandestine refugee center stage in Europe's high-tech security zones. Yet, by not giving her protagonist a voice, keeping him in indefinite detention in front of the camera, and abstracting his specific situation to a point where he becomes the prototypical European refugee, does Biemann

not also inscribe a gendered, national, and class-based asymmetry between a technologically articulate, female, European film producer and a mute, male, non-European immigrant body? How could we begin to give Anatol the status of the highly educated transnational subject-citizen that he is? The answer is far from straightforward, but I believe it starts with coupling Biemann's critique of representation to questions about access to information and to technologies of image making and story telling. If given the chance at all, Anatol would probably not present his plight as a state of suspension typical of Europe, but as something much more contingent and complex, something painfully lived at the margins of so many transnational connections and at the interstices of so many exclusions within humanitarian, political, and artistic discourses not really his own.

This analysis shows once more the importance of studying transnational migration in conjunction with global capitalism and information technologies. The movements of migrants are mediated not only by flows of capital and labor, but also by flows of images and information. This means, among other things, that the study of gendered migration to Europe should take the role of media more seriously. Conversely, feminist scholars of media should address not only the content pervading those media both "here" and "there," in this case the images and ideas about migrant women. Crucial to any feminist discussion of transnational media is the relationship between access to information (technologies) and the (im)possibilities of migration. In short, to return to the issue of Europe, a transnational feminist critique of Europe should not limit itself to the discussion of representation, but should urgently examine our own implication in the capitalist powers of production, distribution, and access, as these powers produce transnational movements and their criminalization.

Notes

1. I thank the editors of this volume for their many fine suggestions.
2. Despite the wide media attention, there is not much official, let alone academic, literature on smuggling and trafficking into Europe due to the aspects of secrecy, criminality, danger, and vulnerability (of the victims) associated with them. While, according to a study by the IOM on *Migrant Trafficking*, "smuggling" is mostly conceived of as a migration issue (voluntary but irregular migration) and "trafficking" as a human rights issue (involving coercion and exploitation), the two activities are sometimes hard to distinguish: someone can choose to voluntarily migrate with the

help of smuggling networks and then end up being deported and exploited against his/her will. In this study I use them as closely intertwined.

3. "Ostracized minorities, women without employment or future economic prospects, and girls without family members to look out for them or who have fallen outside of the educational system. These girls and women are lured by traffickers into leaving their nannies, and instead find themselves forced to have sex for the profit of the men and women who purchased them" (Haynes 2004, 226).
4. See the widely circulating reports available on the web by Amnesty International (http://www.amnestyusa.org/women/trafficking/question_answer.html), the United Nations (http://www.un.org/womenwatch), WomenAid International (http://www.womenaid.org/ukat/press/protocol2en.htm), the European Union (http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/news/8mars_en.htm), the Soros Foundation (http://www.soros.org/initiatives/health/focus/sharp/links/sex_work), and Human Rights Watch (http://hrw.org/doc/?t=women_trafficking).
5. "Law enforcement tools such as wiretaps that determine the location of callers can be foiled by something as simple as a calling card, which can be purchased at a local convenience store, or more sophisticated 'disposable' cell phones that use calling cards or 'clone' cell phones. Smuggling fees that have gone as high as $65,000 (Fujian, China to New York City) have been a boon to financing the research and development of high quality fraudulent documents" (Koslowski 2002, 8).

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Chapter 7

Videographies of Navigating Geobodies

Ursula Biemann

My ongoing investigation into the role of gender and migration in the logic of global capitalism has prompted me to visit several sites that are pertinent to the project: border areas, free-trade zones, entertainment cities catering to military camps, and resorts for sex tourists. These places tell us the repetitive, standardized stories of how capitalism addresses women and their labor, but they also narrate the fresh, inventive, personal worlds that women develop within and around them. In this text, I focus on the movement of women who construct a particular kind of transnational space. Referring specifically to three of my videos, I discuss the different aesthetic strategies I have adopted in order to produce a gendered sense of borders, and map the condition of the emerging transnational subject.

Since the overwhelming majority of gender-related art and video production has placed the body and identity center stage, I must clarify from the outset that in recent years my primary focus has been on gendered systems of world migration and the movement of large numbers of women across the globe. My art and curatorial work investigates global structural concerns, not those of subjectivity formation. Although we already see the existence of a significant body of academic literature on women and space, geography, migration, and globalization, this theoretical shift from identity to geography has not been counterbalanced by a significant shift in the domain of aesthetic production. We are in fact in the process of opening up a field of investigation in which a great deal of visual experimentation has yet to occur.

The video essays I discuss here describe three distinct types of gendered relational space produced by globalization: a topography of the global sex trade (*Remote Sensing*, 2001); a border zone between the European Union (EU) and North Africa (*Europlex*, 2003); and a transnational geography in which the flow of crude oil is related to the flow of irregular migrants (*Black Sea Files*, 2005). In their own

way, these projects invest in specific forms of the domestication and mobilization of space and resources, and are informed by the awareness that mobility itself is one of the most powerful resources available today. Each of them represents a distinct structural configuration, calling for an equally distinct aesthetic strategy of analysis. The writing of the political matrix of a transnational corridor clearly requires a different mode of visualization and intervention than the multidirectional network of the global trafficking of women or the economic circuits circumscribing a border checkpoint.

Although this publication will appear in a context that is essentially academic, I should explain that my essay work and video making are not academic. Nor, in fact, are my research methods. When embarking on my first video, I chose the essay form because it seemed particularly suited to the exploration of issues related to transnationalism. Like transnationalism, the video essay practices dislocation; it moves across national boundaries and continents, and ties together disparate places with a distinctive logic. In the essay, a voice-over narration links the different pieces in a string of reflections that follow a subjective logic. The narration in my video essays—the authorial voice—is clearly situated, in that it acknowledges a very personal view. This distinguishes it from a documentary or scientific voice. Though the narration is situated in terms of identification (as it is articulated by a white female cultural producer), it is not located in a geographic sense. It is the translocal voice of a mobile, traveling subject that does not belong to the place it describes but knows enough about it to unravel its layers of meaning.

The simple accumulation of information and facts for its own sake is of little interest to my projects. My video essays are not committed to a belief in the representability of truth. Rather, my intention is to engage in a reflection about the world and the social order. This is accomplished by arranging the material into a particular field of connections. In other words, the video essay is concerned, not with documenting realities, but with organizing complexities. It is this very quality that makes it a suitable vehicle for my exploration of topics such as globalization, borders, and migration. In this reflection, multiple considerations involving economics, identity, spatiality, technology, and politics converge and are placed in a complicated relationship to each another. The attempt to draw these layers together leads inevitably to the creation of an imaginary space, a sort of theoretical platform on which different elements can be placed in dialogue with each other. Video essayists create this kind of space in their work, a space we could describe as an imaginary topography. Here, all kinds of

thoughts and events occurring in various sites and non-sites undergo a spatial ordering. In my videos, I need this theoretical interface to articulate gender, subject, mobility, and space. I also need to develop a visual language that can speak of the hypermobile, capitalized, gendered bodies that constitute transnational spaces. Geographic bodies. Bodies with a travel schedule. Bodies that grind their routes into the land. In its very structure, the video essay is a geographic project.

It is hardly surprising then that the actual work of constructing the video essay consists mainly in the complex process of montage. In practical terms it means that for each month of research and recording in the field, I spend eighteen months at the editing unit. This procedure explains why my research does not set out with a clearly defined thesis and a line of argumentation; it is, in fact, an open process that produces knowledge about transnational geographies. In my view, these geographies are so intricate that they can only be grasped creatively by writing them, by emphasizing the aesthetic dimension of representation. In addition, some of the relations addressed by my work are, quite literally, more visible than others. In fact, many globalizing processes are increasingly abstract and unrepresentable; either they cannot be captured by documentary practices alone, or they occur in the digital, visual realm of representation in the first place. My fieldwork takes place, then, not only in a material landscape, but also in a mediated one—in the electronically generated terrain of media representations, web markets, and satellite imagery. In my videos, not even the material landscape is presented simply as the backdrop for a plot; it is understood instead as an iconographic index of the mind, a cultural product in which ideas and ideologies are manifest, and it has its own symbolic presence.

I now turn more specifically to the three videos, *Remote Sensing* (2001), *Europlex* (2003), and *Black Sea Files* (2005), indicating the distinctive aesthetic approach I developed for each of them.

Reorganizing Women on a Global Scale: *Remote Sensing*

Remote Sensing (2001) is a theoretical video essay on a particular kind of gender-specific mobility that blossomed in the post-socialist era. The video traces the navigation of female bodies through the more or less visible, more or less illegal, more or less digital terrain of the global sex trade. It is somewhat invisible because in many places prostitution is illegal, trafficking is a criminal operation, and the

women who are drawn into it are captive or clandestine. For my research I traveled to some of the hot spots of the global sex industry that grew up around the former U.S. Marine bases in the Philippines, the Mekong region, and along the border of the Czech Republic. Coming back with all this diverse material, I realized that editing the project would be a lot more complicated than the work I had done for a previous piece about a particular site on the U.S.-Mexican border.[1]

Trafficking—and the global sex trade at large—is a worldwide phenomenon occurring in multiple places at the same time. Women are moving, or are being moved, in multiple directions according to specific patterns. The aim of my exploration, which always involves videographic activity, had to be twofold: first, a focus on the sites where the trading took place, and, second, on movements, trails, and routes, and on the itinerant bodies themselves. The issue of aesthetic production presented considerable challenges. I had to look into ways that would make this particular web of worldwide migration visible, in spite of the fact that I could not go everywhere. For this reason, some of the places I visualize in the video are in fact imaginary ones.

What became increasingly clear to me is that the notion of space is changing, not only due to the constant motion of people and things, but also thanks to the images we are able to generate technologically about geographic space. This prompted my interest in the electronically generated terrains of satellite-mediated landscapes, which are themselves the product of a technology of visualization that has been developed to represent the globe and, by extension, what we have come to think of as "globality." Satellite images no longer present the map of a static moment in time, but a dynamic geography of moving and changing surfaces, over which a steady flow of people, signals, and data can be recorded. Satellite images represent a traversable space. I wanted to examine the economic and sexual nature of this global technological geography trailed by women. While many women enter the sex industry through recruiting agents, others get in motion by taking the initiative of posting their picture on the web in view of activating the interest of someone far away. With this, they demonstrate an active and highly directed use of digital space, while understanding its limitations and channeling their desire for mobility along profitable routes. Indeed, since network navigation transcends the political understanding of boundaries, traveling can take many forms. What starts as a virtual involvement can quickly lead to the purchase of a long-distance train or plane ticket, or the clandestine delivery of the outrageous price for an illegal border crossing. This is the mind-boggling shift in scale that reaches from the most intimate space of

romantic writing to the global scale of migration routed along serialized transnational paths.

Remote Sensing is an attempt to visualize the meaning of a geography where the sexualization of women in global capitalism is linked, often in contradictory ways, to the implementation of new technologies. While the Internet facilitates the migration flow, particularly for women pursuing the marriage market, border reinforcement technologies hinder and push it into the illegal sector. The politics of European visa granting is explicit in its practice of channeling migrant women directly into the sex industry, without allowing them any option to switch to another trade in the future.[2]

Moving female bodies have increasingly become vehicles for economic growth in their home country. This little detail is too often forgotten in discussions about migration for marriage and sex work. Entire national economies depend on the remittances of female domestic and sex workers abroad. The flow of capital in one direction is intrinsically linked to the motion of people in the other. What needs to come into focus in the imaging of migration, and particularly female migration, is the convergence of transnational financial operations with the reverse movement of bodies. Ultimately, the association of migrant women with high-end images of technology and mobility renders the significance of their trajectories more adequately than time-worn images of poverty and helplessness. The paradoxical predicament of these women shows that, although they are capitalized on, they still manage to produce innovative geographies of survival, ranging from negotiating their own terms with clientele, setting up international networks of business connections and smuggling circuits, and creating communities of solidarity.

As we know, images possess not only a secondary, descriptive function but a productive one as well. Scanning, X-ray, and remote sensing, to name but a few optical technologies that are used in geography to track and monitor migration movements, are constantly producing a new visuality that facilitates certain notions of globality, controllability, and governability. In the same vein, female bodies get sensed, recorded, and rerouted. Drawing on the theories of Lisa Parks, what I am arguing here is that, from the orbital perspective, we are beginning to grasp the gigantic dimensions of this transnational and highly sexualized mobility.[3] Satellite images are not limited simply to recording the movement of people; they are also implicated in producing a perspective from which a geographical reorganization of women on a global scale has become thinkable. Another point I wish to make is that these bodies are not only passively traced by geographic information systems,

but are also actively involved in cartographic activities. In the course of the global dislocation of women and the sexualization of their labor, a new geography is being mapped out through the recruitment of women from minority populations and slum communities, their transportation along trafficking routes, and the itineraries they adopt to cross borders, abroad and offshore, to labor in the global sex industry, where they build overseas economies and alternative circuits of survival in the margins of a pan-capitalist reality. This is the highly gendered geography mapped by *Remote Sensing.*

Instead of representations of captivity, immobility, or deportation, my video sketches out an alternative territoriality, opting for images of women traveling, actively traversing geographies, sleeping in buses, and dashing by on motorbikes. I also designed images of a virtual, digital space, images that could not be captured with a Sony camera but which had to be invented: X-ray portraits of young women moving through deep blue landscapes, passing by socialist housing projects in Bulgaria, crossing the Bosphorus, or driving through slum neighborhoods in Mexico. The electronic travel schedules running down over the image trace travel routes across the globe, from Lagos to Munich, from Moscow to Tel Aviv, from El Salvador to California, and from Thailand to Paris. The detailed routings, the meticulous tracking of bus rides from town to town, the timing of border crossings, visa numbers, and ship schedules—all these obsessively collected data seem to come closer to documentary reality than anything else in the video. Such images speak about migration in the age of digital imaging. Whether the female passengers are touring for their personal pleasure, growth, and enrichment, whether they have been routed along a standardized, serialized migratory path, or trafficked by a criminal organization into a life of clandestinity, the repetitive sequences of these digital journeys convey the intensity and multi-directionality of the gendered traffic.

In *Remote Sensing*, different discourses on a single subject may be presented in the same frame. Take Caroline—originally from a slum neighborhood in Manila and now working at the Bunny Club in Hong Kong—who confesses, in a slightly roundabout way, how exhausted she gets from "entertaining" her customers after she finishes long hours of dancing on stage. Her close-up is mounted on a satellite image looking down on slowly rotating Pacific islands, next to a video clip of the pulsing traffic in an Asian city at sunset, and overlaid with Chinese characters for the word "Observatory" (see figure 7.1). The surface is overloaded with signs. As Caroline speaks, textual data on Hong Kong's sunset, moonrise, civil twilight, and tidal changes scroll up, suggesting the entanglement of the hardships of a sex worker with

Figure 7.1 Young woman commuting between Manila slum and Hong Kong's Bunny Club (*Remote Sensing* 2001)

factual scientific information. Here the potential romanticism of the sunset or moonrise over the Hong Kong Bay is overwritten by astrophysical data and the survival narrative of a slum girl.

At other times, the multi-perspectival composition includes talking heads of various leading NGO women who analyze the dynamics behind worldwide female trafficking, the implication of the military, and the effects of globalization on women's lives. In other words, *Remote Sensing* infuses the technological images with the human complexity that motivates, and also functionalizes, the very movements they trace. But time and again the sober analysis articulated by expert women in the field intersects with more ambiguous positions that open up some interstices. Bandana, an NGO woman working in Bangkok, exposes a particularly interesting gray zone that she situates between the notion of "being forced" into prostitution, which is the narrow definition of trafficking, and "opting" for prostitution for lack of a better opportunity. From a human rights point of view and for political lobby work toward legislative changes, a distinction might have to be made between "free will" and being tricked into sex

work against one's will. For a cultural producer, however, it does not seem particularly useful to establish such an artificial distinction for moral reasons or for any other purpose. The cultural pressure, social obligations, and economic necessities that drive women into sex work are ultimately no less imperative than the pull of organized trafficking. Far more interesting is the gray zone, the space of negotiation that opens up "in between," for it is here that the complexity of our lives is located. What I have tried to show is how these gray zones materialize into particular space-times that are certainly presented as alternatives but are not outside the system. This is not the imaginary, romantic alternative of choosing an existence that is removed from or external to the perils of late capitalism, but rather the very ambivalent and conflict-ridden alternative of creating semi-legal circuits of survival in the cracks of a capitalist reality.

Logging the Border: *Europlex*

I now turn to *Europlex* (2003), which I made with Angela Sanders, a visual anthropologist, on the Ibero-Moroccan borderlands. It is less ambitious than *Remote Sensing* in its scope and length, as well as in its theoretical claims. Anthropological in its approach, this project involves first and foremost a precise process of observation.

Illegal migration from North Africa has dominated the news for some time now in the European media. Capsized boats and clandestine immigrants washing up on European shores constitute some of the dramatic images with which the Europe's southern border is repeatedly represented in news reports. The media seems to say that these images communicate the essence of the border in its most compressed and climactic form. But there is no defining image of drama that can narrate the endless story of inclusion and exclusion. There is no single, violent icon to which the event of crossing can be reduced, but only a plurality of passages, their diverse embodiments, their motivations and articulations. Turning the focus away from simple acts of trespassing across a line toward exposing the transnational, diffuse, and semi-legal economic transactions motivating multiple movements within the borderlands might bring us closer to understanding the site.

What we can call the border here is far from being a linear formation. It encompasses the Strait of Gibraltar with all its transversal traffic, the two Spanish enclaves on the Moroccan side, and the plastic-covered vegetable plantations in Andalusia powered by an African labor force. When we see geography as a spatialization of the relationships

connecting systems ranging from the local to the transnational, it also becomes plain why, in border geographies, processes of extreme compression occur on all levels. *Europlex* concentrates on the different ways in which the area encompassing the Strait of Gibraltar and its bordering regions is used, and also looks at various motivations for mobility.

This area is given its cultural meaning only by being crossed: by container ships en route from West Africa to the Mediterranean, by boats transporting clandestine migrants on their perilous nocturnal journeys, by helicopter patrols keeping watch, by radio waves and radar lines, by itinerant plantation workers who pick vegetables for the EU market, by commuting housemaids (domesticas) who go to work for the señoras in Andalusia, by the border-guard patrols along the mountain paths, by buses transporting Moroccan women who peel imported shrimp for Dutch companies in Tangier, by pirates who procure goods from China, and by women smugglers who tie them up under their skirts and carry them into the medina. This is the mobility we are concerned with, the everyday mobility lived out on a local level, producing micro-geographies that are deeply intermeshed with one another and at the same time reflect global dimensions.

In a series of border recordings, *Europlex* examines the circular movement of people around the checkpoint between the Spanish enclave-city of Ceuta and the surrounding Moroccan territory. Interestingly, the aim of the migrants who cross the border here is not to get into the fortified city of Ceuta, but to pursue their semi-legal business in the expanded border complex. Southern Spain and Northern Morocco form a space that may well be powered and ruled by the European economy, but it is ultimately produced by the people who move across and in between the territorial imperatives of the borders. Our main concern here is neither with the global players nor with the deconstruction of power. We are more interested in the close observation of counter-geographies and dissident practices, mostly semi-legal and often invisible. We call our videographic recordings "border logs," where the term "log" refers to both the travel logs and the ethnographic recordings. In video editing, the log, which constitutes the chronological list of filmed material, is considered an indispensable element in preparing the editing process. Again and again we went to the border at six in the morning to observe the peculiar activities taking place there. *Europlex*, particularly in the first border log, visualizes this process.

Border Log I primarily reflects our meticulous observation of the extensive smuggling activities that circumscribe the border with Ceuta.

Filming is strictly prohibited, so that images can be recorded only with a hidden camera or from a distance, with constant interruptions. The liveliness begins at 6 a.m., when the gates open to a crowd of Moroccans waiting impatiently outside, and it continues through the day. Smuggling—which takes place in daylight and within plain sight of the border officials—is part of the everyday culture. The female smugglers strap shirts and clothes to their bodies, layer upon layer, until they have doubled their body volume. This seems to be a technique only women use. Since each piece increases the profit margin of their passage, the logic of economics is inscribed on every layer of these mobile female bodies.

Border Log II follows the daily journey of the Moroccan housemaids who live in the town of Tétuan in Morocco and work in the Spanish enclave. For many of them the day begins as they shove through the crowded, gated passage on the border, hoping to be let in. The state officials use every pretext to slow down or block the flow completely. Yet *Europlex* does not focus on the difficult conditions young Moroccan women face when they enter the European labor market. Instead, the video takes a look at the curious fact that the workers commute between the Moroccan and the Spanish time zones. Since the two adjacent territories are located in distinct time zones with a two-hour time lapse, the domestic workers turn into permanent time travelers within the border economy. Here their life rhythm is off beat; it is performed through an alternating delay and acceleration with respect to the social context. In the video, the time-traveling housemaid is presented in front of a pop art background, her gesture and her smile appear unnaturally repetitive, going backward and forward. Her movements are interrupted by drop-outs, missing images that stop and restart in a choppy fashion. The animated portrait of this Muslim woman, with its achronological movements, takes on charming robotic features that separate her from our conventional system of measuring time.

Border Log III enters the transnational zone near Tangier, where Moroccan women manufacture products for European subcontractors. The border crossed by these women on a daily basis is a lot less visible than the fortified one around Ceuta traversed by the smugglers and domestic workers. Still, upon entering the transnational zone, the worker experiences a distinct split from her cultural environment. In *Europlex* this is expressed in a series of portraits of female workers captured at the exit of a factory in the harbor of Tangier. In terms of image technology, it is performed by means of a brusque freeze of her image; a woman's face and her gaze remain sharp while the background dissolves gradually into graininess. In this fragmented composition her presence is decontextualized, her body entirely technologized.

Figure 7.2 Transaroma: Moroccan women working in transnational production zone (*Europlex* 2003)

These logs describe three diverse practices that transform the border space into a translocal reality. What the border recordings aim at, and attempt to impact on, is not the consolidation of a national unity, but its opposite, the permeability and constant subversion of this supposed unity. Television reports on clandestine boat passengers do that too, to some extent, but it seems crucial to me that the shadowy and partially subversive circumstances of these border passages are not assimilated all too quickly into a disciplined national order where intervening state officials play the leading part, but that they are allowed to cultivate an alternative imaginary based in translocal cultural practices (see figure 7.2).

Global Oil Circulation and the Routes of Trafficking: *Black Sea Files*

While most of my previous video essays were concerned with globalization processes in exterritorial zones and along borders, with my

latest project, *Black Sea Files* (2005), I turn my attention to a particular transnational infrastructure: the BTC oil pipeline. For the first time, gender is not the major category of analysis in a video of mine. However, since one of the ten Files focuses specifically on the trafficking of women in the Black Sea basin, I attend to this specific component in my discussion that follows.

The overall focus of the two-year video exploration is the spatial and social transformations introduced by the gigantic infrastructure project. Passing through the Southern Caucasus and Turkey, the newly built pipeline pumps large amounts of new Caspian crude oil from Azerbaijan to the world market. In record time, the representation of the region has changed from that of a politically unsettled and impoverished post-Soviet periphery hosting a million displaced people, to a space where energy and capital flow at a rate that is remarkable even by world standards. In the wider picture, the oil pipeline is the first materialization of a larger European plan to expand access to Caspian oil reserves, moving even further into post–Cold War territories. A veritable Super-Silk Highway is the long-term vision behind it, and it will encompass a fully integrated transportation and communication network linking Europe with Central Asia. The pipeline is a geostrategic project of some political impact, not only for the powerful players in the region, but also for a great number of locals: farmers, oil workers, migrants, and prostitutes. These are the subjects that populate the video, turning the corridor into a complex human geography. While migration and displacement are a major historical experience in this part of the world between the Caucasus and Turkey, it is crucial to conceive of migration not as a singular phenomenon but one among many strands of interaction between regional and national spaces. In this instance, the video looks at the movement of people in relation to flows of resources, capital, information, and images. What is at stake here is not only a matter of oil, land, and power, but also, first and foremost, is a problem of representation. The first task at hand was to fragment and disperse the current centrality of the United States in oil discourses by introducing, in a sequence of ten synchronized double video Files, the many sidelines and secondary landscapes in the extended geography of Caspian oil.

International media coverage of the Caucasus features images of political elites signing contacts, rubbing new oil between their fingertips, or cutting ribbons at inaugurations. My work does not prioritize these corporate images because they offer little insight into complex regional relations and local textures. In *Black Sea Files* I do not pretend to grasp the complex region in its overall political and cultural

dimension. I attempt, nonetheless, to shed light on a subjective but interrelated series of scenes and plots. Varying in scale, the Files speak of grand ideas and sordid conspiracies, remote ordering systems and their prosaic local upshots; they detect plans within plans, seeking to understand their strategic purposes, operational failures, and the meaning they have in terms of human experience. It is the ensemble of the Files that will reveal their interconnectedness. Singling out one specific case would not allow these meanings to emerge.[4] For this reason, I will provide some background information on the conjunction of the trajectories of oil migrants in the region. It is no coincidence that the Bosphorus, a major choke point in the global circulation of oil, is also the site of a high concentration of human mobility. In some instances the correlation between the two becomes more tangible: the flows of oil and capital have had a direct impact on the legislation of migration in the Caucasian-Turkish relations.

Less work seems to have been done on the cultural analysis of energy than on technology or velocity, even though energy is unarguably one of the major ingredients that power and shape our society today. This lack of theoretical discourse makes it more difficult to discuss the circulation of oil in the context of a cultural-theoretical consideration of gender and migration. I had to do a great deal of groundwork.

Turkey is considered one of the main transit countries for irregular migration in the modern world.[5] Tens of thousands of migrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Moldova, and Russia arrive in Turkey every year, two-thirds of them illegally, with the intention of moving on. This does not mean that they dash through the country in a hurry; it may take them up to four years before they arrive at their destination in Mediterranean Europe. Migrants often use this time to work and earn the money necessary for their passage to Europe, which may require handsome smugglers' fees and bribes. Azerbaijani citizens usually do not have to resort to smugglers because they enjoy privileges in Turkey that have to do with old pan-Turkic ties. Despite seven decades under the Soviet regime, close historical and cultural links remained between the two countries and were rapidly revived immediately after Azerbaijan became independent. Within a few years, Turkey became the country's main ally, and thousands of Azerbaijani citizens started visiting Turkey regularly as tourists and working there as labor migrants. On a legislative level, the big contracts for cooperation on oil export have brought about a simplified visa regime between the two countries, offering Azerbaijani citizens privileged access to residence permits in Turkey. Turkish politics in

this regard consists in a parallel and synchronized regulation of human and fossil resources.

Azerbaijani migrants mainly concentrate in Istanbul, Izmir, and Trabzon, a Black Sea port located on the Georgian-Turkish border. The most extensive migration flows, however, run through Istanbul, one of the major international hubs for irregular migration, smuggling, and trafficking. The metropolis on the Bosphorus attracts 75 percent of all undocumented migrants who enter the country. With the threat of severe sanctions, the EU required Turkey to clamp down on irregular migration heading for Greece, Italy, Spain, and France. In EU politics there is a radical divergence between the flow of human and fossil resources. While the European market absorbs growing amounts of crude oil, it rejects the people who travel along the same line searching for work. My video reestablishes a loose link between the movement of oil flows and the routes of trafficked women.

Let us look at the geography of oil in juxtaposition with these migration routes and concentration points. The Black Sea remains the largest outlet for Russian oil exports. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the importance of the Bosphorus has greatly increased, as the vast oil reserves in the Caspian region must be transported, at least partially, through the Black Sea in order to reach external markets. The Turkish Straits are among the world's busiest and most challenging waterways, cutting through a city of twelve million people.

At the same time as fossil resources are harnessed and evacuated to the west, we see the impact of the liberalization of post-socialist countries on female mobility and marketability. The Black Sea basin is known as a major trading place for women. Female migrants trafficked from the former Soviet republics to Turkey (where they work in unregistered brothels) frequently use the route through Azerbaijan, by now a regular transit country for illegal migration.[6] In Azerbaijan, the massive oil-field revenues do not filter down easily to ordinary citizens. Women, and particularly young women, have to look for opportunities abroad, and they use the same westbound route as the oil.

As important as the connections between oil money and sexualized female labor migration are, they are often difficult to establish conceptually in a video, because these issues are discussed in very different scientific fields, using different languages. In the visual world of video space, and particularly in the practice of the video essay, there is a chance to bring them together. Certain events in the *Black Sea Files*, like the scene I am about to describe involving Russian and Azeri prostitutes, may indeed seem unrelated or coincidental. During

fieldwork, however, the essayist is not always in representational mode; on the tracks of her research topic, she triggers real situations simply by being physically present. The situation often requires a spontaneous decision to pursue a narrative thread that was unplanned.

Theoretically, I knew about the booming sex industry in the region, but it was not my explicit intention to tie it into my video project. I arrived in Trabzon toward the end of my research trip through the Caucasus. I had taken a bus from the Georgian port of Batumi across the Turkish border and planned a couple of relaxing days in this lively old trading city. After taking a bath at the ancient hamam and watching a Lara Croft movie at the only cinema, I took a stroll down to the port. Behind the covered Russian market, where cheap plastic articles, textiles, and electronics are for sale, the filthy street was lined with brothels, hotels, and bars crowded with women from Russia, the Ukraine, and the Caucasus Republics. Even though I felt it was my time off, I made contact with people in this environment the same day. In a local hotel room, I subsequently taped an encounter with three young prostitutes—two from Moscow and one from Baku, Azerbaijan—who had recently arrived in Trabzon, in the presence of their pimps, the agent, and the translator, all of whom remained behind the camera (see figure 7.3).

The excessive male presence in the room made a candid conversation impossible, and in terms of factual information, the encounter would prove to be entirely useless. However, while waiting to begin an interview, I filmed the nervous way in which the three women moved around the room, getting up, sitting down again, reclining, hiding behind each other, constantly reshuffling their positions on the queen-size bed in the effort to place themselves in the best, or possibly the least, favorable posture in front of the camera. For the longest time, they rearranged their bodies in ever new positions, gradually becoming conscious of the humorous manner in which they were hindering my task as a camerawoman and undermining the pimps' authority. It is this awkward choreography that ultimately tells us more convincingly than any verbal statement about the women's discomfort with their labor and with the necessity of exposing themselves in this intimate transitory space determined by capitalist relations. Yet, with their pointless moving around the room, they were also able to appropriate the space in an anti-productive, playful, and resistant way.

It is this unspectacular and unassuming form of resistance—discovered through a process of minute observation—that I have often

Figure 7.3 Jula and Nara: Interview with post-Soviet prostitutes in Trabzon, Turkey (*Black Sea Files* 2005)

chosen as my object of representation, not because it has any real power to change economic relations, but because, in representation, the gray zones that allow for the momentary but highly symbolic agency of women hardly ever come into view. In the end, hard facts always lead to a discourse of exploitation and rarely reveal strategies of mobility, slyness, and inventiveness, which are ultimately the principal qualities required in these geographies of survival.

Notes

1. *Performing The Border*, 1999
2. From an interview with Eva Danzl Suarez, Fraueninformationszentrum Zurich, in Remote Sensing. 2001
3. Lisa Parks, *Cultures in Orbit, Satellites and the Televisual* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005).
4. The complete research of the *Black Sea Files* is published in Anselm Franke, *B-Zone Becoming Europe and Beyond* (Barcelona: ACTAR Publishers, 2005), 16–99.

5. Bickley, Charmaine. 2001, *Away From Azerbaijan, Destination Europe*. A report for the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Geneva. URL: http://www.iom.int//DOCUMENTS/PUBLICATION/EN/Azerbaijan_Report.pdf (27.10.2005). Geneva: IOM, 2001.
6. Sema Erder and Selmin Kaska, *Irregular Migration and Trafficking in Women: The Case of Turkey* (Geneva: IOM, 2003), 16–17.

Chapter 8

*"Affective Nationalism" and Transnational Postcommunist Lesbian Visual Activism**

Anikó Imre

Transes of Nationalism

Puszta Cowboy is a nine-minute film made in 2004 by the Budapest Lesbian Film Collective, a group of semiprofessional lesbian film-makers. On the DVD cover, its makers describe the film as "the first Hungarian Lesbian-Transgender-Paprika Western, complete with horses, gunfight, goulash, and traditional Hungarian csárdás-dancing." The film opens by citing the epic poem *Miklós Toldi,* written by prominent Hungarian Romantic poet János Arany in 1846. The poem itself recasts the adventures of the eponymous folk hero to create an inspiring allegorical narrative and enduring role model for the nation, which is seen to be in perpetual need of defense from more powerful enemies. In the poem, Toldi, a peasant boy of extraordinary strength and impeccable moral fiber, rises from his humble surroundings on the Hungarian plains (the "Puszta") to become one of the king's most loyal soldiers in his fight against foreign intruders. The poem has become a fixture of the national literary pantheon and school curriculum. It also lent itself well to the communist state's folk mythology, which was instrumental in the nation-state's pedagogical mission to create a unified "people."

In *Puszta Cowboy*, a voice-over recites the poem's memorable beginning stanza, which describes the lonesome and imposing figure of Toldi standing tall in the hot, dry landscape. However, what we see is a transgendered Toldi on horseback, wearing a cowboy outfit, in a landscape identified as the Wild West. The poem is immediately thrown outside of what Homi Bhabha calls the "continuist, accumulative temporality" of the pedagogical (Bhabha 1994, 145). In his well-known essay "DissemiNation," Bhabha describes nationalism as

a narrative strategy, which is constantly divided between its performative and pedagogical functions. As he explains, "In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation*" (145). Rather than the homogeneous and horizontal view proposed by nationalist historiography, whose reference point is an unchanging "people," the "people" is a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference repetitively produced and confirmed within a set of discourses.

> We then have a contested conceptual territory where the nation's people must be thought in double-time; the people are the historical "objects" of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*; the people are also the "subjects" of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as a sign of the *present* through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process. (1994, 145)

The dual time of nationalism allows nationalism's pedagogical mission repetitively and performatively to reinscribe what is otherwise represented as horizontal, homogeneous, and unchanging, while "surmounting" the traces of such continual construction. The transgendered American cowboy/Hungarian folk hero thus becomes the double, the figure of the nation's repressed, who emerges from nationalism's effort to maintain the illusion of the nation's eternal present through "a consistent process of surmounting the ghostly time of repetition" (Bhabha 1994, 145). While nationalism is in no way contingent or accidental, Bhabha argues with reference to Ernest Gellner's work, it is made up of cultural shreds and patches that are often arbitrary historical inventions. *Puszta Cowboy* reveals nationalism to be a patchwork of the "arbitrary signs and symbols that signify the affective life of the national culture" (Bhabha 1994, 142).

After the initial gesture to *Toldi*, the film deviates from the poem and employs the generic markers of the Western to tell the story of the protagonist's quest for his lover, who had been kidnapped by her former beau. The lover, played by director Katrin Kremmler, is decked out in an excessive folk outfit complete with traditional stockings, shoes, a multilayered skirt, blouse, vest, and tiara. Her appearance

recalls images featured in tourist guide books and films to attract visitors to "quaint," "premodern" Eastern Europe. In the context of a lesbian "goulash Western," this is also a mockery of romantic gestures to an idealized national past when gender relations were supposed to be more clear-cut. Furthermore, it is a fitting visual translation of the sartorial excess in which the gendered binary division that underscores the Western's nostalgic nationalism finds expression.

An Indian leads Cowboy Toldi to his adversary's hideout. There a shootout occurs, represented by alternating shots of the actual actors and shadow animated cartoon figures, which further reduce the Western to core elements of recognizability and simultaneously render Toldi's narrative a didactic allegorical tool (see figure 8.1). All the roles, which in actual Westerns act as codes that glue together the gendering, racializing, and nationalizing of the spectating subject in a seamless process, are played by lesbians. We end up with a deliciously disorienting carnival with multiple crossings: those of genres, national cultural traditions, cinematic conventions, and gender roles. By projecting the Western's desert scenery onto the backdrop of the Hungarian "puszta" and the cowboy, the problematically sexualized embodiment of American manliness onto the mythical embodiment of Hungarian heroism, the film reverses the process whereby "the scraps, patches and rags of daily life [are] repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects" (Bhabha 1994, 145). The rags and patches of the cultural fabric are revealed to be substitutable—by those taken from other nationalisms and global popular culture.

Figure 8.1 "*Puszta Cowboy*: The Duel" (2004) (courtesy of Budapest Lesbian Film Collective)

The filmmakers foreground how nationalism as a narrative strategy repetitively re-creates its "people" in a continual performance of narrative coherence. Such a performance is inherently transnational. Indeed, similar to the Lesbian Collective's other work, it is marked by multiple instances of the "trans": translational, transgendered, transgressive. The Collective has adopted feminist "third-wave" models of carnival and a playful, camp aesthetics of activism, both in the form of live events (their annual Gay Pride and LGTB film festival, drag balls and parties) and through their media activism (represented by a feature film, several shorts and documentaries, a strong web presence, and a lesbian radio show). They have also translated, disseminated, and adapted queer and post-structuralist feminist theories and fiction in the course of the last decade.

These strategies evoke the performative activism of lesbian groups in the United States who, since the 1980s, have revalued popular media, fashion, and consumer culture as political resources and redefined the link between theory and activism (Cvetkovich 2001, 283–286). Following the initiative of the group *ACT UP*, which consciously employed style as a tool of lesbian activism, the first manifesto of the collective *Lesbian Avengers* identified activism as fun and drew on mainstream media tactics to make lesbian identities visible by organizing demonstrations, parties, and "Dyke Marches" in large U.S. cities (290–291). In a similar vein, visual collectives such as *DAM!* (*Dyke Action Machine!*) began to use conventions of corporate advertising during the "gay '90s" to install lesbians within the public sphere, reminding consumers that political and visual power are continuous and that activism and advertising are both grounded in the fiction of diversity and inclusion while harnessing fantasy for political goals (297).

However, in *Puszta Cowboy* and the Collective's other work, nationalism looms as a much more powerful target of subversion, appropriation, and identification than does mainstream global popular media. For this vanguard group of lesbian visual activists in Eastern Europe, the nation-state and nationalism are complex and compelling obstacles to creating public queer visibility. In this, the Collective's work is paradigmatic of a regional, postcommunist pattern of ambivalence toward nationalism and the nation-state in lesbian and, by extension, feminist emergence. This ambivalence is characterized by affectionate mockery; a simultaneous critique of the silences imposed on lesbianism by various heteronormative technologies of governmentality, and an unsubstitutable sense of belonging to the national collective; a sophisticated awareness of the way in which

nationalism punishes and criminalizes nonreproductive sexualities and a simultaneous inability to imagine lesbianism detached from Hungarianness, Croatianness, or Polishness; a willingess to borrow from other European models of lesbian visual activism and a simultaneous dedication to rediscovering or retroactively establishing a lesbian tradition within national culture.

Tellingly, the two members of the Budapest Collective who took *Puszta Cowboy* to the 2004 Cineffable Festival, held in Paris, reflected on their festival experiences in an online report on the website of the lesbian organization Labrisz in these words: "I think *we* represented Labrisz/Hungary well. . . . At times *we* tend to think here that *we* are behind, that nothing happens in Hungary. . . . But at events like *Cineffable* one can see that this is not exactly true. People are interested in what *we* create here, but they know very little about it" (Kremmler 2004, my emphasis). In their use of "we," the national collective and the lesbian collective become continuous. This ambiguous "we" is further complicated by the fact that the two women who represented Hungary at *Cineffable* are citizens of Germany and France, respectively, speak Hungarian as a second (or third) language, and consider Budapest their home of choice rather than birth. Are they naive or ignorant as to how the nation's moral majority feels about their kind? Or do their comments imply an elitist or idealistic transcendence of the walls of nationalism by those who possess the luxury of European mobility?

The answer to both questions is "no." Their adoption of the Hungarian national "we" is an indication of the peculiar affective intensity of nationalism in the postcommunist region: at once a powerful pedagogical and emotional force and something dangerously close to a collective farce that national subjects—and even foreigners—knowingly perform. To understand the relationship of emerging feminist and, in particular, lesbian groups to the nation-state and its nationalism, is an enterprise that holds out productive potential for thinking of sexuality transnationally. In this essay, I would like to highlight some of this potential. More ambitiously, my hope is to contribute to the ongoing work of rethinking lesbian representation, queer theory, and theories of visuality and gender as they cross studies of nationalism, postcoloniality, and globalization. As Judith Butler puts it, sexual difference *within* homosexuality has yet to be theorized in its complexity as the vocabulary of describing play, crossing, and the destabilization of masculine and feminine identifications within homosexuality has only begun to emerge (1993, 240). "The inquiry into both homosexuality and gender will need to cede the

priority of both terms in the service of a more complex mapping of power that interrogates the formation of each in specified racial regimes and geopolitical spatializations" (1993, 241).

"Affective Nationalism" and the Transnational Study of Sexuality

Following up on their earlier, seminal work in transnational feminist studies, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan recently set out to map the complex terrain of sexual politics that is "at once national, regional, local, even 'cross-cultural' and hybrid" (2001, 663). While acknowledging how much postcolonial, ethnic, and diaspora studies have contributed to globalizing the study of sexuality, they argue that the "transnational" is a more useful term than "global" to describe postmodern sexualized identities. As they show, however, the semantic map of the "transnational" is also fragmented by a multiplicity of recent applications and old disciplinary divides, which sustain some unfortunate binary divisions:

One of these is the separation of the study of sexuality from those of race, class, nation, religion, and so on. Approaches to sexuality, they argue, are still often underscored by psychoanalytic cultural criticism, whose Eurocentric biases privilege the modern European family as a structural metaphor and reproduce nationalist formations (667–678). A second separation, within the United States, demarcates American Studies from international area studies, both of which are products of Cold War global power relations. As a result, comparative work in these areas remains bound by nation-states and informed by unspoken nationalisms. In addition, studies of sexuality have remained focused on North American and European cases, which are concerned with white, middle-class life (669). Finally, despite much work in postcolonial studies, the old tradition-modernity split persists in studies of sexuality in the global age. As Grewal and Kaplan write,

> Nationalist biases and geopolitics contribute to this binary formulation, in which the United States and Europe are figured as modern and thus as the sites of progressive social movements, while other parts of the world are presumed to be traditional, especially in regard to sexuality. If any countries or nations depart from this model, it is because they are interpellated by "primitivism." In general, the United States and Europe come to be seen as unified sites of "freedom" and "democratic choice" over and against locations characterized by oppression. (669)

The crucial question for the authors is, "What, then, is a transnational practice of the study of sexuality?" (672). They offer some productive recommendations as to what such a practice would look like: it would pay more attention to issues of travel, tourism, and, above all, the media and visual culture. It would not be limited to a psychoanalytically informed, cultural understanding of global lesbian and gay movements; instead, it would analyze the ways in which "nation-states, economic formations, consumer cultures, and forms of governmentality all work together to produce and uphold subjectivities and communities" (670). It would acknowledge the fact that the nation-state's function is not always oppressive toward nonnormative sexual identities and that such identities are neither equal in their access to power nor inherently subversive of nationalism and the nation-state.

However, with all their nuanced attention to the unacknowledged roles of nationalist biases and power inequalities in structuring studies of sexuality, some of the very binaries that the "transnational" is intended to contest haunt Grewal and Kaplan's own discursive framework: The "West" or the "first world" still function as well-identifiable entities, associated with whiteness, and set against a dark-colored "third world." In a similar vein, "Europe" still appears as the monolithic and undifferentiated center of economic and cultural Euro-power. While their theoretical analysis usefully highlights current impasses and spaces of invisibility within transnational studies of sexuality, such persistent implied dichotomies predetermine the kinds of examples and case studies one can legitimately analyze.

Feminists from and working in the defunct "second world," one of those spaces of perpetual invisibility, are familiar with the discomfort of being forced to choose between first- and third-world identifications (see Marciniak 2006). The difficulty of classifying East European women and feminisms within this binary paradigm has led to a great deal of difficulty and multiple misunderstandings in the budding communication between women from postcommunist countries and feminists from elsewhere. In the case that generated the most global attention, the wars of Yugoslav succession brought to the surface latent tensions among feminists of different orientations. Narratives of rape became instrumentalized in nationalistic constructions of Serbian or Croatian ethnic identities, preventing coalitions among feminist groups who otherwise shared an antiwar stand. What Djurdja Knezevic calls "affective nationalism" of a specifically Eastern and Southern European kind energized "patriotic feminist" organizations in Croatia, among them lesbian groups such as *Kareta*. These groups condemned the war but insisted on measuring and comparing on a

national basis the victimhood assigned to women through rape, torture, and humiliation. They refused to communicate with antinationalist feminists in Serbia and elsewhere. The activism of Croatian patriotic feminists is an extreme expression of the ambivalence that characterizes postcommunist feminist and lesbian emergence. Importantly, it converged with the activism of Western liberal-activist feminists who, headed by Catharine MacKinnon herself, saw the solution in giving voice and legal protection to women regarded as voiceless, passive victims (Batinic 2001).

I believe there would be fewer missed opportunities for communication if feminists heeded Grewal and Kaplan's call to take the field of visual media much more seriously. Despite a shared global media culture in which images and fantasies travel at digital speed, it seems that the implicit hierarchy between activism (as primary, more effective, and more important) and studies of representation (as derivative, secondary, even parasitic), survives on a geopolitical scale. Such a hierarchical division has been historically important for feminism but has become ultimately problematic by the 1990s as feminists have realized that the representational is an indispensable political tool.

Yet, queer and feminist studies continue to conceive of the "representational turn" in lesbian visual activism, celebrity culture, and films as specific to Euro-American metropolitan and academic centers. Notwithstanding the occasional interpretive "queering" of postcolonial national or regional cinemas or of particular films from "third world" contexts, the kinds of performativity that have bridged mainstream consumer culture and lesbian activism to create some of the most fruitful examples of feminist political intervention have been understood as "Western" phenomena. When it comes to other cultures, lesbian representation, as well as feminist and queer theory in general, tends to yield priority to "women's issues," which are seen as more urgent and legitimate within their oppressive national contexts: to the representation of women on a strictly political basis, presupposing the primacy of an essentialist identity politics. As a result, when lesbianism is distinguished from women's or feminist issues at all, its activist kind is singled out, severed from representational aesthetics and popular culture, let alone post-structuralist theory. Such an approach does not only overlook the crucial role of the performative, rather than combative creation of, visibility for lesbians in these cultures but may also unwittingly collaborate with nation states' essentialist reliance on a binary gender division.

Puszta Cowboy and similar media work by lesbians and feminists in postcommunist countries provide testimonies to the impossibility

of choosing between third- and first-world affiliations, between theory and activism, between the combative and the performative. They supply evidence for Grewal and Kaplan's argument in favor of a truly transnational study of sexuality—something the authors' own choice of examples subtly undermines. "Second world" feminisms are equally informed by both the essentialist, allegorizing force of postcolonial nationalisms, which freezes differences among and within nationalized subjects into the homogeneity of the national collective, and the political need to conceive of identities as fluid and performative. This necessity to work out a compromise between these two models of identity plays a significant role in the ambivalence that the Budapest Filmmaking Collective and other lesbian and feminist groups sustain toward the nation and nationalism.

One of the peculiarities of East European feminisms is precisely what Romanian feminist anthropologist-activist Enikö Magyari-Vincze calls an "island" type of emergence. She compares the "state" of the Romanian feminist movement to a growing island among, and influenced by, different waves of feminism that originated elsewhere but are developing into something new and yet unpredictable (Györgyi 2001). Polish feminist academic-activist Agnieszka Graff uses a strikingly similar metaphor to describe the postcommunist development of Polish feminism. In her article, "Lost between the Waves?" she argues that Polish feminism employs tools favored by third-wave feminism —irony, camp, play, cross-dressing, carnival, post-structuralist theory, and a concern with images and representation—to achieve goals typical of the second wave, such as reproductive rights, equal pay, and political representation. The group of feminists led by Graff created a hip-hop group. They have demonstrated against the ban on abortion and other neoconservative measures through campy street demonstrations and music (Graff 2003). Elsewhere, Graff also proposes that such a refusal of the chronology of "waves" may lead to something as yet unfamiliar in Polish gender politics and the feminist movement in general (Graff 2005).

"Performativity" implies the productive acknowledgment of one's implication in what one opposes. It is the turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power in order "to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a 'pure' opposition, a 'transcendence' of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure" (Butler 1993, 241). In cultures and regions where lesbianism has limited or no visibility due to extreme religious or nationalistic hostility, serious political activism and essentialist identity politics are not necessarily more

effective than forms of performative activism and the playful subversion of representations sanctioned by local versions of heteronormative ideology. In an infamous recent feminist debate, Gayatri Spivak refuses Martha Nussbaum's "matronizing reference" to poor rural Indian women who, according to Nussbaum, have no use for the kind of "symbolic" feminism espoused by Butler and her followers. On the contrary, Spivak writes, "Gender practice in the rural poor is quite often in the performative mode, carving out power within a more general scene of pleasure in subjection" (Spivak 1999). In a similar vein, in post-Soviet Eastern Europe, lesbian theorizing and activism do not follow the evolutionary path that Western sisters have treaded since the 1970s. Rather, one can detect a kind of development where local theorists and activists pick and choose from the entire set of coexisting theoretical models developed over decades and employ performative forms of activism to bring gender and lesbianism into visibility (Györgyi 2001, Kalocsai 1998, Graff 2005).

Beáta Sándor, Hungarian lesbian activist-writer and Labrisz's legal representative asks, "Why is it not enough for minorities to have equal rights?" Post-structuralist feminist theories constitute Sándor's starting point. "How is it possible to create new subject positions so that not only recognizing but also creating strategies for transforming existing institutions and practices can be a project? Feminist politics are crucial in determining which existing theories might be useful in the effort for such a change" (Sándor 1999). Her goal, shared with many East European feminists, is to challenge the language of biological femaleness: to question naturalizing expressions that efface language as a site of political struggle, which are often legitimized with reference to social scientific, empirical data. Sándor explains that, as a particular effect of the belated emergence of feminism in the region, East European feminists have simultaneous access to all "waves" of feminism. As a result, theoretical discourses seem to initiate, rather than follow, (pre)political organizing. "We need theoretical discussions of the relation between language, subjectivity, social organization and power, partly to understand the primary questions why women tolerate social relations which subordinate their interests to those of men, what makes it particularly difficult for women to organize and structure their identities outside the constraints of heterosexuality, and what the mechanisms are whereby women and men adopt particular discursive positions as representative of their interests" (1999).

However, it is noticeable that all of these East European feminist activist-intellectuals theorize conspicuously similar patterns of

emergence primarily with reference to their own national contexts. To me this signals less a limitation of vision but a recognition on their part of the continuing power of the nation-state and of nationalist discourses to filter and transform globally circulating ideas and provide an affective ground that mediates rather than gives way to the transnational. In other words, I argue that even for feminists who are critical of gendered and sexualized discourses in the national media and in the practices of national governments, the identification with nationalism remains a force that cannot be ignored. While nationalism is something to be discursively and continually performed, it also provides a culturally specific blueprint for gender identification itself.

Queer Cultural Nationalism

I would like to return to the work of the Budapest Lesbian Filmmaking Collective to underscore the argument that the postcommunist lesbian and feminist ambivalence toward nationalism should be an important aspect of thinking about sexualities transnationally. On the one hand, the films and activism of the Collective maintain a critical distance from the homophobic institutions and practices of the nation-state and media discourses, which tend to portray lesbians as exotic animals reduced to their "queer" sexuality and eroticize "lesbian" sex in heterosexual porn. (Although there is also obvious enjoyment in hiding, in the intimate transgressions of the boundaries of the nation-state and national language.) On the other hand, there is a marked effort to construct lesbian cultural and political representability within national boundaries. The former is manifest in a collective effort to create a decidedly Hungarian lesbian national literary and visual mythology and way of communication. The latter consists in unceasing lobbying efforts for equal rights, which employ the nation's own "pedagogical" strategies.

These negotiations with the state and national discourses are further implicated in the larger, by definition transnational sphere of the expanding European Union. While the EU exercises its own shifting governmentalities, its stated policies of inclusion and democratic rights for minorities provide lesbian and queer groups some leverage in lobbying their nation-states. For instance, Labrisz's most explicitly "pedagogical" project, "Queer Identities and Knowledge," is supported by the European Union's Phare Democracy Project. The program's goal is to offer workshops that introduce information about homosexuality and actual LGTB people in schools, the very fortresses

of the nation's pedagogical mission. The name "Queer Identities and Knowledge" implies that lesbian, gay, bi, and trans differences can be captured, named, and accommodated in the pedagogical language of nationalism and the nation-state. The project is fueled by a desire to be an organic, positive part of a national tradition and to have a voice within the institutions of the state. In this regard, the program continues a project that began with the Collective's very first film, *Mihez kezdjen egy fiatal leszbikus a nagyvárosban?* ("*What Should a Young Lesbian do in the City?*" 2000). The film is considered "infotainment" by its makers, the creation of lesbian representations that are likable and truthful, providing a safe mirror of identification.

Another welcome effect of participating in European flows of media, ideas, and people on lesbian media activism have been new opportunities for travel and collaboration. *Eklektika Dance Club*, a 2003 documentary, registers exactly such a process. It documents the growing success of a queer dance club located in Budapest's Café Eklektika. While same-sex dancing initially offered the safety of role-playing and performance to gay and lesbian couples otherwise reluctant to come out in public, some of these couples have also gone on to win international gay games competitions. The film's narration jumps back and forth in time, between scenes of remodeling the building to scenes of the first clumsy baby steps taken on the floor intercut with interviews with the dancers and glamorous vignettes from international competitions. The dancers comment on how such opportunities for international travel and transnational companionship strengthen gay identities. But it also appears that such experiences trigger a curious dialectic: in the course of travel, they become defined and discover themselves as representatives of their nation. In one of the most revealing scenes, triumphant dancers are greeted at the airport by their peers, who are waving the national flag. The aesthetic evokes memorable moments of welcoming Olympic athletes, a familiar sight on national television. The transnational in some way is mediated through, while also reframes, the national, much like *Puszta Cowboy* reframes the national epic on which it is based.

Staking out identities within and across national borders through a performative aesthetic reaches its epitome in the group's most recent, forty-five-minute documentary about an international drag king workshop organized in Budapest. Narrator-codirector-participant "Dédé" introduces and comments on the events. Two German drag king workshop coordinators were invited from Berlin to transform a group of Hungarian and other European lesbians into heterosexual men for a day—a fascinating experiment that is supposed to provide

one with an embodied experience of the working of gender. Something important transpires in the course of the day as the women learn how to inhabit space, talk, and eat like men, decking themselves out with facial hair, men's clothing, and a sock in a strategic position to gain more authentic manpower: The different ways of "being men" translate into recognizable national stereotypes. A German woman dons a turtleneck and black-rimmed glasses to become the type of German intellectual most familiar to Americans from Mike Myers's *Saturday Night Live* "Sprocket" skit. A dark-complexioned Bulgarian woman becomes a long-haired Latin heartthrob in a flowing flower-patterned shirt. One Hungarian participant chooses to be a Robin Hood-type outlaw, a mythical folk hero from the past. Dédé herself identifies her male persona as an "intellectual."

What is striking about Dédé's performance of the "intellectual" is that her appearance changes very little in the transformation. The ease with which her body shifts from lesbian to a type of, supposedly straight, man provides an important clue to the question how and why East European lesbian-feminists are able to sustain such a marked ambivalence toward nationalism. The intellectual performed by the "kinging" Hungarian lesbian brings together a particular register of Hungarian culture and the most playful, theoretically informed register of transnational queer culture. Dédé is able to inhabit the intellectual, a central figure of nationalism as well as a recognizable emblem of masculinity across the region, because the intellectual stands for an inherently androgynous type of masculinity, whose boundaries of performance are already fluid.

The artist/intellectual is a Romantic type, whose persona has profound roots in Eastern and Central European nationalisms. In the absence of the enduring institutions of the nation-state that characterized European nationalisms on which Eastern counterparts are modeled, the latter are especially firmly grounded in a "cultural"—literary, artistic, symbolic—identification with the European nation (Csepeli 1991, Hutchinson 1994). These nationalisms are inherently belated and contingent, perpetually engaged in a voluntary but unacknowledged colonial mimicry of Europe. Since such cultural nationalisms are so evidently based on the discursive "scraps" and affective "rags" of nationalism, they are also in constant danger of being exposed as such. The Romantic self-image of these nationalisms, the longing for perfect Europeanness, is both expressed and compensated for in an assumption of cultural and intellectual equality with or even superiority to Europe. Stanisław Barańczak repeats a widespread East European cliché when he calls East Central Europe "the kingdom of the intellect"

(Nowicki 1995, 22). The allegorical embodiment—high priest and prophet of this "kingdom"—is the East European artist/intellectual.

The erosion and eventual collapse of communism exposed the colonial dynamic that has always haunted the precariously sexualized image of the intellectual. In Hungary, this process began in the 1980s and produced ambivalent cinematic representations that expressed the impending crisis of nationalism and the naturalized boundaries of masculinity together. In Hungarian culture, this dual crisis was indicated by male figures who walk and eroticize the no man's land between homo and heterosexuality, and feminized or female artist alter egos.

Within the tenuous gender relations of East European cultural nationalisms lies one crucial clue to the ambivalence that characterizes the work of lesbian activist-artists in particular and emerging East European feminist groups in general. This ambivalence should be interpreted in relation to the ambivalence inherent in postcolonial East European nationalisms. On the one hand, these nations submit themselves to a voluntary colonization, performing Europeanness according to the logic of "almost but not quite" in the sphere of imagination and culture, rather than in those of economy or politics. The performative aspect of these nationalisms is thus always more apparent, always likely to be taken up by subversion, than that of nations better established in the pedagogical languages of economic and political "progress." The affective relations that provide the glue of nationalism are grounded in the discursive, tenuous stuff of poetry and other arts, which is significantly different from the pride that Americans may feel about their government's military and economic might or that English or Dutch people may feel about their country's past glory and democratic institutions. The shifting, tenuous ground of nationalism is reflected upon and performed in a wide range of masculine performances. Lesbians, who are otherwise unrepresentable in terms of binary gender roles, inhabit the porous, liminal borders between masculinity and femininity opened up by intellectual and artistic masculinities, which remain malleable in the direction of both male homosexuality and of traditional femininity in postmodern Hungarian culture.

At the same time, precisely because the narrative boundaries of nationalism are especially vulnerable to appropriation, the institutions of the nation-state—education, the media, the legislation, the legal system, health care, and so on—are compelled to reinforce the pedagogical mission of nationalism in excessively rigid ways. While lesbians are able to carve out small spaces of representability in national literature and culture along the borders of binary gender

roles, they find themselves facing walls of exclusion when they demand non-prejudiced political representation in the areas of employment, education, domestic partnership rights, adoption, legal age of consent, and the antidiscrimination laws imposed by the EU.

Furthermore, because of the culturally based, inherently Eurocentric "universality" of Hungarian and other East European "poetic" nationalisms, lesbian activist-artists who hail from other European nations are able to identify with selected patches and rags of national culture. While Europe is conceived of as a common home for Hungarian, German, or French lesbians within the EU, those from the core European countries are not bound by the more discriminative practices of East European nation-states even if they choose to live there.

For emerging lesbian groups in postcommunist countries, it is politically crucial not to engage in an essentialist opposition to heterosexuality, which would support the nation-state's own divisive strategies. What follows from this discussion of postcommunist lesbian ambivalence toward the nation is that it is difficult and problematic to issue feminist judgments without falling into multiple traps of ethnocentrism. It is not reliable to consider the work of East European feminists exclusively either in their specific national contexts or in a regional or global brushstroke. Only the simultaneous presence of all of these frameworks can yield enough specificity to unpeel layers of contradiction and make one understand how nationalism can prevent and enable lesbian identities at the same time.

Note

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Chapter 9

Long-Legged Girls *and the Transnational Circuits of Vietnamese Popular Culture*

Lan Duong

On a balmy summer evening, the crowds for Vu Ngoc Dang's *Nhung Co Gai Chan Dai*, or *Long-Legged Girls* (2004), at the Korean-owned Diamond Plaza in Ho Chi Minh City were enormous. Sleek motorbikes were stacked in rows around the mall; throngs of young, fashionable people animatedly congregated to meet for drinks and watch the latest film. Comprising four floors devoted to various consumerist pleasures, the mall is flanked by tall business towers and lies adjacent to the Notre Dame Cathedral and a national park, at night a notorious meeting place for lovers and for prostitutes and their clients. Diamond Plaza offers foreigners and an emerging Vietnamese middle class an air-conditioned respite from the heat during the summer months. It remains a place of leisure for a well-heeled generation of Vietnamese youth, also called the "@ generation."

Diamond Plaza is not, however, the only theater in Ho Chi Minh City. The other cineplex that I visited is located at the outskirts of downtown, near a famous ice cream parlor and the infamous Backpacker's Alley. Run-down and cavernous, the theater offers cheap tickets priced at less than $2.00. At the Vinh Quang Cinema, amongst an audience of mostly young couples, I saw on my last visit a murky, dark videotaped version of Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). Featuring painted movie posters along its exterior walls, the theater provides creaky seats that are large enough for two, accommodating those who want a covert sexual tryst. In fact, movie theaters in Viet Nam provide the few dark spaces for people's sexual encounters, since distinctions between private and public spaces are blurred and the domain of the home often includes both close and extended family members.

These cinema-going experiences at Diamond Plaza and Vinh Quang—their stark contrasts and unevenness in terms of projection and

sound quality, atmosphere and space—are reflections of the irregular development of Viet Nam's film industry and the country's economic trajectory, which have brought scattered transformations since *Doi Moi*.[1] A quick ethnography of the two spaces, whereupon the semipublic expressions of sexuality, youth culture, consumerism, and technology all converge, frames my interrogation of the context and contradictions of film spectatorship in Viet Nam, a focus that heretofore has not been discussed in scholarship on Vietnamese cultural productions.

Observations such as these also point to my positionality as a Vietnamese-born, U.S.-educated transnational feminist doing research in Viet Nam, and as one whose way of seeing has been shaped by the various discourses of feminism taught in the U.S. academy. Since much of what I observed within Viet Nam's visual culture was predicated on the display of women's bodies, I have struggled to identify the kinds of gendered discourses that I witnessed taking place in Viet Nam and to understand how women and men in Viet Nam view themselves on an everyday basis. Viet Nam is a country that, in the past thirty years, has emerged from a devastating war, undergone a decade of socialist reforms resulting in crushing poverty, and is currently grappling with a capitalist economy. Delineating what feminism means in Viet Nam is a problem, compounded by a cultural and linguistic challenge vis-à-vis the term "feminism." Within the Vietnamese language, there is no word for "feminism" as the term is understood by scholars in the West. The closest denotation is *nu quyen*, or literally, "women's rights and power," which represents official state feminism. Exhibits at the Vietnamese Women's Museums in Ha Noi and Sai Gon, for example, dwell upon notions of courageous motherhood and revolutionary heroism.[2] As a diasporic feminist subject doing U.S.-funded research in Viet Nam, one who must work in collaboration with the Vietnamese state, I asked myself a series of questions that relate to my estranged sense of being within the country of my birth and my research. What can transnational feminism mean in this context? How do we look at postwar Vietnamese cinema through a problematized feminist perspective? How do we understand the globalized circulation of bodies through the analytics of gender and sexuality? More specifically, when it comes to Viet Nam's culture industry, how do we define cinematic subjecthood for a young Vietnamese population, whose actual bodies are constantly surveilled and managed by the state? What does the country's changing economy, cultural landscape, and demographics mean for feminists working on and in Viet Nam?

To address such issues, an abbreviated review of Viet Nam's recent history is needed. In 1986, ten years after the end of the war, the Sixth

Party of Congress in Viet Nam inaugurated its historic phase of capitalistic development called *Doi Moi*, following border wars with Cambodia and China as well as disastrous attempts at land collectivization programs. The implementation of *Doi Moi* became an ideological compromise between the forces of globalization and the anticolonialist and nationalist spirit upon which Viet Nam was founded. More recently, I believe Viet Nam is also moving into a "postdevelopmental stage," which Aihwa Ong characterizes as "a new stage of state engagement (rather than disengagement) with global agencies and capital" (200). Since the 1990s, Viet Nam has been a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and recently attained World Trade Organization (WTO) accession. In the postwar era, the Vietnamese government has aspired to be a future Asian Tiger and has restored itself variously to adapt to global capitalism and post–Cold War geopolitics. These new reformulations of state governance, surveillance, and repressions require that feminists reconsider the ways in which gender relations and women's bodies are being reimagined in Vietnamese film and visual culture, as well as within the sphere of the everyday.

Made in 2004, the film *Long-Legged Girls* stands as a compelling case study for the analysis of the transformations that have been wrought within the spheres of state policy and popular culture. A privately funded film, it exemplifies the current metamorphoses in Vietnamese cinema and its political economy, signifying the trend toward commercial filmmaking and coproductions within the country's impoverished film industry. Marked by world cinema's influences, this transnational product is further enhanced by its English-language subtitles on the DVD version, which ensure its legibility and translatability in different contexts. Within the frames of the film, moreover, the sexualized images of young men and women accommodate popular taste and lend the film a more global and commercial appeal. Vu Ngoc Dang's blockbuster employs objectifying images of both men and women in a manner that cannot easily be dismissed by feminist film critics. I see the objectification of body parts in the film as a gesture that produces queer points of identification, which become particularly potent within a state that tries to regulate desire and cultivate an appreciation amongst youth for the wartime sacrifices that define twentieth-century Vietnamese history. Further, *Long-Legged Girls* constructs an array of subjectivities rarely found in Vietnamese and Vietnamese diasporic cinemas. As such, it challenges the cultural scripts provided to youth in contemporary Viet Nam. Traveling fluidly outside of the country as "low culture," the film also usefully

tests the boundaries of gendered behaviors and cultural norms for multiple audiences.

The following sections interrogate the acts of consumption located within and surrounding Vu Ngoc Dang's *Long-Legged Girls*, stressing the politics of looking between same-sex subjects and the conspicuous consumption of technology that enables these looking relations to occur within the film. Focusing on the visualization of body parts in *Long-Legged Girls*, I explore the film's queer representations of gender and sexuality as part of its bid for the youthful spectator's attention and pleasure. In doing so, I cite instances of the articulation of female desires in the narrative and argue for the film's critical import in relation to the conceptions of the female gaze. My conclusion discusses the imbrication of sexuality in Viet Nam within the cultural context of the country's phase of rapid economic development. Finally, the essay's objective is to point to more innovative ways of looking at Vietnamese filmic texts. The historical juncture at which the country finds itself demands that the emerging study of Vietnamese films rigorously consider the state's flexible strategies in governance,[3] its transforming film industry, the influences of and on youth culture, and the shifting notions of gender and sexuality that mark contemporary social relations.

Sexing the City: Technology, Desire, and Long Legs

In the same year as *Long-Legged Girls* was released, *Memories of Dien Bien Phu* was also shown in theaters, making very little profit at the box office. A lavish movie, costing about $900,000.00 to make, *Memories of Dien Bien Phu* served to commemorate the nation's victory against the French in 1954. Head of the Viet Nam Feature Film Company, Nguyen Van Nam consequently lamented the loss of money and the corrupting influence of commercial demands on Viet Nam's incipient cinema.[4] Vietnamese viewers, however, offer a different story. Box office receipts for commercial films expose the desire for films to reflect the tastes and trends of a growing community of urban moviegoers. Letters and commentaries in Vietnamese online and print magazines manifest an active, generative, and responsive imaginary underlying youth culture. On glossy forums singularly devoted to Vietnamese youth's growing preoccupation with cinema, the articles and blurbs about Viet Nam's film industry reveal an intense curiosity revolving around filmmaking, international cinema, and the star system.[5]

In order to situate the viewing practices of Viet Nam in the theater and at home, we must consider how clear lines are currently being drawn between "high" and "low" films by the state. As a result of rampant piracy, products flow illicitly through Viet Nam, with popular Hollywood and Asian cinematic imports remaining popular because their distribution is more accessible than that of indigenous films. The problem lies partially in the state's inability to enforce legal sanctions and its own tight hold on the country's cultural products.[6]

Because of its status as an ordinary commodity, *Long Legged Girls* has a popular currency outside Viet Nam, as it is free from any underlying taint of "politics." Within the Vietnamese diaspora, and particularly in the United States, the film's mobility and accessibility attest to changes in U.S.-Viet Nam relations. Since the lifting of the Trade Embargo between the United States and Viet Nam in 1994, the movement of capital, culture, and people has increased exponentially. The vociferousness with which Vietnamese cultural productions were once denounced as Communist propaganda within Vietnamese American communities has lessened slightly, depending on the nature and classification of the imported works. Popular cultural items, including fashion shows, theatrical comedies, and beauty pageants, circulate amongst the Vietnamese and in the diaspora more freely than ever before. In opposition to cultural forms that deal with *Realpolitik*, which are usually defined in masculinist terms, what is considered harmless "low culture" from Viet Nam has found a market in the overseas communities; conversely, Vietnamese American cultural products, such as the serialized extravaganza show *Paris by Night*, find an enthusiastic audience in the homeland. Within the digitized circuits of a black market economy, such multi-directional movements of transnational commodities signal the ways in which cultural politics are being refashioned by everyday consumers in multiple places, the distinctions of taste defying official demarcations of Vietnamese culture in both the homeland and diaspora.

Cultural elites and government officials have deemed the content of *Long-Legged Girls* as inherently apolitical and without value. I would like to contest precisely this perception. For amidst a crisis regarding national identity and moral value often lamented within Vietnamese public discourses, director Vu Ngoc Dang assigns virtue in his film to the youths of Ho Chi Minh City. The film speaks to modes of consumption that have provocative political implications for Vietnamese and diasporic viewers; its content alludes to the public fantasies of the youth population and elicits spectatorial identification with its gendered subjects on-screen. More specifically, the film eradicates

the question of war and history altogether, dealing fetishistically instead with the endless reproduction of images from television, photography, film, and cellular phone technology. Its glaring absence of flashbacks, a predominant feature of the Vietnamese feature films that preceded it, testifies to the film's express intent to be situated in the present moment.[7] This elision of Viet Nam's struggles with foreign invaders speaks to the country's overwhelmingly young population, the majority of whom are under twenty-five and who have no memory of the war that ended over thirty years ago. *Long-Legged Girls*' mobile camera movements, swooping angles, and MTV-style editing show a knowing sensibility, as well as a queer, cosmopolitan way of seeing and experiencing Ho Chi Minh City in the *Doi Moi* era.

Indeed, *Long-Legged Girls* derives its "cosmopolitanism" mostly from its metropolitan setting and stylish characters. The main story deals with the rise and fall of the fashion model, Thuy, whose values are called into question on the road to success. The country girl, who migrates to the city, realizes that she has lost herself in the pursuit of fame. She alienates her boyfriend and destroys her relationship with her older sister in the process. True to the trajectory of most romantic comedies, the movie concludes happily: Thuy returns to her sister's house, wherein her virtue is restored; she reconciles with her boyfriend; and the finale celebrates heterosexual coupledom.

Despite the heteronormative narrative, the film's introduction signals its extravagant play on sexuality between the three main characters. Undergirding the love story, or what superficially serves as the primary narrative, is a gay male fantasy that inaugurates both the film and its irreverent tone toward gendered identities. It opens with a rock musical video sequence that establishes the love triangle between the three characters: Khoa, Hoang, and Thuy. First, we see Thuy in a rural setting, atop a haystack as she hunts for something; the camera then swoops down so that we see the object of her pursuit: a baby pig. Abruptly, the camera cuts to a shot of two semi-naked men sleeping together in a closed room, one embracing the other. It is this intimate image of the two roommates, Khoa and Hoang, that the film repeats in its insistence to trouble the relationship between the two heterosexual leads. In a similar swinging action to Thuy's chasing of the pig, the camera plunges downward, as one of the men raises his leg to get up and take a shower. Due to the quick parallel editing, when the camera swoops down, the object of the spectators' "pursuit" in this scene becomes the man's genitals, as the camera gaze plays peek-a-boo with the covers and the anchoring of Hoang's leg. The invisibility of Hoang's sex, which, in essentialist terms, signals his

sexuality, is anxiously figured as unknowable; this ambiguity surrounding his object-choice keys in directly to the ways in which the opening sets up audience expectations for a male-to-male romance between the two roommates. For the spectator, the search for Hoang's sex—or his sexual orientation—becomes a challenge that is established from the start.

Further overlaying such shots is the catchy tune that becomes central in reading the queer-identified sequence. The scenes are further accented by the song's lyrics. Sung by a male singer named Aikia, the words revolve around notions of love, sex, and romance regarding a long-legged lover whose sex is never named ("Like the long legs I had dreamed of coming to see. For me to love."). The lyrics bring a dynamic coherency to the queer images put forth on screen, visualizing a moment of pleasure for the gay character, Khoa. As he is the only figure on screen, the lyrics work to articulate his fantasy. Image and sound cohere because of the ways in which Khoa's face consistently conveys pleasure throughout this sequence. Serene in sleep, the character's smiling face is intercut with shots of his roommate's dancing legs, buttocks, and body in the shower. One shot shows Hoang's gyrating half-nude body; then immediately after, another shot presents us with Khoa sleeping restfully. During these quick juxtapositions, the sexually explicit lyrics intoned are, "These long legs that came here many times, even if only in my dreams, I thank you for coming." Brightly lit and filling the screen for long moments of time, Khoa's expressions register the erotic desire that constitute the song's words.

These scenes are further endowed with meaning not merely because of the simultaneous emphases on the visual and aural registers underlying the shots, but also, because of the allusions to sexual dreams and fantasies they provide, functioning as they do at the level of wish fulfillment.[8] Drawing on the work of Freud and Metz, Teresa de Lauretis contends that popular cultural narratives hold great emotive value for spectators and thus serve as "public fantasies," since they "perform at the societal level and in the public sphere, a function similar to that of the private fantasies, daydreams and reveries by which individual subjects imagine their erotic, ambitious, or destructive aspirations" (304). In sleep and in his waking reality, Khoa's private fantasies and longing are projected on screen and are often situated within the space of the apartment and public sphere of the gym. These instances give way to a rare moment in Vietnamese film history: a depiction of homosexual desire, one that rivals the heterosexualized romance between the two lead actors. This sequence and others establish the play of and on sexual identities underlying the

narrative. As queer theorists of film have noted, notions of play, irony, and camp are central to the figuration of (mostly male) queerness on the filmic screen: "Playfulness is perhaps the crucial tool of queer theoretical practice which allows barriers and thresholds to be crossed, sexual and gender roles to be explored, and, importantly, the acknowledgement of the role of fantasy within different discourses" (Krzywinska 1995, 103). Briefly indulged on screen are, therefore, the subjective queer male fantasies of Khoa, a key player in the film who constitutes the third but crucial vector of a love triangle.

In the same way that the filmmaker Vu visualizes Khoa's desires, he also renders women's pleasures in looking but executes this circuitry of gazes in a more conventional manner. At the center of the film is the spectacle of women's bodies and specifically their legs, which are often fetishistically imaged on film. Because the film revolves around the fashion industry, it often presents images of photography and film equipment in the mise-en-scène to signal the milieu within which the film takes place and to comment meta-cinematically upon feminine performance and spectacle. Vis-à-vis the camera, we are afforded voyeuristic views of models undressing and of titillating shots of women's legs that stress a masculinist, heterosexual way of looking. This is most evident when the character of a top photographer, Dong Hai, is introduced for the first time and looks at the models and their bodies in the film. Through his point of view and an eyeline match, we see the model's long legs and witness the model's smile, which conveys her delight in being looked at.

Nevertheless, the camera is also used to highlight women's gazes at each other. Various forms of technology enable the looking relations that are instigated between women characters. Thoroughly engaged as well as implicated in the politics of looking, both women, though cast in the requisite roles of virtuous heroine and evil villain, possess contradictory and ambivalent desires that are significantly realized on film. Especially if *Long-Legged Girls* is placed amongst dominant Vietnamese and Vietnamese diasporic cinematic representations of female virtue and femininity, this becomes an imperative move. In contrast to how native women in indigenous and diasporic films represent anteriority and fixity, *Long-Legged Girls* shows Vietnamese women to be thoroughly modern in their mobile gazes as well as in their consumption and manipulation of technology.[9] Soon after she arrives in the city, Thuy happens upon a photo shoot in the street. Instantly, she becomes captivated by the top star of the fashion world, Xuan Lan. Shot in slow motion, the scene is marked by upbeat, cheerful music, the same music that will later be used to herald the arrival

of the new star, Thuy. Centralized in the shots, Xuan Lan and her movements are slowed down as she poses seductively for the photographer's/director's/spectator's gaze. Dressed as the quintessential woman in red, the centerfold-type poses the model enacts are tinged with an ironic performativity, as spectators witness the framing and objectification of the cliché of feminine "Oriental" beauty. Emphatically framed as the "woman-as-spectacle," the model paradoxically contains these notions of femininity by contradicting the conventions of Vietnamese female beauty with her dominatrix-like attributes.[10] Juxtaposed with these shots of a parodic femininity are shots of Thuy's covetous looks of desire and appreciation.

Though coded as envy and admiration for Xuan Lan's status as object-of-the-look, Thuy's looking contains a frisson of female-to-female desire that runs concurrently, especially given the other queer-identified sequence that preceded it. Much like the musical video sequence that begins the film, these scenes are excessive to the diegetic narrative. Framed as a (hetero)sexual object of desire, Xuan Lan nonetheless poses (homo)erotically for Thuy's female gaze as well as for the audience. Most conspicuously, "when the woman looks" in this film, as our heroine does often, her look is usually framed in a homosocial, yet eroticized gaze that is directed at other women and their body parts.[11] When Thuy looks with fascination upon a fashion show, for example, her looks of ecstasy and wonderment are accentuated in a sequence that cuts back and forth between the show and her apparent pleasures in beholding the spectacle of women's bodies. Scopophilic pleasures for women are simultaneously relayed and registered as deeply gratifying. Outside of this homoerotic subtext, Thuy's looking signifies a longing for status that consolidates class and access within a nexus of power relations, one that reflects back on how women are situated in a visual culture where their bodies are often objectified. When Xuan Lan returns the look, for instance, her gaze incriminates Thuy and effects a form of punishment for Thuy's queer, excessive identification with her. In a scene that takes place in an underground nightclub, Xuan Lan uses her Nokia cellular phone to humiliate Thuy by digitally capturing her performance within an illegal modeling show. Yet, the final look executed between Xuan Lan and Thuy shows a mutual understanding that indexes the kind of competitive and exploitative milieu in which the models are uncertainly positioned.

Significantly, the complicit looks amongst the women in *Long-Legged Girls* differ from the circuits of gendered looking in Vietnamese and Vietnamese diasporic films that utilize "woman" as a naturalized repository of tradition. In such films, she does not and cannot look

back. "High" cultural productions, like *Nostalgia for the Countryland* (1995) by Vietnamese director Dang Nhat Minh, have centralized female characters. Yet, in Dang's film, women serve as ciphers for a male subject, who alone possesses the capacity to narrate stories and capture images with his totalizing gaze. The timeless and feminized construction of Viet Nam can similarly be found in "high," artistic Vietnamese diasporic filmic productions, for example, Tony Bui's *Three Seasons* (1999) and Tran Anh Hung's *Scent of Green Papaya* (1993).[12] In such highly acclaimed works, "Vietnam" does not occupy synchronous temporality with the West.[13] Directed by an overseas male elite, diasporic imaginings of the country feature the homeland as a battleground for the struggles between tradition and modernity, socialism versus capitalism. These battles are often played out on native women's bodies, marked as authentic signifiers for the homeland.[14]

Though Vu Ngoc Dang is not known to be a gay director in Viet Nam, his second film, *Long-Legged Girls*, contains self-conscious representations of femininity, queerness, and female desires that set it radically apart from other films. The most prominent features of the film are the politics of looking between same-sex subjects, the conspicuous consumption of technology by women, and the contemporaneity of Viet Nam that pervade it. Unlike other works that construct an essential "Vietnam," *Long-Legged Girls* demands a sense of co-temporality for the country, drawing upon a notion of present time that runs counter to the ways that Viet Nam has been reified in Vietnamese nationalist discourses as a country with a tragic but glorious past. The film proclaims Ho Chi Minh City's modernization and technological progress and in so doing, promotes an exciting urbanity not only to the Vietnamese population but to the Vietnamese diaspora as well.

Queering the State: The Legislation of Homosexuality in Viet Nam

Following Gayatri Gopinath's work on queer diasporic cinematic representations, I wish to place the queer subjectivities and the "impossible desires" engendered by this film within different contexts—in this case, Viet Nam and diaspora—to further explore their impact.[15] While such moments of queer desire are fleeting, these expressions are especially potent within an official context in Viet Nam that sees homosexuality primarily as a pathological sickness as well as a Western import and refuses to acknowledge homosexuality and bisexuality as

related to HIV and/or AIDS. While the film can certainly play up to the fears of Western contamination that might result from Viet Nam's "open door" policy, it also creates new viewing positions from which to contemplate the contemporaneity of Viet Nam—notably through the prism of gender and sexuality. *Long-Legged Girls* projects the libidinal and erotic desires of a youthful population in Viet Nam, a move that has rarely been activated in Vietnamese cinema.

Screened outside of Viet Nam, the film disrupts the Western paradigm of gay identity politics, as it demonstrates the ways in which constructions of sexuality and the private and public space are configured differently in Vietnamese society. The intimate "play" between Khoa and Hoang relies upon a culturally bound form of homoeroticism that can be publicly displayed, tactile, and sensual, especially within a "tolerant" heterosexist society.[16] Codes of masculinity in the public space are thus tied to men's social positions as husbands and fathers in a relational and societal hierarchy. As such, they are not related to sexual identity per se. Sexual identities in Viet Nam are not rooted within a set of sexual behaviors or sex acts. Instead, normative constructions of heterosexuality are intimately linked to concepts of marriage, parenthood, and the family, which can be perfunctorily performed within a public arena (Laurent 2005, 192). This slippage suggests that men who have sex with men (MSMs) may self-identify as heterosexual and occupy the symbolic placeholder of father within a social sphere.[17] Rather than "coming out of the closet" within a binary of visibility and invisibility, which has hegemonically been defined as *the* gay experience, queer subjects in Viet Nam often have to redefine normativities and renegotiate their identities within the public and private differently. Consequently, sexual relations and/or intimate gestures between the sexes can arise within private spaces, despite societal constraints and gendered expectations. Though I do not mean to ahistoricize the wide range of homosocial and homoerotic acts that occur in Viet Nam, I do want to emphasize this fluid notion of sexuality, the ways in which it becomes envisaged in this film, and the implications it has for its viewing subjects in multiple contexts.

For diasporans, queering the modern Vietnamese home overturns the reified notion that the homeland is invested with an anteriority and authenticity which the diaspora can only mirror as a false copy.[18] In the Vietnamese context, the film imagines what has not yet been codified in legal terms, since homosexuality has "never been illegal in Vietnam" ("Frank" 1).[19] Within this fluid field of social relations, different subjectivities can go unmarked under the radar of a repressive

regime and can thus clear a space for the contestation of hegemonically defined gendered and sexualized identities. Though not an ideal space, and certainly not one that represents a sexual Utopia as "Asia" is sometimes figured, it is still important to note that for the Vietnamese state, this field of social relations is exceedingly difficult to delimit and manage.

Thus, in 1998 in the Mekong Delta, two lesbians, Cao Tien Duyen, twenty, and Hong Kim Huong, thirty, were married in a public ceremony with about hundred guests in attendance. At first, the local authorities denied the certification of marriage but did not know what else to do with the two women. Three months later, the National Assembly decided to ban gay marriages. Soon after in June, local officials visited the two women's home and emerged with a signed affidavit that the women no longer see each other. The appalling punishment was exacted because of the ceremony's public nature and the two women's justifiable need for the visible and legal recognition of their relationship within the communal and civic domains. Authorities were more disturbed, it seems, because of the visibility of the event, the public attention it claimed, and the civic reinscriptions it demanded. At a very basic level, this event exposes the sheer invisibility of lesbians and undecideability of female desire within Vietnamese medical discourses and studies on Vietnamese sexuality, dominated as they are by analyses of female prostitution, sex trafficking, and HIV/AIDS. However, it also illustrates the fact that queer subjects are still very much positioned within a field of state surveillance and that disciplinary measures certainly exist for those who defy social and cultural codes, if not legal regulations. The women's desire for visibility in this case cannot be seen as an ascription to a Western model of "coming out." It demonstrates instead how queer subjects in Viet Nam, marked by class and always already restricted as heteronormative national subjects in the public space, are currently negotiating the prospect of cultural visibility and performing gender in different spaces.

As a highly consumable commodity, *Long-Legged Girls* reorients the politics of consumption by carrying out an important cultural and political work that crosses national boundaries. Largely seen as a vacuous form of "low" culture in Viet Nam's struggling film industry, Vu Ngoc Dang's *Long-Legged Girls* is an undoubtedly glossy but thoroughly self-conscious catalogue of city spaces, urban sexualities, and gendered identities. My analysis has focused on "low" popular culture, yet I do not intend to celebrate a postmodern, globalized, and sexualized identity that travels across borders freely. Rather, the emphases on temporality, space, and sexualities present in *Long-Legged Girls* are

locally specific and speak to a key segment of the Vietnamese population within contemporary times, specifically in the *Doi Moi* era. The focus upon urban youths is especially timely, as public discourses in Viet Nam manifest deep anxieties about a population, which does not intimately apprehend the country's history of sacrifice and war.

Because of the "absence" of politics enacted by *Long-Legged Girls*, audiences in the Vietnamese diaspora can also access the film locally. Starkly different from dominant Western representations of Viet Nam as primarily a site of tragedy and "country of war," images of cosmopolitan Ho Chi Minh City predominate in the film. It shows a city that has been made over by transnational corporations and joint ventures from countries such as Korea and Japan. Through the film's evacuation of Viet Nam's history of war, this global city reverberates with joint-productions and economic collaborations that mark Viet Nam's new economy within the twenty-first century.

Returning to the questions that frame this article, I end this study with an emphasis upon the transnational capital that has transformed Viet Nam's economy and cinema industry, stressing the role of the state and the ways that it currently negotiates with this capital in terms of its own citizenry. While promoting the potential of its young, English-speaking laboring classes to foreign countries, the government's authoritative powers continue to regulate the social behaviors of its young subject-citizens, whose speech and identities are constantly managed within public forums and spaces. Similar to Negar Mottahedeh's instructive study on the state and Iranian cinema, I would like to envision a transnational film feminism that is "alert to the materiality of culture and to the power differentials informed by the intervention of colonialism, imperialism, and global capitalism in national cultures" (1405).

Both Mottahedeh's analysis and the line of inquiry that begins this essay underline the ways in which transnational feminism can be used as a strategic practice in looking at cultural productions from the global south. Following Grewal and Kaplan's formulations of transnational feminism, it is crucial to attend to the history of colonialism and the developments of global capitalism occurring in these regions. Such are the key elements for a feminism that not only tracks the linkages between multinational corporate strategies and dominant nationalist agendas, but also critiques the notion of a "global sisterhood."[20] Indeed, the notion of a global alliance *continues* to undergird some Western feminist accounts of what is seen—from a sweeping perspective—as the defeat of socialism to realize equality in postwar Viet Nam.[21] To counter reductive analyses, we should not only interrogate past images

of "women warriors," but should understand that in the wake of these socialist failures, the Vietnamese re-negotiate every day what it means to be men and women as heterosexualized subjects within the public space. Moreover, drawing from the practices of transnational feminism, we can take into account the quotidian ways that globalization has affected the lives of the Vietnamese within the realms of local culture and popular cultural productions. For it is in this sphere that unscripted and unofficial enactments—like the sexual activities that occur in public parks and the congregations of youths who partake in unabashed consumerism—take place outside of and despite state surveillance.

As I am now situated back in the United States and peruse the aisles of Vietnamese movies that crowd the shelves in the marketplaces in northern and southern California, I am struck by the rapidity with which cultural products currently travel to and from Viet Nam within an ethnic economy, moving as they do through electronic routes that escape US legal sanctions and Vietnamese laws concerning piracy and copying. In straddling the local and the global, the national and the transnational, it is an underground network that signals the dynamic processes of the production of culture. Such a network reminds me of the imperative to not only interrogate Viet Nam's "high" cultural forms, which the population itself rarely has access to, but to also examine youth culture and popular culture in Viet Nam along with their intimate linkages with visual culture in an increasingly globalized world. As I have demonstrated with this essay, analyzing "low" culture means that we must also trace the political economy within which such products circulate, as evidenced by the historic changes that have occurred in Viet Nam and the various means by which the state accommodates global capitalism. In terms of textual analyses, it is important to consider constructions of both masculinity and femininity as well as the dual registers of gender and sexuality at play within Viet Nam's cinema. While the criticism on Vietnamese films heretofore has been formative, I believe it is not enough to analyze the cinema solely in terms of a post-*Doi Moi* historicization of Vietnamese movies, the figure of woman, or as authentic filmic documentations from Viet Nam.[22] What is striking about the films that are currently being produced by a young generation of mostly male Vietnamese directors is an evident preoccupation with mobility, hybridity, fluidity, and change, as they are manifested through the mutable Vietnamese body. In fact, comedic narratives about pregnant men, bodily transformations, and gender switching are increasingly popular and in concert with governmental discourses

about identity, sexuality, and gender.[23] To comprehensively account for these images, the promiscuous relay of looks contained within the films, and the unruly ways in which they circulate, the practice of transnational film feminism allows us to make those critical connections between the film industry and the state. At the same time, it enables us to map out the conditions of production for a changing body of filmic works and activate different ways of seeing Viet Nam.

Notes

1. On *Doi Moi*, see George Irvin, "Vietnam: Assessing the Achievements of *Doi Moi*," *Journal of Development Studies,* vol. 31, no. 5 (1995): 725–750 and Peter Boothryoud and Pham Xuan Nam, eds., *Socioeconomic Renovation in Viet Nam: The Origin, Evolution and Impact of Doi Moi* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000).
2. For an insightful discussion on these images, see Hue-Tam Ho Tai, "Faces of Remembering and Forgetting," in Hue-Tam Ho Tai (ed.), *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
3. Aihwa Ong's notion of "flexible strategies" is useful in my discussion of the Vietnamese state. She uses the term to describe transnational Chinese migrants in explaining the ways that they negotiate with the politics of the homeland within and outside of the diaspora. "Flexible strategies" is an apt phrase for describing how the Vietnamese government conducts itself. To ensure its own survival within the new order, the state has been defined by great mutability and gives "new valence to such strategies of maneuvering and positioning" (19). Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).
4. For more on the debates on commercial cinema in Viet Nam, see article at http://www.kfccinema.com/index.php?archive=1130636061&subaction=list-archive&go=archives.
5. Popular websites for cinephiles in Viet Nam reference two major sites: http://www.phim24g.net/Users/Home.aspx and http://www.moviesboom.com/.
6. While the entire series of *Friends* can be purchased at vendor stalls on the street, one cannot find the kind of films routinely promoted as exemplars of the country's "high" cultural forms, like Dang Nhat Minh's *Woman on the Perfume River* (1987) or Nguyen Thanh Van's critically acclaimed *Lives of Sand* (1993). Circulated instead at international film festivals and on U.S. university campuses, such films are permanently housed at the Viet Nam Film Institute in Ha Noi, where one can watch a two-hour film at $15.00/hour, an exorbitant price for most Vietnamese. In 2005, the Film Archives quoted this price to me.

7. I am referring to classic Vietnamese filmic texts, such as *Em Be Ha Noi* [*Girl from Ha Noi*] (1970), which relies on flashbacks to narrate a tragic past, most distinctly from a young girl's perspective. In fact, this film employs flashbacks within flashbacks as part of its complex narrative structure. Another important film is Dang Nhat Minh's *Co Gai Tren Song* [*Woman on the Perfume River*] (1984), which features flashbacks to emphasize the virtue of the prostitute-as-heroine. For an understanding of the ideological use of flashbacks in film, see Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989).
8. On the ways that MTV videos have a repetitive structure that is akin to dreams, see Marsha Kinder, "Music Video and the Spectator: Television, Ideology, and Dream," *Film Quarterly,* vol. 38, no. 1 (1984): 2–15. On how MTV videos appeal to a queer male visual aesthetic, see Steve Drukman, "The Gay Gaze, or Why I Want My MTV," in Paul Burston and Colin Richardson (eds.), *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men, and Popular Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995). Drukman argues: "MTV thus grants freedom to the gay (re)visioning of Mulvey's gaze, a freedom unsanctioned in mainstream cinema" (89).
9. I find Anne Friedberg's work provocative in the ways that she traces the female consumer's gaze in relation to shopping, tourism, and the cinema. Though situated in late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century France, her formulations of the female gaze and its mobility are linked with my project here because of the ways that Viet Nam is in the process of modernizing in the urban space. Funded by various transnational corporations, the constructions of cineplexes and high-rise malls pockmark the cityscapes in Viet Nam's present moment, permanently transforming the kinds of relationships that people have in relation to each other and their sense of space in the urban city. See Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
10. Mulvey's phrasing is key in describing how women's bodies are spectacularized in this film. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 835.
11. I borrow this phrase from Linda Williams's essay on the genre of horror and female spectators. Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks," in Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams (eds.), *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, (Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1984).
12. In a recent article, I discuss the looking relations that circulate in Tony Bui's *Three Seasons*. See Lan Duong, "Manufacturing Authenticity: The Feminine Ideal in Tony Bui's Three Seasons," *Amerasia,* vol. 31, no. 2 (2005): 1–19.
13. Throughout this essay, I put quotes around the word, "Vietnam," to signify the ways that the West has constructed Viet Nam in its imaginary.

Without the quotation marks and as two separate words, Viet Nam is used to denote the country in its contemporaneity.

14. On Tony Bui's *Three Seasons*, see my article. For a critique of Tran Anh Hung's work, particularly his use of women in film, see Carrie Tarr, "Tran Anh Hung as Diasporic Filmmaker," in Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee (eds.), *France and "Indochina": Cultural Representations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).
15. Analyzing Deepa Mehta's film, *Fire*, e.g., Gayatri Gopinath maps the contours of its impact in several contexts. Her analysis is instructive as it seeks to locate a queer female diasporic subjectivity in all of its travels. Reading across various fields of reception, Gopinath maintains that "multiple and contradictory meanings" are thus available to different viewerships but most especially, for a queer spectatorship (158). This remains a viable way to intervene in the fields of feminist studies, queer studies, and Asian American studies. She writes: "As images travel transnationally, they serve to provide a common visual vocabulary for queer spectators in disparate diasporic locations, one that reconciles not only the contradiction between queer images and heterosexual narrative, as White suggests, but also the contradiction between the space of the nation as implicitly heterosexual and the space of diaspora as foreign, inauthentic and indeed 'queer'" (113). I also find her point of examining popular culture for expressions of female desire useful, as it is within these sites that queer viewing strategies are possible and created (113). In this spirit, I wish to look for the sightings of female desire contained in *Long-Legged Girls*. This way of looking enables me to track the queer viewing strategies produced as a result of the film. Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005).
16. As Erick Laurent asserts, "Masculinity [in Viet Nam] is confirmed by marriage and parenthood, rather than explicit heterosexual behavior. Therefore, affection between men, physical contact, and even sharing a bed are socially acceptable, and not usually connoted with sexuality" (192). Erick Laurent, "Sexuality and Human Rights: An Asian Perspective," *Journal of Homosexuality,* vol. 48, no. 3/4 (2005): 163–225.
17. For more on sexuality in Viet Nam and MSMs, see Donn Colby, Nghia Huu Cao, and Serge Doussantousse, "Men Who Have Sex with Men and HIV in Vietnam: A Review," *AIDS Education Prevention,* vol. 16, no. 1 (2004): 45–54.
18. I am influenced on this point by the work of Jigna Desai on the cultural politics of India diasporic filmmaking. Desai discusses the ways in which the diaspora has been figured as a false simulacrum in the homeland when, in fact, the two sites are mutually constitutive (20). Jigna Desai, *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

19. Frank Proschan contends: "Vietnamese legal codes were typically influenced by then-contemporary Chinese codes, but when in 1740 the Ching Dynasty in China elaborated, "for the first time in Chinese history, punishment for sodomy between consenting adults" (Ng 1989, 76, cf. Meijer 1985), the Vietnamese did not follow suit, once again omitting any such prohibitions in the Nguyen Code that was promulgated soon after" (screen 1). During French colonialism, neither homosexuality nor homosexual behaviors were actually prohibited. This is still the case today. More recently, though, the government of Viet Nam has enacted frequent crackdowns against gay bars and other meeting places for gay men, especially since the state's pronouncement that homosexuality is a "social evil" in 2002.
20. Kaplan and Grewal posit that a transnational feminist practice must establish central links in the "understanding of postmodernity, global economic structures, problems of nationalism, issues of race and imperialism, critiques of global feminism and emergent patriarchies" (358). Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal, "Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies: Beyond the Marxism/Poststructuralism/Feminism Divides," in Norma Alarcón, Caren Kaplan, and Minoo Moallem (eds.), *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).
21. Western feminists, such as Arlene Eisen, Kathleen Barry, and Mary Ann Tétrault, have recently focused their attention on the conditions of women in Viet Nam. In their collective works, the recounting of the women's movement is predicated upon resistance and revolution and read in terms of the state versions of it, thus reifying by rehearsing this narrative in their respective works. Underlying such texts is a dependence upon a stable construction of history and a denial of Vietnamese women's agency in today's context. Kathleen Barry, ed., *Vietnam's Women in Transition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Arlene Eisen, ed., *Women and Revolution in Viet Nam* (London: Zed Books, 1984); Mary Ann Tétreault, "Women and Revolution in Vietnam," in Kathleen Barry (ed.), *Vietnam's Women in Transition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).
22. Essays by Kathryn McMahon and Dana Healy both focus upon the gender politics of recent Vietnamese films but in ways that elide the representation of masculinity and the relations between genders on film. Kathryn McMahon, "Gender, Paradoxical Space, and Critical Spectatorship: The Works of Dang Nhat Minh," in S. Sarjer and E. N. De (eds.), *Trans-Status Subjects: Gender In the Globalization of South and Southeast Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Dana Healy, "Laments of Warriors' Wives: Re-Gendering the War in Vietnamese Cinema," *South East Asia Research,* vol. 14, no. 2 (2006): 231–259. I would like to note that Mark Bradley's and Gina Marchetti's articles are particularly useful and informative. However, by classifying Vietnamese films under the rubric of "revisionist" filmmaking and within the genre of melodrama,

respectively, their methodological approaches to these films neglect how the films can purport to say otherwise, since the grouping of films under Western systems of classifications neglects the critical strategies that come before and after these films. This presentist mode of looking at Vietnamese films underlines the inaccessibility of Vietnamese films that have only recently circulated in the United States along film festival routes. Mark Bradley, "Contests of Memory: Remembering and Forgetting the War in Contemporary Vietnamese Cinema," in Hue-Tam Ho Tai (ed.), *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Gina Marchetti, "Excess and Understatement: War, Romance, and the Melodrama in Contemporary Vietnamese Cinema," *Genders* 10 (1991): 47–74.

23. The issue of transgenders and identity is currently being debated in the state. Although it is too early to tell whether the law will pass, a recently drafted decree would allow transgendered people to assume another identity once they undergo a sex operation. Of course, this is in keeping with the rigidity of gender norms, since the government disallows gays and lesbians the same prerogative. Within the realms of popular entertainment, the first transsexual singer was permitted to release her musical CD. See respective articles at the following websites: http://vietq.wordpress.com/2006/10/10/viet and http://www.vietnamartbooks.com/articles/article.html?id=1399.

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Part III

Modalities of Foreignness

Chapter 10

Palatable Foreignness

Katarzyna Marciniak

How I Became Transnational

The trajectory of my journey to the "transnational" designator has thus far structured my academic life in the United States. Before I became "transnational," however, I was first "foreign" and then "international." During my graduate days in the early 1990s, the notion of an "international" student was not yet in prevalent use. Back then, it was not a part of the "politically correct" academic vocabulary; students from other countries on my campus were officially referred to as "foreign." When I started a doctoral program on a different campus, my formal identity shifted to "international" student.[1] During the time of my institutional "foreignness," I remember how the Foreign Student Coordinator, a woman who was assigned to help us navigate various formalities pertaining to our legal status, kept telling us, in well-meaning tones and gestures, that "we are the ambassadors of our cultures," and that we should proudly present those cultures to the rest of the campus community. We were politely advised to "behave appropriately" and encouraged to accept that, as individuals, we were representatives of our respective "home" cultures. This, we were told, endowed us with a sense of importance and responsibility. Ironically, our Foreign Student Coordinator was a foreigner herself, already well trained in discourses of acceptability.

On one level, this kind of coaching might appear sensible and well intentioned as it aims at protecting foreign nationals through offering them appropriate codes of behavior in a new cultural environment. Simultaneously, however, such coaching rests on stale and essentialist notions of the logic of national identity. That is, this logic assumes that the place of birth binds the specific body ontologically and epistemologically in stable and unshakable ways: in terms of national affinities and loyalties, cultural and social knowledge, restrictive notions of belonging, and clear-cut presumptions of ethnic identity. In short, this

is what Trinh Minh-ha, for example, might call the reduction of difference to "the simplicity of essences" (Trinh 2001, 930). I did not know that such "simplicity of essences" would haunt me in very intimate ways.

In 1998, as a fresh Ph.D. graduate, I was offered a tenure-track job in Transnational Literature. This was the time when the term "transnational" did not yet penetrate job listings; while nowadays one sees "transnational feminism" listed frequently on Women's Studies postings, back then it was a novelty. The history of this position is also worth mentioning. It used to be classified under the "International Literature" rubric and it belonged to a Chinese scholar who taught Asian and Asian-American literature until she retired. When the department debated how to word the job listing, one faculty member, a particularly astute theoretician, managed to convince the entire department that "international" was already passé and that they should advertise "transnational" instead. As I visited the campus as a job candidate, several faculty members mentioned to me jokingly that the department was not sure how to understand "transnational literature" and that they collectively decided that they would find this out from the candidates. In other words, candidates were expected to educate the department. This was a challenge, to be sure, but also one that gave candidates considerable power.

My job talk and my individual meetings with faculty generated provocative questions about my scholarly identity and my work. Some of them, covertly, had to do with my specific alienhood.[2] That is, as a white Eastern European woman, I would not classify for a "diversity hire" and hence could not be easily associated with the field related to my ethnoracial identity. In other words, I posed a dilemma: as a Slavic woman, I was not trained in Slavic Studies but in English and Film Studies. But the most pressing issue, as expressed by several faculty members in the audience after my presentation, had to do with the topic of my talk: issues of displacement, dislocation, migration, abjection of the foreigner. There was a worry that the material I would teach and the issues these "transnational" texts would pose would be "too alienating for our students," as one person said. "How will you make these issues of exile and dislocation relevant to our local students?" "Don't you think that making our students aware that they are already familiar with exile because, one could say, they are exiles themselves since they had left their homes for college, would be an effective strategy? You can also argue that we are *all* exiles, right? This way, they might be able to at least begin to relate to the concepts

you would bring in." Lying, I answered, "Thank you for this useful suggestion. Yes, that would be a great pedagogical strategy."

In a simple discursive gesture, I presented myself as a palatable foreigner who was willing to engage complex issues of foreignness, alterity, and otherness as familiar and easy for my future students' consumption. What I hid was my surprise about the persistence of the old conceptual push toward seeing exile as an existential, universal condition, a reading particularly troublesome because I had carefully situated my job presentation within specific historical, racial, sexual, and ethnic contexts.

In the end, I was hired for the position, but, in the history of this department, it was a hire that underwent an unusual process. After my campus visit (which candidates on the job market understand to be their last performance), I received a phone call from the chair of the committee. I heard that the committee was very interested in my candidacy but, because there were still questions, they would like to conduct a supplementary phone interview. This was going to be in addition to the usual round of events that included an interview at the Modern Language Association's annual convention and later a campus visit. I anxiously agreed to it and, when it was over, wondered about its validity, purpose, and usefulness as I was asked by the same committee members the same questions I had already addressed. To the best of my knowledge, nobody else in the department was hired in this fashion. Only in retrospect was I able to ponder this unusual situation critically. I read it as a process of making sure that the department was hiring a safe, amicable, and palatable alien.

This backstage history serves not so much as a story of my personal grievance (though, I admit, watching the hiring process over the years, I wondered many times what was wrong with me that my candidacy warranted extra scrutiny), but rather as a platform to open up a discussion of institutional discourses vis-à-vis certain kinds of "foreignness" that uneasily translate into already validated paradigms of knowledge. Over the years, the department hired an African scholar to teach African literature, an African-American scholar to teach African-American literature, and so on. The correspondence between their ethnoracial identities and their fields of expertise was transparent. Also, these scholars were our "diversity hires" so the official ethos was that their "color" diversified this traditionally white department and we were gaining "authentic" specialists. While their "essences" were read as undeniably manifest and trustworthy, it was my "essence" that was dubious. This ambivalence also had to do with

the feminist aspect of my "transnationality," a combination that was particularly unusual because of my Eastern European background.

Who Can Be a Transnational Feminist?

As Anikó Imre writes in chapter 8 of this volume,

> feminists from and working in the defunct "second world," one of those spaces of perpetual invisibility, are familiar with the discomfort of being forced to choose between first and third-world identifications. The difficulty of classifying East European women and feminisms within this binary has led to a great deal of difficulty and multiple misunderstandings in the budding communication between women from postcommunist countries and feminists elsewhere.

This difficulty is, no doubt, exacerbated by the fact that the field of transnational feminist studies has developed in the United States through radical interventions of mainly "women of color" whose work has already altered the restrictive frameworks of nation-centric studies arguing for various models of feminist practices across national, racial, ethnic, and class lines. The collective work of Jacqui Alexander, Gloria Anzaldúa, Ella Shohat, Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, Chandra Mohanty, and Gayatri Spivak forms a crucial legacy for those of us who pursue feminist work in transnational contexts. This work shows the need to think outside the idea of "nation" by taking into account migrancy, immigration, diaspora, and displacement vis-à-vis studies of globalization, postcoloniality, and corporate logics of transnationality[3]—crucial experiences and developments that mark the present era. This work has also inspired feminist discussions of difference, persuasively arguing against earlier models of "global sisterhood" and "global feminism," models that too often relied upon similarities rather than differences to create cross-cultural alliances.

However, the way these critical interventions have thus far translated themselves into new models of praxis (who can be hired for a position in transnational feminism, who can teach courses in this field with authority, whose identities are chosen to speak about these issues) has worked through subtle operations of the politics of selective exclusions and inclusions. Denise Roman, a social scientist and a native of

Romania, summarizes the impact of these institutional operations:

> Transnational feminism and discoursing about gendered practices of globalization appear to be the most widespread feminist theoretical frameworks in the women's studies departments across North America. To the student of Eastern Europe, however, this is a closed scholarship, limited only to histories and geographies that circumvent Eastern Europe, as if communism did not fall there seventeen years ago, as if women from Eastern Europe do not have an existence or a voice. I am not talking about the absence of a voice in general, since rigorous studies about Eastern European women's lives do exist in some departments of anthropology, sociology, history, political science, and Slavic studies. I am talking about those very institutional outlets (women's studies departments) that should have embraced and encouraged the expression of Eastern European women's issues and narratives through transnational feminism, after more than fifty years of confinement behind the Iron Curtain. (Roman 2006)

Is it not the challenge, then, to probe various institutional impulses behind the exclusions Roman refers to and work toward stretching the conceptual and geographic limits of transnational feminisms? Pedagogy, it seems to me, is one of those crucial venues through which such stretching might effectively take place. That is, offering our students diverse narratives representing women's lives in transnational frameworks can reinforce new models that will allow us to move beyond the first-world/third-world dynamic, beyond what Ella Shohat refers to as "an additive approach." Shohat defines this approach as "merely piling up increasingly differentiated groups of women from different regions and ethnicities—all of whom are projected as presumably forming a coherent yet easily demarcated entity." Such additive operations, she writes, have "women of the globe neatly neighbored and stocked, paraded in a United Nations-style 'Family of Nations' pageant where each ethnically marked feminist speaks in her turn, dressed in national costume" (Shohat 2002, 68). To counteract the additive approach, Shohat proposes a "relational feminism," which is a practice that would strive to forge "dialogical relation within, between, and among cultures, ethnicities, and nations" (69).

But how does one practice such a relational feminism in the classroom, teaching film and other media? How do we base individual courses on this idea? How might we revise curricula? The pedagogical challenge here would not be simply to add to the already validated paradigms of knowledge voices from the socialist and now

the post-socialist regions as "extras" that would allow our syllabi to have an imaginary vision of "wholeness." Rather, a more productive pedagogical incentive would be to find ways to build comparative frameworks through which our students might engage the dialogical relations Shohat speaks about.

Even if such a proposition sounds invigorating, the questions it raises center on the introduction of new pedagogical methods and on the willingness to open up one's thinking to new conceptual shifts. As I argued elsewhere, the field of transnational feminist studies declares its "global scope" but its very idea of globality seems restrictive, circumventing Eastern Europe.[4] Part of this restriction is motivated, I believe, by a persistent treatment of "Europe" as an organic whole, an unconsciously stubborn resistance to pierce this model of understanding, to recognize the historical specificity of Eastern European whiteness within a larger European context. I use the notion of "unconscious resistance" here strategically to underscore the point that this monolithic vision of Europe is so deeply ingrained in Western cultural imaginary that even most progressive feminist thinkers fall into its trap.[5]

Relational Feminism in a Classroom

I have taught a variation of a "Feminist Politics and Global Media" senior seminar for a number of years. I designed this course as grounded in diverse transnational perspectives, discourses of migration, immigration, and foreignness. The list of films and other media texts has been evolving, often following my new research interest, but each time my syllabus has attempted to honor comparative, relational structures and a critical framework of "transnational encounters." My students have typically majored in English, Women Studies, Film Studies, and Communication, and they have been predominantly white Anglo-Americans. Occasionally, I have in my classroom a few students of color and members of the LGBT community.

The worry that some members of my department expressed during my hiring process about the difficulty and alienating effects of the texts I would teach was indeed not unfounded. Many a time my students have found my cinematic choices for the class demanding, and they have often complained that the films we discuss are "hard to get into" and impossible to identify with.[6] In this essay, however, I focus on a particular version of this course, Foreign Women in Contemporary U.S. Cinematic Contexts, for which I selected films that privilege female protagonists of various ethnoracial positions, and of various

immigrant backgrounds and histories as, again, I consciously wanted to move beyond a first/third-world axis. To my surprise, this particular course had an opposite effect on my students: it offered narrative seduction and spectatorial delight. The spontaneous acceptance of the chosen representations of female foreigners depicted by a variety of films situated with the U.S. context prompted me to engage my students in a reflection on the way contemporary U.S. cinema overwhelmingly imagines interactions of the dominant culture with its "others." I wanted my students to think about their own ease as spectators; I pushed us to theorize specific spectatorial expectations vis-à-vis representations of female foreignness embedded in Western imaginary through a particular cultural training that affects us all.

Although I approach pedagogical experiences through specific case studies and textual close readings of three films—Joel Zwick's *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002), James L. Brooks's *Spanglish* (2004), and Theresa Connelly's *Polish Wedding* (1998)—my broader goal is to use these filmic examples as a starting point for a series of reflections on the paradigm I call "palatable foreignness" that, in this case, pertains to the representation of Greek-American, Mexican, and Polish-American female identities. As my students have shown me, a Western gaze (or more specifically a U.S. gaze) is visually and conceptually "trained" in particular ways, already accustomed to certain kinds of onscreen female foreignness ready for spectatorial visual consumption: nonthreatening, sentimentalized, often "comforting" in its awkwardness, shyness, and "otherness," what Trinh calls "the exotic and erotic feminine ethnic minority" (Trinh 1991, 115). In other words, the difference is scripted as a readily palatable "easy viewing" which rarely produces modes of address that might effectively strip a Western gaze from its customary Eurocentric ocular comfort.

Coco Fusco, an interdisciplinary artist, offers a useful point to further this discussion, claiming that the prevailing mode of experiencing other cultures on the part of Anglo-Americans is through commodification and consumption. Referring to eating "ethnic food," or shopping, she argues that "ethnicity and otherness become a vicarious experience of sentimentality and emotion, and a reassertion of power through the act of consuming" (Sawchuk 1992, 29). Such a critique exposes subtle operations of the logic of difference that Western culture, through its power of representation, instills in all of us: always teaching palatable and safe encounters with otherness, validating experiences of other cultures with the purpose of enriching our own multicultural education.

Through my readings, I wish to probe this mode of representation and its nuances precisely because it has been so effective, pleasurable, and seductive for my students. As I suggest, the seduction works through garnering spectatorial sympathy by locating narrative loci in the normative, patriarchal family structures but, even more importantly, by reinforcing first-world whiteness as the governing diegetic principle that, in a benevolent gesture, may accept foreignness as long as the dominance of this particular whiteness is not upset and as long as foreignness is treated like a "colorful bonus." Additionally, the particular version of female foreignness I discuss here is appealing either because of its healing powers or relational usefulness or both.

Foreigners as Healers

My Big Fat Greek Wedding, a romantic comedy deemed "the most economically successful ethnic film in American cinematic history" (Georgakas 2003, 36),[7] as with many audiences around the world, was amazingly popular among my students.[8] The protagonist of the film, Toula Portokalos (Nia Vardalos), is not a foreigner per se. Greek-American and born in Chicago, she identifies herself, however, solely as Greek and, from the onset of the narrative, underscores her presupposed cultural difference for the audience: "When I was growing up, I knew I was different. The other girls were blond and delicate. And I was a swarthy six-year-old with sideburns. I so badly wanted to be like the popular girls . . . eating their Wonder Bread sandwiches." A flashback shows a young Toula at school during lunch, sitting separately and eating *moussaka*. The "blond and delicate" girls tease and humiliate her by making fun of her food; *moose-ka-ka*, as they gleefully mispronounce it, is a deliberate word play meaning to associate Toula with her "ethnic" and "weird" food. *Moose-ka-ka* is the children's "bathroom talk"; it conflates Toula's food with feces and draws a boundary between normalcy and cleanliness ("white" Wonder Bread) and dirt, filth, and disgust ("brownish" *moussaka*).[9]

Through the link to the "ethnic" food, Toula's "foreignness" is thus associated with abjection right from the beginning. While the mode of representation of foreigners-as-abjects has long been present in the films that depict migrants or immigrants in the United States,[10] Toula's positionality was particularly important for our class discussions because her story documents the quick shift from the repulsive other to the enticing, desirable, and useful exotic.

Toula is a thirty-year-old, single daughter of Greek immigrants who desperately wish she would marry soon. She works in her family's Greek restaurant in Chicago and is represented as an "ugly duckling"—her visual inadequacy is stressed by her frumpy clothes, unflattering hairdo, thick and clunky eyeglasses, and her physical "heaviness": all of these qualities cast her as stereotypically unattractive—"Frump Girl" as she calls herself. In the introductory scenes, she moves awkwardly through the restaurant space, prefers not to be noticed. Her clumsiness and inadequacy register as predictable: she is set up as a woman in need of rescue—both from her "frump" phase and her solo existence.[11]

The film thus initially displays Toula's "foreignness" as aesthetically displeasing, burdensome, and painful. Even before she embarks on the journey of the vigorous makeover, the audience has already received enough clues to conclude that Toula must radically change if she ever wants to become professionally, socially, and romantically successful. It is, therefore, obvious that to attract Ian Miller, a non-Greek boyfriend, a *xeno*, as Toula's father playfully calls him, reversing the dominant idea of foreignness, she needs to "redo" herself entirely and become, as one reviewer put it, "a radiant Hellenic butterfly" (Kehr 2002). Only when remodeled via contact lenses, make-up, new stylish hairdo, colorful clothing, and discreet jewelry will she stand a chance to be noticed by Ian. In other words, only through an encounter with and validation of Anglo whiteness, her foreignness can be made palatable, somewhat "healed." As my students aptly observed, she herself needs to be healed first before she can become a successful healer to Ian later.

On the one hand, the film uses Toula's "Greekness" as an ostensible marker of her "ethnic" identity—accented by the attention to Greek food, music, dancing, religious rituals, customs, extended family's noisiness, and their comic theatrics. On the other hand, the film also places Toula within a scheme of a generic heteronormative femaleness that, as in a typical Hollywood narrative, must be improved to fit the hegemonic standards of beauty and female desirability. In other words, despite all the diegetic markers of Greekness, the film ultimately casts Toula as a "universal" woman (i.e., white, straight, and middle class) so that the Western gaze is once again reassured in its expected visual consumption. One reviewer confirms this point: "It's a strange thing about stories that are specific and true. Somehow, in their truth, they become universal. With a few changes, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* could be a story of any family in which people eat well, get loud, and carry on" (LaSalle 2003). Precisely. But to achieve

this level of universal appeal, Toula's difference must not be too different; it needs to be toned down to find spectatorial acceptance.

My Big Fat Greek Wedding not only offers a "safe" portrayal of a Greek-American femaleness, but it also projects a celebration of palatable "multiculturalism." The film's aspiration to cast itself as an offering of multicultural conciliation creates an additional critical twist regarding the discussion of foreignness. This is an especially intriguing point given that, as Dan Georgakas writes, "numerous Greek American civic organizations and Greek American newspapers have heralded *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* as an ethnic breakthrough" (2003, 37).

At first, cultural differences between Ian's Anglo parents and Toula's family are set up as polarized, beyond any reconciliation. Through the aesthetics of the mise-en-scène and sound, the narrative binarizes the families, offering a much stronger emotional proximity to the Portokalos. The Millers are introduced as uptight, stiff, reserved, and bland, emotively uninteresting. They are marked by excessive concern for propriety and etiquette: at one point when Toula and Ian visit his parents to announce their engagement, the meeting is full of uncomfortable silence and bodily stillness, all punctuated by the ambient sound of classical music. By contrast, we frequently see Toula's flamboyant family dancing, drinking, enjoying food, being at ease, loud, and vivacious. After the two families have met, Toula's father despairs over a sense of seemingly irreducible differences between them: "They look at us like we're from the zoo. They different people."

Additionally, the Millers are represented as oblivious to any sense of cultural differences around them. This obliviousness manifests itself, for example, when both parents are unable to recall whether the father's former secretary was Greek, Armenian, or Guatemalan, implying, of course, that all "foreigners" are alike—exotic beings from elsewhere to whom they can only relate through the paradigm of *usefulness* in the employer-subordinate relationship. But this representation of the Millers as highly proper yet awkward, and unable to comprehend Ian's desire to marry Toula, a woman of a "foreign" background, does not compellingly dislocate their position of privileged whiteness, even though the audience has been repeatedly shown that this particular model of whiteness is quite unattractive—as Toula's father says, "So dry. That family is like a piece of toast."

The "curing" of differences, however,—the diegetic climax of "multicultural euphoria," to use Ali Behdad's and Laura Elisa Pérez's phrase (1995, 70)—comes at the end during the wedding scene.

Toula's father, who specializes in finding a Greek root in any word, delivers a toast in which he tries to rectify Toula's outmarriage. He explains that "Miller" goes back to the Greek word for apple, and "Portokalos" derives from oranges. Hence, he concludes: "We all different. But, in the end, we all fruit."

With this idea—that, despite cultural differences, we are all the same after all, all humans, all alike—the film sells a particular version of multiculturalism, one based on the logic of homogeneity and sameness; one that functions as a safe panacea rather than an actual, risky engagement of difference. The narrative uses its multicultural appeal that symbolically functions, to quote Nawal el Saadawi, as "an exhibition, a spectacle for the pleasure of others to see, to consume" (1997, 122). The fusion of the two families, thus, comes across as progressive, inevitable—all initial clashes or frictions discursively erased and any sense of cultural difference made, ultimately, insignificant.

The spectators have already been prepared for this contention—multiculturalism that results from a welcoming "addition" of colorful and splashy Greekness to the dominant culture—when, at the start of their romance, Toula attempts to explain to Ian the tangled difficulties of their potential dating: "I am Greek.... No one in my family has ever gone out with a non-Greek before. No one." Foreshadowing Toula's father's wedding toast, Ian explains: "We are not different species. Yes, we come from different backgrounds... and, hey, here's some news about my life, to this point. It's boring." The irony here is manifold yet nuanced: Ian speaks from a privileged position (he is a well-to-do member of a dominant culture), yet describes his life as dull. Compellingly, he sees Toula as his healer, as someone whose presence can alter his existential dullness. She and her Greek family become an invigorating "spicy" stimulation for him, accessible via an intercultural romantic adventure, confirming bell hooks's contention that "within commodity culture, *ethnicity becomes spice*, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (1992, 21, my emphasis). As Ian tells Toula, "I came alive when I met you," stressing the symbolic importance of enlivening the dominant culture through multicultural encounters as long as, of course, the core of this culture remains unmovable.

Foreigners as Moral Cleaners

By contrast, *Spanglish*, a story of an upper middle-class white family in Los Angeles and their Mexican maid, Flor, takes a different

approach by showing an Anglo family not simply bored and in need of "enlivening" but diseased and in need of fast moral repair. And the disease in the family is not ambivalently dispersed but quickly recognizable as it is gendered and localized: the mother, Debra (Téa Leoni), is its nucleus. The maternal, represented as obsessively narcissistic, neurotic, self-absorbed, and forever consumed by self-doubt, is unequivocally condemned by the narrative as a threat to the well-being of her family, particularly to her young daughter, Bernice, whose self-confidence she undermines over and over again.

Spanglish deliberately avoids showing the female foreigner as abjected, and instead it shifts the feelings of aversion and repulsion onto the white woman who is relegated to the role of an affluent and privileged emotional abject, a woman who cares more about her jogging, yoga, and shopping than about her children or her husband. Debra's overdetermined representation as a perfectly fit, "hard" but heartless body functions as a synecdoche for the ills of a contemporary American family and reveals a particular ideological investment in showing how the family structure "has gone bad" because white women-mothers have traded all the traditional values for self-indulgence and, as a result, suffer from feelings of guilt and inadequacy. This self-indulgence is evocatively depicted in the scene showing a sexual encounter with her husband (Adam Sandler): while he lies on his back (in the conventional "female" position), Debra is on top of him, consumed only with her own pleasure.

The sanctioned maternal—caring, sensitive, protective, and loving—is not, however, absent from the narrative but displaced onto Debra's husband, John. Like Debra's "spoiled" femininity, his masculinity too is problematic: he is of an effeminate, brittle sensibility to the point of weepiness; in the absence of a traditional woman, he "becomes" her. One of the top chefs in the city, he not only knows how to help his daughter with homework but how to cook as well. As Flor's daughter, Cristina, who narrates the film in the course of writing her application to Princeton, remarks about her mother's initial inability to relate to John: "To someone with a first-hand knowledge of a Latin *macho*, he seemed to have emotions of a Mexican… woman."

Spanglish thus aligns John with Flor (Paz Vega); the title points to a fantasized, "transnational" hybridity, which suggests that John's delicate masculinity, invested in the familial, can be properly nurtured by a noble foreigner such as Flor. Her foreignness, unlike in Toula's case, is not a burden and a site of pain, but a source of her pride, unselfishness, and dignity. She is coded as the narrative panacea and a lofty

model to emulate, all in direct contrast to "unpalatable" Debra. Deeply protective of her daughter whom she desperately wants to shelter from assimilating into Anglo culture and its "spoiled" ways, Flor performs a mode of maternal behavior—warm, devoted, selfless—that again parallels John's maternal instincts. This constitutes the powerful affective pull through which the film earns spectatorial affinity, compassion, and acceptance, associating Flor with a particular kind of emotional "purity." Such an attractive depiction of foreignness carries a forceful message: that privileged white American femininity can retrain itself to be properly feminine again following an example of Mexican womanhood and motherhood.

The idea of the necessity of training the Anglo woman, in fact, guides the narrative as Debra receives her first "training lesson" from Flor already during their introduction. Everybody present, Debra's daughter and her mother, can pronounce Flor's name but Debra. She is the only one who is unable to perform a rolling "r" in Flor, and, instead, pronounces Flor's name as "floor," "something you walk on." As Flor displays her utmost patience, showing frustrated Debra how to properly roll her tongue over and over again, Debra asks: "Is there some school of the ear I'm flunking out off right now?" When, through her determination, Debra finally "gets" it, it becomes clear that, with some effort, even someone like her can follow the guidance of a Mexican woman.

Flor's foreignness is not simply palatable but, in fact, hyper-palatable. Unlike Toula, Flor does not have to go through any bodily reconfigurations as, from the opening moments, she is depicted not only as morally and emotionally sound but physically flawless as well. "You're gorgeous," Debra tells Flor upon their first meeting; later when she meets Flor's daughter, she is stunned by the girl's "perfect look": "Flor, you could make a fortune in surrogate pregnancy!" Despite their affinities, the narrative, however, prevents John and Flor from engaging in an interracial, intercultural, extramarital romance because the two of them are too loyal for such transgressions. Flor is thus a "delicious" foreigner who cannot be had, a woman who cannot be consumed. Instead, her usefulness as a "healer," echoing Toula's usefulness in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, takes on a more spiritual and moral dimension. One particular scene features John and Flor at night as they stand alone in his restaurant. John has his arm around Flor: "My hand is the only sane part of my body. Every other part wants to jump off the cliff." Even such a brief physical interaction with Flor, the touching of the other, the contact with her flesh, has a momentary soothing effect on John.

But the most intriguing part about Flor's position in the Clasky's house is that of a *domestica*; after all she is hired to be their housekeeper and their "cleaning lady."[12] The scene that features Flor's entry into the Clasky family metaphorically conveys the racial and class division between the employer and their "maid." As Flor, who initially speaks no English, and her Mexican cousin-translator walk toward the backyard with a swimming pool where the family luxuriates, the cousin inadvertently walks into a spotless and "invisible" glass door and smashes and bloodies her nose. This moment is meant to foreshadow future collisions between the employers and their domestic worker, suggesting bodily hardships that await Flor. During our class discussions, I asked my students to single out scenes that represent Flor's domestic work and her cleaning practices. To their surprise, they barely located a few: at one point, we see Flor arranging roses; another time we see her cleaning up magazines. She is thus a cleaner who does not really clean; instead she functions as a metaphorical cleaner, pointing to the necessity of "cleaning up" the dominant family.

Foreigners as Toilet Cleaners

Theresa Connelly's *Polish Wedding*, set in a contemporary Detroit suburb, is an "immigrant comedy" preoccupied with the themes of female sexual adventurousness, virginity, marital infidelity, religious devotion, shot-gun weddings, and ethnic discrimination against immigrant working-class Polish-Americans. While *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* depicts a quick remaking of Toula from abjected to desired and needed by Ian, and while *Spanglish* represents the moral usefulness of hyper-palatable Flor, *Polish Wedding* offers yet a different version of female foreign palatability. Polish-American Jadwiga's palatability is both explicit and ambivalent at the same time: she is represented as an enticing abject who proudly "owns" her abjection. The dominant culture in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* and in *Spanglish* is shown as profiting from the usability of female foreigners via healing intercultural marriage or moral modeling. Connelly's film takes a more direct approach by representing immigrant women as toilet cleaners who, unlike Flor in *Spanglish*, actually do clean:

> —We don't exist for them.
> —We *exist* for them. We exist to clean their toilets.

This dialogue takes place between two women dressed in blue cleaning uniforms in front of a restroom in an office building: Jadwiga (Lena Olin), the mother of a large Polish family, and Sophie, her Syrian daughter-in-law. The women's work is interrupted by businessmen who go inside to use the facility; the women wait patiently to resume their cleaning duties.

The exchange between Jadwiga and Sophie draws attention to a specific immigrant point of view. Both women are acutely aware of how their status as women and as immigrants places them in a doubly marginal and vulnerable position. Their dialogue articulates a compelling paradox: while Sophie sees their social place through erasure, invisibility, and nothingness ("We don't exist for them"), Jadwiga believes that their existence is that of *essential* "servitude" that sustains the very position of "natural" Americans ("We *exist* for them").

But, contrary to the stereotypical expectations that a foreigner who cleans "American" toilets might deplore and resent her abjection, Jadwiga presents a defiant understanding of her work, pointing to a subversive energy of the abject.[13] That subversive energy operates on several levels simultaneously: it reveals the specific structures of servility and subjugation that produce abjection while it shows how representing abjection can open up a space for an articulation of oppression. One moment in the narrative evocatively illustrates this point. When Jadwiga flamboyantly pursues an erotic relationship with her boss, Roman, but, at a crucial juncture, refuses to leave her family to travel to Paris with him, her status as a "cleaning woman" is used as an insult, an injury, an accusation:

> ROMAN: Do you want to stay a cleaning woman? Huh? Yes. You are a cleaning woman.
>
> JADWIGA: I *am* a cleaning woman. That's what I am.

The mise-en-scène here is coded by a luxurious excess that stands in direct contrast to Jadwiga's house, represented as run-down, crowded, with three generations under one roof, and with paper-thin walls that occlude any privacy. Roman's luxury foretells what Jadwiga's life might be like if she were willing to succumb to his wishes and desires. The lovers are both dressed in burgundy red robes; Jadwiga's body is spread on a leather couch; there are candles lit, caviar on the table, shimmering glasses, silver dishes, a fireplace, and flowers. Jadwiga is a "queen" to Roman and he aims to rescue her from what he perceives to be a life of debasement, a life devoted to cleaning up after others. When she refuses and defiantly "owns" her cleaning-woman-status as

her identity, when she links her very being with cleaning practices, her response violates both Roman's expectations and normative cultural views about the abjected life of a cleaner.

Earlier, before her rejection of Roman's rescue, Jadwiga and Roman engage in sex on the restroom floor, next to mops and buckets with grimy water. This sexual encounter occurs in *her* space as this is the space that she controls, cleans, and whose dirt she polices. The eroticism of this moment is amplified precisely because the erotic here is so close to abjection (the repulsive, the forbidden) signified by the toilets and their cleaning. Thus this scene reveals yet another dimension of the usefulness of the female foreign abject by showing how the female worker who cleans public toilets can quickly move from a position connoting drudgery, repulsion, and filth to a position of an available titillating object of desire. Does this curious collapse of roles not expose another crucial factor in the discourses of relational foreign usefulness—the quivering and tenuous boundary between the abject and the erotic? Does it not yet again suggest a particular utility of the foreign?[14]

Even though teaching Julia Kristeva's work to seniors is at best a challenge both for the students and the instructor, I have included in our readings excerpts from *Strangers to Ourselves* because of her provocative examination of foreignness that I thought would compellingly relate to our film analyses. She writes: "Foreigner: a choked up rage deep down my throat, a black angel clouding transparency, opaque, unfathomable spur. . . . Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder" (1991, 1). Kristeva points to the need to reenvision the sanctioned notion of the "I" that always locates foreignness elsewhere, beyond itself, in the body of the other. She questions the privileged ontological status of the subject that likes to write itself as "unitary and glorious," while concealing its own strangenesses and incoherences (2).

When she metaphorically claims that "the foreigner lives within us," she puts back the otherness within the self, so to speak, arguing that otherness, understood as foreignness, is always already a part of the "I." And this reimagining of the foreign is guided by an ethical impulse: "Shall we be, intimately and subjectively, able to live with the others, to live *as others*, without ostracism but also without leveling?" (2).

This is a poetically, even movingly, rendered question, yet the filmic examples I engaged with my students over and over show that the dominant cinematic representational tactics offer a different investment.

Predictably, the foreign is not imagined as part of the self but as *exteriority* of the self, as the outside, but, even more crucially for my discussion, as "the not-me but *for-me*" paradigm. That is, the foreign is revealed to exist *for my use*—whether the foreign is understood as a healer of my boredom, a moral example, or a body that cleans up "my" dirt and is also available for erotic adventures.

Notes

1. See Mohanty (1998). She describes ways in which the U.S. state and its institutions categorized her over the years, as the designators moved from "foreign student" to "student of color" (490).
2. I have extensively theorized this concept in *Alienhood* (2006).
3. This is Aihwa Ong's term. See *Flexible Citizenship* (1999).
4. Marciniak (2006).
5. While writing this essay, I attended a lecture by Rosi Braidotti who repeatedly constructed "Europe" as a unified space. See also, e.g., Grewal and Kaplan (2001), where the authors consistently refer to "the United States and Europe," as if Europe had never been divided by a Wall that symbolically constituted the "eastern" space and its inhabitants as abject.
6. Trinh Minh-ha's *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989) or Agnieszka Holland's *Kobieta Samotna* (*A Woman Alone*, 1981) are just two such examples, which I discussed elsewhere, using the theory of *suture*, as narratives navigated by complex processes of "antistitching" and "hypersuture," respectively (Marciniak 2005).
7. See Perren (2004) for a compelling analysis of the film's development, production, and distribution contexts.
8. See Imre (2006) for the discussion of *My Big Fat Roma Wedding*, a Hungarian adoption of the story line from *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*.
9. For a thoughtful analysis of "cinematic food events" and "foodways" in relation to culinary tourism, ethnic restaurants, and consumption of the other in *American History X*, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, and *Along Came Polly*, see Roth 2006. In fact, the food discourses and foodways perform a crucial function in the three films I discuss here. The Greek-American family is purposefully represented in the context of their "ethnic" food and eating rituals; the Polish-American family too is depicted through their foodways (Polish dumplings, pickles, and bread) and their ethnicity is emphasized by their culinary and eating habits. While, undeniably, the food in both *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* and *Polish Wedding* is thus "ethnicized," the food John as an innovative chef prepares in *Spanglish* is described as sophisticated delicacies presumably free from "ethnicity." The favorable *New York Times* review his restaurant receives depicts him as "taking chances with his combinations," as

preparing a succession of appetizers that are “constantly and casually daring.”

10. See, e.g., Werner Herzog’s *Stroszek* (1977); Paul Mazursky’s *Moscow on the Hudson* (1984); Gregory Nava’s *El Norte* (1983); Steven Spielberg’s *The Terminal* (2004).
11. As my students pointed out, they were already familiar with such a narrative design and a trivialization of female agency. They recalled it, e.g., in Barbra Streisand’s *The Mirror Has Two Faces* (1996), a film in which a female protagonist, just like Toula, goes through a very similar trajectory of bodily alterations in order to “earn” her male partner, or in Callie Khouri’s *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (2002) where a woman is “rescued” back into a proper heterosexual union.
12. The issue of Flor’s legal status, something that Latina migrant domestic workers are hyperaware of, is fully occluded by the film. See Anayansi Prado’s documentary, *Maid in America* (2004), for a complex depiction of (il)legality.
13. For a powerful discussion of the subversive potential of the abject, see Taylor (1993).
14. I discuss these issues fully in “Foreign Women and Toilets” (Marciniak 2008).

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Chapter 11

Translating Silences: A Cinematic Encounter with Incommensurable Difference

Priya Jaikumar

> The Musalmaans were more large hearted, production was with them, grain, fruit, everything. And they were generous. Whenever anyone went to their homes, say if a Sikh went, they would give us presents, sukhi ras it was called, uncooked things…And they used to say very calmly, you [Hindus and Sikhs] don't eat things cooked by us…you see we used to drink milk from their houses, but the milk had to be in an unused utensil, a new one…If we had been willing to drink from the same cups, we would have remained united, we would not have had these differences, thousands of lives would not have been lost, and there would have been no Partition.
>
> Bir Bahadur Singh's account narrated by Urvashi Butalia

> For my own class in the decolonized nation vaguely conceived, I had little else but contempt. Now it seems to me that the radical element of the postcolonial bourgeoisie must most specifically learn to negotiate with the structure of enabling violence that produced her; and the normative narrative of metropolitan feminism is asymmetrically wedged in that structure.
>
> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Encounters

In her introductory overview to "women's cinema," Alison Butler looks at feminism's "work of recovering the history of women's creativity in cinema" since the 1960s and 1970s (Alison Butler 2002, 3). Her rhetorical trajectory reproduces a teleology that perpetuates a problem her analysis seeks to mitigate. To accommodate its plural "forms, concerns and constituencies," Butler productively defines

"women's cinema" as a "minor cinema" rather than a "counter-cinema" (in the Deleuze and Guattarian sense of a "minor literature" exiled and minoritized by the very language it inhabits), and analyzes U.S. women directors who redefine the grammar of film genre, narrative, and authorship while using cinema's lexicon (Alison Butler 2002, 19). In distinction from these films, Butler argues that "the politics of location" central to all films, "and perhaps to Hollywood above all," are "most fully addressed in relation to particular practices where national and cultural identity have been consciously considered rather than taken for granted: in national film movements, post-colonial cinemas and exilic and diasporic practices"(Alison Butler 2002, 23).[1]

I propose that feminist film theory's challenge to the neutrality of terms (such as film perspective, apparatus, genre, and authorship) delegitimates the gesture of placing any particular feminism as an exemplar of locationality and identity-politics. Feminism has rendered this interpretive move impossible by showing that visual and narrative strategies produce particular perspectives as generic or universal only through violent assumptions of power, which enable them to represent plenitude. When we cease to use postcolonial or national cinemas and exilic or diasporic filmmakers and theorists as instructive extensions of existing notions of women's cinema, we begin to ask why and how certain texts make their situational particularities *in*visible, and variations within seemingly place-neutral terms such as modernity, subjectivity, agency, narrative, visuality, body, and gender come to the fore. Such investigations reveal the conditions of entry for a text, a subject, or an interpretive practice into enclaves where modernity, subjectivity, agency, and gender receive their hegemonic definitions.

The feminist mandate in its academic and activist facets has always involved identifying social hierarchies of power in order to envision alternatives that might enable a more egalitarian world; feminist theory has had an interventionist attitude moving it beyond negative critique. Perhaps it is in these imaginings that feminisms diverge most radically, despite their shared political commitments. To begin with one fundamental difference, we might consider the assimilationist model used by Alison Butler, within which feminist interventions in film theory are considered as a redefinition and extension of existing feminist theories without disrupting the progressive linearity of an englobing narrative of feminism. Though this model is easier to teach or use as theoretical scaffolding because of its accessibility and familiarity (it is similar to narratives that move chronologically from first wave to liberal, culturalist, left and second wave to third wave and transnational feminisms), within it third-world feminisms—feminisms

emerging from contexts identified by their geographical and cultural particularities—are doomed to occupy a supplementary place as their nation-forms emerged after the anterior, powerful, and "placeless" modernities of imperial nations.

Post-structuralist feminists such as Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak provide a different kind of narrative. Asking us to use feminist theory that might begin *without* presuming the materiality of the body and its attendant emplaced social identities, Judith Butler explores a theorization of feminism's political mandates by arguing that the "loss of epistemological certainty" resulting from giving up the notion of a subject does not entail "political nihilism," but rather "provides the conditions to *mobilize* the signifier in the service of an alternative production" (Judith Butler 2002, 17). Abandoning the notion that some self-evident unity is given in the signifier *woman* permits a rethinking of the social. Under Judith Butler's prescription, we attempt to imagine a space beyond the loop of social or discursive construction and subject formation, in order to interrogate the limits of both. The quest is for a way out of the constructivist dilemma where subjects, identities, or relationships possess the potential to expand or subvert their defining dominant social paradigms, but never the capacity to escape its terms. As Spivak and Homi Bhabha argue regarding currently hegemonic Western liberal democracies, it is problematic that identity-based diversity or a representative multiculturalism provides the best incorporation of difference within a democracy, without displacing the invisible "ethnocentric norms, values and interests" underlying liberal visions of universalism.[2] In the work of these scholars, a materially intractable but politically desirable space is born of a deep suspicion (and accusation) of the implicit and explicit hegemonic norms underlying all identities and interactions humanity inherits: between and within genders, sexualities, classes, religions; between and within the global north and south; between and among modern nation-states and their citizens.

Despite the impossibility of thinking such a space into existence *ex nihilo*, people everywhere—theorists, lawmakers, bureaucrats, scholars, filmmakers, citizens, subalterns—are struggling to imagine beyond available vocabularies, risking the containment of their imagination by prevalent grids of intelligibility. The two epigraphs that open this essay express the burden of normative, relational self-definitions and the urgent need to unseat them, even as they address two different forms of sociality: that of communal life (in Bir Bahadur Singh's description), and that of academic feminism (in Spivak's). These two desires for dialogue within varying modes of sociality are linked by

another common thread. Contentiously unifying all stripes of feminisms is their opening up of the personal to the political through an investment in gendered mechanisms of experience that vary, and hence that variously (geographically, racially, culturally) define the linked realms of the personal and political. A central locus for such experiences is the communal arena of formative and ritualized interaction, gestured at by Bir Bahadur Singh and Gayatri Spivak. Insiders and outsiders are repeatedly constituted in relation to such shared spaces: spaces of social communities, and equally spaces of academic feminism. Who can speak to which issues and who must be silent; who can be fed which food, from which utensils, and in which room; who can enter which house or which institution; who thinks or lives outside these rules and how?

In my view, both signaled collectives and the desire to reimagine them is crucial to this anthology, and of particular significance to my essay. This book invites encounters between essayists and readers who are feminists of different national, racial, and cultural hues, desiring to create an intersubjective arena despite, or through, difference. This is a search for alliances and solidarities that acknowledges potentially incommensurable difference. In other words, the effort is *not* to mitigate difference by utilizing one normative model of feminism, but rather to desist from hypothesizing about the universal female condition in a way that uses women of color as supplements to a larger narrative of emancipation that originates in a liberal, white West. With this acceptance of difference comes both the attempt to theorize difference and to create dialogue. "To talk about feminist praxis in a global context," in Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty's words, "is a way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in *different* geographical spaces," to understand the "unequal relationships among and between people" by foregrounding the political, ideological, and economic processes of capitalism and race *internationally* (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, xix). My charge, as I define it in this essay, is to examine thresholds of shared spaces in feminism, social theory, and film text, where gender relations are imagined and unmade nationally and globally. The primary film that serves as an example of my arguments is Pakistani film director Sabiha Sumar's *Silent Waters* (*Khamosh Pani*, 2002). I lack the space to extend my analysis to Tunisian filmmaker Moufida Tlatli's *The Silences of the Palace* (*Saimt el Qusur*, 1994), but it is proximate in terms of its thematics, conditions of production, and perspective, and it forms a subterranean textual instantiation of my analysis.

Silent Waters gives cinematic representation to the predicament of women during India and Pakistan's violent birth to nationhood in 1947, and *The Silences of the Palace* narrates the story of female domestic slaves of the Bey rulers during Tunisia's struggle for independence from the French, and from its own indigenous aristocracy in 1956. Both films carry a particular historical and formalist depth charge, but the specificities of cinematic medium and represented historical moment also permit broader parallel questions relevant to all feminist film and media practices. If feminism has shown that a hetero-patriarchal universe constitutes the social determinants of personhood, which in turn define access to representation, rights, and freedom within relational collectivities, what does a feminist vision of an alternative universe look like? Is it a redefinition, subversion, and challenging extension of the existing lexicon, or something other than that?[3]

Asking this question actively resists a relegation of *Silent Waters* to national or identity politics, even while engaging their concerns. Following Chandra Mohanty's observation that the "most expansive and inclusive visions of feminism need to be attentive to borders while learning to transcend them" (Mohanty 2003, 2), my analysis is shaped by three kinds of movements. At its narrowest, I evaluate the film in relation to its material and historical contexts (in the section on "Difference"). Pulling out the focus, I assess textual inscriptions of gender by understanding how the film uses women as an optic to interrogate the constitution of local polity and community—using *constitution* both as a referent to a nation's founding document, and to the event of its creation. I ask how the film uses this device to imaginatively interpret the mutually influential coming-into-being of a state and a gendered subject (in the section on "Silences" and "Difference"). Most expansively, in this chapter I am concerned with the political encounters and feminist theorizations *Silent Waters* permits. I want to consider how we can test the multiple ends that such a film text might serve, as it circulates in a national and global space of popular and academic publics composed of (patriarchal) institutions and (male and female) subjects, each embedded in particular "power geometries" in relation to other institutions and subjects.[4]

Silences

The gravitational center of the film titles *Silent Waters* and *The Silences of the Palace* tug toward silence, a mode of non-enunciation resonant within several feminist texts. As Spivak has argued by

extending the work of Pierre Macherey, the task of interpretation can involve measurements of what a text "refuses to say" and of what it "*cannot* say" (Spivak 1988, 286). The difference between these two kinds of silences is not always sustainable, but it primarily refers to a deliberately repressed textual absence against what cannot be articulated within a given textual paradigm. Considering imperial texts, which politically and ideologically (consciously and unconsciously) described a colony through imperial epistemological codifications, Spivak gives credence to the postcolonial interest in measuring the empire's archival, historical and discursive silences; silences deriving from what the empire refused to say or could not say about the colonized, in a continuum of epistemic violence against its subjects.

Nevertheless, as she notes, subaltern studies cannot be an eternal reading against the grain through a "historical recounting of the details of the practice of disenfranchised groups" (Spivak 2005, 476). If the task of subaltern studies is to track the "effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject," and if feminists seek the "doubly effaced" traces of gender and sexual difference within this itinerary, the act of confronting an effacement or silence does not sanction a new narrative. The postcolonial or subaltern narrative carries the *same* risks of appropriating and essentializing (silencing) the subaltern subject or consciousness. Thus the "irretrievable consciousness" of the subaltern subject constitutes an obstinate silence: it is a silence that cannot be represented without an appropriation within dominant structures of colonial *or* national difference, but which nevertheless produces "texts of insurgency" by its enabling stance of "counterpossibility" to dominant (Spivak 1988, 287).

The feminist historiography of India's partition illustrates this argument well. Numbers testify to the numbing crisis that the governments of Britain, India, and Pakistan abetted through their oversight and mismanagement, as the subcontinent was ripped apart in violence during the transfer of power from Britain and to India in 1947: one million dead, twelve million displaced amidst widespread slaughter and loss, and 75,000 women raped or abducted (Butalia 2000, 3, 34). Literary and poetic outpourings about the horrific experience offered some clues to the trauma's cultural, social, and psychological impact, but nothing was written of the women kidnapped, raped, and killed by their communal enemies, or by their own families in so-called honor killings by fathers and brothers afraid to let "their" women fall into the hands of a Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh. Not until the late 1990s did feminist historiographers begin to publish work on the historical chasms in the official records of Partition.

In her significant collection of oral narratives about Partition, Urvashi Butalia confronts what she calls "the other side of silence" to raise questions about the epistemological status of women's histories and narratives. Like Butalia, other feminist historiographers of Partition echo Joan Kelly, and ask a series of questions about what it means to make *woman* a historical subject (Menon and Bhasin 1998, 9). Do women differ from men in their experience of history, and in their participation in the life of a nation, family, or community? How does one prevent essentializing women while realizing their similarities across the bar of difference pertaining to their class, national, and caste identities? Do women extend the notion of history and politics by drawing attention to stories that have a "lesser" status than the recoded events in constituting a community's official sense of self? Does their inclusion consequently demand a reconceptualization of the idea of historicity and of political life? Was the violence toward women during Partition an anomaly, or on a continuum with the quotidian? Are the investigations of feminist historiographers relevant to historiography, or more broadly to a comprehension of gender relations in everyday life?

Feminist historiographers made it evident that transcribing women's stories of Partition was not merely a task of collating experiences to fill a silence; a task already made impossible by witnesses who had since passed away, changed their identities to survive, adopted a necessary amnesia, fallen silent because they were subjected to "skepticism, dismissal, disbelief" (Menon and Bhasin 1998, 17), or whose stories were half-remembered and ground into familiar grooves through repetition. The search for women's Partition narratives problematized at least three modes of historiographic thought: it contested dominant theories of social change (by focusing on the lack of gender uniformity in people's experiences during the rupture of Partition and nation-constitution), dominant periodization (by challenging the notion of emancipatory self-determination through nationhood), and dominant categories of social analysis (by questioning the edifice of postcolonial constitutional democracy).[5]

Feminist historians of Partition who seek to mitigate the lack of records of women's lives by conducting oral interviews operate in the restorative mode, but consistently point to the impossibility of fully enunciating and filling the silence at the *center* of their narratives. This is the silence of women who were witnesses or survivors of Partition whose experiences could not be transparently transcribed into text, but which nevertheless constituted a point of opposition or counter-possibility to imperial records of India's independence, and to

triumphal nationalist histories of Pakistan and India. The repressive silence of nationalist patriarchy compounded by "the planned discontinuity of imperialism" involved feminist historiography in "the difficult task of writing its own condition of impossibility as the conditions of its possibility."[6]

Representing absences or silences of a kind that remain elusive within the politics of presence and speech, but that nevertheless unsettle their domain of articulation, carry different stakes for feminist fiction than for feminist historiography. The feminist historian facing the question "how do I represent the silent female subaltern" must find a different disciplinary answer than the novelist or filmmaker asking the same question, but they have much to learn from each other. To make *Silent Waters*, a film that could not receive commercial support from a politically conservative and financially beleaguered Pakistani film industry, Sumar was dependent on the compromising possibilities of a transnational film market. Transnational markets, whether popular or festival, place particular pressures upon the articulation of film content. In fact, Alison Butler's mention of an "international liberal intelligensia" that facilitates the production and distribution of films from underfunded film industries in the global south reveals the ways in which Butler's own analysis productively troubles the application of a politics of location to postcolonial films. To state the obvious, coproductions that depend on international funding—such as funding from Switzerland, France, Germany, and Sweden in the case of *Silent Waters*, and from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in addition to the Tunisian Cultural Ministry, Matfilms, Cinetelefilms, Magfilms Production, and Channel 4 in the case of *The Silences of the Palace*—are partially or wholly enabled by financial structures outsides their nations.

Such films actively create transnational alliances in order to envision a kind of cinema not commonplace within their nations. When a woman director from Pakistan or Tunisia creates films that contravene dominant nationalist ideologies despite institutional odds, she invokes and addresses a sphere of internal dissidence as well as a transnational public sphere, comprising potentially receptive film audiences who share with her a structure of sympathy, politics, and pleasure. The circuit of film festivals through which films travel, and their particular framing within an international video DVD redistribution chain, "wedges" her films within transnational spheres in very particular ways—as a First Run title endorsed by "Human Rights Watch" in the case of *Silent Waters*, and as part of the "World Cinema Collection" of Canada's Mongrel Media in the case of *The Silences of*

the Palace. As a South Asian academic in the United States who is writing, in this instance, on a Pakistani filmmaker's transnational coproduction screened at international film festivals, I find that the options and stakes of both of our work can be offered up for scrutiny against dominant discourses of metropolitan feminisms within which our work necessarily circulates.

Nivedita Menon argues, endorsing Partha Chatterjee's concerns, that in "the latest phase of globalization of capital" "a transnational public sphere has emerged whose moral values proceed from the assumption of the existence of a unified civil society," including "'many United Nations agencies, non-governmental organisations, peace-keeping missions, human rights groups, women's organizations." These organizations "act as an external check on the sovereign powers of the nation-state, 'assessing the incomplete modernities of particular nation formations'" (Menon 2004, 225). Such assessments frequently become an alibi for international and U.S. interventions into nations that are at base guided by political and economic motivations rather than by human rights concerns: witness the sudden concern in the United States for Afghan women under the Taliban, which manifested itself precisely during the Bush administration's drumbeat for war against Afghanistan in 2001. With detailed case studies, Menon develops the argument that human rights discourses are constituted in relation to specific moral universes, and feminism's effort to launch its agenda in a manner compatible with pervasive legal discourses could potentially "refract the ethical and emancipatory impulse of feminism itself" (Menon 2004, 3).

As long as there is an underlying sense of unsuccessful or partial modernity, or a sense of a late arrival to modernity ascribed to the global south, the "framework of global modernity can only structure the world in a 'pattern that is profoundly colonial'"(Menon 2004, 225). A feminist film text might be potentially subversive at the national level, informative of domestic oppressions at the international level, yet facilitated by an evaluative framework that is susceptible to a benevolently racist transnational paternalism. An interpretation sensitive to this potential double-bind of transnational cultural texts from the global south can best proceed by "pluralizing the history of power in global modernity" (Spivak 2000, 317).[7]

Two methodological shifts are central to this pluralization. One, states and subjects cannot be treated as self-evident categories of analysis. They must be perennially measured against each other, because the argument of plurality maintains that modernities (of which the nation-form and capitalism have been key manifestations) in all parts

of the world came into being through *variously* (geographically, politically, chronologically, culturally) defined post-feudal relations between bodies of governance and governed bodies, in a change that placed the world in radical interconnection. Two, any analysis interested in pluralizing the history of power under modernity must have the tools to study both articulated and silenced realities. Select modernities have been sufficiently articulated to enter the realm of governability and to find expression within today's national and transnational forums. The most prominent of these is the bourgeois capitalist heteropatriarchal modern. A number of incommensurate modernities (such as that of the subaltern, the indigenous, the militant in the global north and south) are pushed to silences that either menace the visible and dominant, or promise incompletely articulated and partially governed worlds of sociality and selfhood.

What we lose by giving up the assumption of a singular narrative of modernity, namely, the loss of a single evaluative framework, we gain in requiring a *constant* dialogue/confrontation between each new struggle for emancipation or articulation of desire against legitimated visions of inclusion, diversity, and egalitarianism, in order to vigilantly test the former's claims against the latter (and vice versa). Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan consider this interpretive turn a postmodern one, rejecting modernity as contaminated by Western imperialism. Yet their important notion of "scattered hegemonies" and "multiple peripheries" should disallow the persistence of categories such as the "West" as well (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 20), exploding modernity into a million fragments as it was anxiously negotiated with, coerced upon or jubilantly embraced by different parts of the world, pointing to multiple modernities rather than to a complete rejection of its terms. Pakistani and Tunisian modernity, nationhood, female and male subjectivity, realms of intimate and public spaces, and Indian or British or French modernities, nationhoods, and subjectivities were formations embedded in each other, but for each state-operation and subject-formation this acquired different meanings and realities based on their particular local and international positions. This is less a relativization of realities than a politicization of their interconnections. To return to a term evoked at the opening of this essay, "women's cinema"—understood as a politically efficacious designation for a kind of filmmaking across the world—may now be defined as a cinema that reveals the gendered plurality of power in its local configurations, underwritten by an awareness of this power's inextricably networked international dimensions.

Difference

Like a variety of screen media, cinema's imaginative latitude within structural constraints allows it descriptive as well as prescriptive powers: it can turn a critical lens upon plural patriarchal realities while also inventing relations between subjects and their state that are asymptotic to this reality. Fiction can call into existence an imaginative sympathy and a notion of ethics or morality that exceeds the language of law and the state, and through this enliven what seems *possible*, even if not realized, within prevalent conditions. As I show here, in telling fictional stories of women silenced during their nation formation, and in simultaneously enunciating what has been impossible to narrate within available discourses of imperialism, nationhood, and internationalism, *Silent Waters* (like *The Silences of the Palace*) dislodges the seemingly inescapable hierarchies locking subjects to their social collectivity, their state, their nation, and its global position. It provides a means to envision modernity's unleashing of *multiple* and *non-consonant* discourses, of which only a few have dictated reality by being assimilable within manifest national and international forms, while others have operated in invisibility because they exceeded the range of legitimated discourses in their difference.

In *Silent Waters*, Ayesha, a middle-aged Muslim woman living in Charkhi, Pakistan, is revealed to be the same person as Veera, a Sikh girl separated from her family during the Partition of 1947. Memories of Veera's trauma focus around a well in her village, and rip through her normalcy in rupturing sequences, in which Veera's voice-over directly addresses the audience. These memories and direct-address voice-overs remain unacknowledged within the film's dramatic narrative. The audience is aurally and visually privy to memories that she does not mention to the film's other characters. We learn that in 1947, at the Charkhi village well, Veera's father forced the women of his family to drown themselves in order to escape religious conversion, violence, or possible rape at the hands of Muslims. Veera, a little girl unwilling to kill herself for her family's "honor" at her father's command, runs away from him and her family. She meets a Muslim man who is kind to her, and reinvents herself as Ayesha to live life as a devout Muslim and as his wife. Three decades later, in the film's present, we see Veera/Ayesha's dual identities unraveling as her son turns to Islamic fundamentalism during Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship. Tragically for Veera/Ayesha, her son is at the forefront of a fundamentalist campaign against the first group of Sikh pilgrims permitted to

cross the border from India to Pakistan, to visit holy sites and reconnect with a lost homeland.

I believe the film deploys gender to articulate positions against religious fundamentalism in the *absence* of adequate alternatives (or in the presence of compromised, problematic alternatives) in the language of secularism. As local, national, and global politics today force us into the mutually antagonistic positions of religious fundamentalisms and secular liberalism, and there appears little common ground or space for dialogue between these two positions, the feminism of this film actualizes dialogues, negotiations, and subjectivities between seemingly irreconcilable, incommensurable alternatives presented to a South Asian woman—between religion on national patriarchal terms, or secularism on internationalist patriarchal terms; between rights based on ethnic/national identity politics or rights based on a global imperialist universalism; between repressive traditions or a history-erasing modernity. Veera/Ayesha opts for a life and a death beyond those terms.

Crucially, Ayesha's defiance of her son's fundamentalism can be traced to the moment of her rebirth from a refugee to a citizen of Pakistan, when she adopts a religion by way of her inclusion into a new community, and by way of her refusal to accept the violent death prescribed by her father's communal/national pride (I use different permutations of the protagonist's name to reflect the instability of her Sikh/Muslim identity on some occasions, and her option to define herself as the Sikh Veera or the Muslim Ayesha on others.) In other words, Ayesha's arrival to nationhood and religion are in *distinction* to the constitution of Pakistan's religious and secular identity, which have made divisive claims on its body politic. Framed in March 23, 1956, nine controversial years after independence, Pakistan's Constitution proclaimed the nation as an Islamic Republic, maintaining that Islamic provisions would not be legally enforceable but would serve as guiding principles, to enable Muslims to live a life in accordance with the Holy Quran and the *sunnah* (Khan 2001). Repeated enforcements of martial law following frequent abrogations of the Constitution, and its reconstitution under each new executive power (in 1958 under General Ayub Khan; in 1969 by General Yahya Khan; in 1971 under the civilian leadership of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto; in 1977 by General Zia-ul-Haq) produced a centralization of state power in the hands of the executive, a complex relationship between the state and the judiciary, and a deeply negotiated democracy.[8] Thus Pakistan's Constitution or the principles constituting the nation remained in a constant state of negotiated crisis (Newberg 1995, 1).

The complex history of relations between state institutions and civil society in Pakistan is beyond the scope of my essay, but a few factors are notable. First, as the scholar Paula Newberg notes, the centralization of executive power was a British imperial legacy, and ironically modern Pakistan incorporated the model of an executive-dominated state to assert its sovereignty from Britain and India. Second, religion became a way of centralizing various ethnicities and languages that composed Pakistan (such as the North-West Frontier and East Pakistan populations), so that a strong center was politically expedient for the new state (Jeffrelot 2000). Third, the guidance to state-form provided by Islam was contentious, but was meant to protect minority rights and formulate a modern Islamic democratic republic. In March 1949, when Liaquat Ali Khan moved a resolution for the Constituent Assembly to frame the Constitution, he argued along with several others that describing the state as a neutral observer with regard to religion would be the "very negation of the ideals which prompted the demand of Pakistan." The state had to be an active participant in creating a truly Islamic society in Pakistan, understanding "Islamic social justice" as a concept that gave a "deeper and wider connotation" to the words "democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance" (Khan 2001, 93).

With her choices, Veera/Ayesha embodies the early constitutional vision of a democratic, tolerant Islamic society, thwarted in the life of a political community repeatedly held hostage to what Georgio Agamben has theorized as the "state of exception," created by Pakistan's colonial-national imperative for a strong center against an embattled judiciary and unassimilated border territories (Agamben 2005). In filmmaker Sumar's vision, Pakistan's politics represent the normalization of "exceptional" conditions exemplified by various military coups. In particular, the film depicts Zia's eternal deferment of elections on the grounds that Pakistan was politically and economically unprepared for open franchise. Significantly, Veera's *refusal* to accept a similar normalization of the exceptional is what inducts her, of her own free will, into Pakistan's national life.

Veera is reborn as the Pakistani citizen Ayesha when she negates death in defiance of her father, who accepts female suicide as the only honorable act under the exceptional threat posed by Partition to the female body. The larger implications of Ayesha/Veera's choice become clear if we contrast two worldviews against each other: the perspective of her father's notion of religious "honor," and her son and the *mullahs'* support of Islamicization under Zia's enforcement of *hudood* laws,[9] as opposed to the secular global and élite national perspective,

which condemns religiosity and Islamicization as repressive and backward. In the visual and thematic regimen of the film, various elements position Ayesha/Veera outside both these paradigms for assessing an Islamic nation, in a manner inalienable from her gendered construction in relation to the state.

In *Silent Waters*, the woman is explicitly *not* an allegory or metonymy for the nation. As the film opens, Ayesha is seen in the context of one of many "imagined communities" struggling over the meaning of Pakistan. The film opens to her drying a *dupatta* with her neighbor, as they discuss her neighbor's daughter's wedding. Ayesha is also seen haggling for the price of vegetables, drying red chillies in the sun, refusing to go to the village well for unspoken reasons, preparing and serving food for her son, and befriending her son's girlfriend Zubeida. We see her involved in female communities and domestic activities until two militants enter her village, bringing with them a different sense of sociality. They address the villagers at the neighborhood mosque, and appeal to them to support Zia in his vision for the unity and purity of an Islamic nation. This band of men, which soon includes Ayesha's son Saleem, has a strong sense of community based on their interpretation of the "true practice" of Islam. Their prescriptive social conduct dictates that Saleem cannot woo his beloved Zubeida, because love marriages are not part of Islamic culture; it holds militancy to be part of religion; and it demands that women be segregated in the name of modesty and orthodoxy. Ayesha's world and theirs are in radical conflict.

Yet Ayesha's defiance of her son's fundamentalism does *not* originate from what Spivak terms a "class-internalized secularism" inherited from imperial structures, and redefined by postcolonial political subjects in creating new civic, national bodies. Spivak argues that while secularism is necessary in the fight against theocracies, it cannot be a moral position deployed as an ethical persuasion against religious violence, because it is a class-internalized position among the elites of the former colonies (Spivak 1992). (A blind adoption of secularism, however valuable in protesting religious intolerance, would be problematic in this context for other reasons as well. The so-called secularism of the Western world and ostensible religious purism of Zia were both deeply compromised by the fact that Zia received assistance from the liberal democratic United States, because his support to the anti-Soviet Islamicist mujahideen in Afghanistan served U.S. interests.) Ayesha's anti-fundamentalism is far from being a class-internalized position, as it comes from an alternative investment in the notion of an ethical and religious life through her gendered

encounter with the state and the family. Ayesha teaches the Koran to a group of young girls, preaching inclusion rather than exclusion, because that is what the Koranic life represents to her through her rebirth as a Muslim during Partition. Her entry into nationhood and religion signified her birth into active agency and subjecthood.

Zia's coup and the arrival of the Sikh pilgrims precipitate a world of radically opposing options for Ayesha. Much like her father, who asked her to die an honorable death or live a life of dishonor, Ayesha's son gives her two equally unviable alternatives. According to Saleem, she must either proclaim her Muslim faith in public, denouncing her false past and false beliefs as a Sikh, or live a life branded as a traitor and unbeliever (*kaafir*). Ayesha's response is to not choose on the basis of the options given to her by these two men, or by masculinist notions of state and religion; her refusal to leap into the well for her father in 1947 turns into the shocking decision to terminate her life in the same well in 1979.

I do not read Ayesha's suicide as "unrecognizable resistance" or a "refusal of victimage,"[10] because, arguably, Zubeida recognizes her resistance and Ayesha does not entirely escape victimage, as her death remains open to competing interpretations by her son Saleem, by Zubeida, and by the audience (as described further). Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that Ayesha refuses the available discourses of her life that will assimilate her into society based exclusively on two arbitrarily constructed, mutually antagonistic positions.

When *Silent Waters* screened at the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles in 2003, it was following by a discussion marked by disagreements over how to read Ayesha's suicide. The actress Kirron Kher (who plays Ayesha/Veera in the film) defended the suicide as a positive act of disengagement; an abnegation of the restricted choices available to a woman betrayed by her national past and religious present. Several Americans and South Asians in the audience saw it as a defeat: an accession to the woman's lack of agency, and an act of violence performed, once again, on the female body, albeit by the woman herself. I read this disagreement as a space constituted between the film and its audiences, between a representative system and its interpretive acts, where a series of arguments unified in their opposition to religious fundamentalism struggled to find expression when their recourse to the language of secularism was made deeply problematic. The film does *not* allow its audiences easy recourse to the language of secularism—frequently used without interrogation in opposition to fundamentalist positions—because Ayesha/Veera's choices disallow such binarism. The fictional Veera—who adopts the persona of Ayesha

because Islam's tenets are familiar and hospitable to her, but refuses to remain Ayesha because of modern Pakistan's nation-constituting intolerance for its religious Others—succeeds in establishing a subjectivity engendered by imperatives *outside* both the realms of secular politics and religious fundamentalism.

The film's last few sequences are an eloquent expression of this negotiated subjectivity. Before her death, Ayesha gives a chain with a locket to Zubeida, Saleem's girlfriend before his turn to fundamentalism. This locket contains a photograph of her as the Sikh Veera, and is the only reminder of Ayesha's past life. It is given to Ayesha by her brother, who is among the troupe of visiting Sikh pilgrims. He wishes to reclaim her for India, though Ayesha refuses by insisting that her Pakistani present is the only life of her own creation. After Ayesha's suicide, when Saleem throws his mother's belongings into a river—refusing to accept her Sikh past and adopted Muslim present even in death—her locket remains a forgotten possession. The film's last scene ends not here but with Zubeida in Rawalpindi in 2002. She is an older woman now, and she looks at herself in a mirror, touching Ayesha's chain and locket around her neck as she prepares to leave home. On the streets, Zubeida passes a television broadcasting an interview with Saleem, now an important member of President Musharraf's government. Saleem emphasizes the need to enforce Islamic Law in Pakistan and speaks of the impossibility of reconciling Western notions of democracy with traditional notions of Islam. As Zubeida pauses and passes him by, we are given a silent—unspoken because unspeakable within this climate—alternative.

Zubeida's community is not in her immediate vicinity. Unlike Ayesha at the film's opening, Zubeida is solitary in an anomic urban environment. The television's content has also changed. Whereas the film was initially replete with popular cultural references, signified by a poster of Hindi film star Amjad Khan and an enthralled Saleem viewing a video clip from the Hindi film *Amar Prem*, the new arenas of mass cultural life are overtaken by news broadcasts of the growing tensions between India and Pakistan, and an intolerant Saleem who speaks of the incommensurable options facing Pakistan's society. As the camera pursues Zubeida and the locket, the only legacy of a woman who chose a life and death against the discourses available to her, we are given the possibility of an alternative alliance. This is achieved when the film differentiates Zubeida's perspective from her surrounding environment, and from her enveloping mass-mediated messages. Ayesha's life, death, and her silent presence in Zubeida's reality sets in place a nexus of social relations founded on different

premises than those acceptable to the world around her. A parallel moment in *The Silences of the Palace* comes with Alia's communion, at the end of the film, with her dead mother and unborn daughter.

In documentary filmmaker Jill Godmilow's words, such films leave "an audience of individuals, not a collective," in that they do not appeal to audiences through a unified emotional message, but allow a dialogic social collective to form by taking viewers to the silenced counterparts of national and global modernity, while leaving room for debate over its content and significance (Shapiro 1997). The collectivity of audiences and subjects thus constituted through encountering and debating an unwritten history becomes one of many transnational feminist communities, which hold the potential to intervene in Zubeida's or Ayesha's (or Alia's) isolation.

If silence stands for what gets remaindered in the formation of the dominant social, then the notion of incommensurability—manifested in racial, national, gendered, religious, or sexual difference—is where I must begin my analysis, not conclude it. The strivings of transnational feminist art, and of other modes of fiction, regulation, and experience, are radical when they speak across differences while acknowledging the difficulty of their task. An expression of the value of attempted translations across difference presents itself in Paul Gilroy's question: "Why should the assertions of ethnocentricity and untranslatability that are pronounced at the face of difference have become an attractive and respectable alternative to the hard but scarcely mysterious work involved in translation, principled internationalism, and cosmopolitan conviviality?" (Gilroy 2005, 8). As my reading of the film and my experience of teaching *Silent Waters* and *The Silences of the Palace* has shown me, they both hold the ability to create a transnational feminist community of "principled internationalism," by finding prevalent options for defining subjectivity, nationhood, religion, identity, and gender unviable, and by opening a dialogic space for alternative possibilities, incompletely realized in the United States as much as in Pakistan or India.

Notes

1. Butler uses the works of Helma Sander-Brahms, Moufida Tlatli, Jane Campion, Gurinder Chadha, Mira Nair, Tracey Moffat, Julie Dash, and Shirin Nishat, among others, to further her analysis of films that complicate "national cinemas" by placing identity at their forefront, 89–123.
2. See Jonathan Rutherford's interview with Homi K. Bhabha for an explication of this aspect of multiculturalism and cultural diversity.

3. This issue has been actively debated among feminists who adopt the human rights discourse to extend women's rights, while also noting the problems of working within the framework of rights discourses. As representatives of the two sides of this debate, see Menon (2004) and essays on human rights by Mallika Dutt and Inderpal Grewal in Shohat (2002).
4. This is Doreen Massey's phrase, from her essay "A Global Sense of Place" (Massey 1991, 24–28).
5. *The Silences of the Palace* provokes similar questions by attending to the experience of women servants, who do not share the same historical encounter with Tunisian nationhood as its men or its elite.
6. I am quoting Spivak as she discusses how the subaltern project varies from the Foucauldian effort to render hidden genealogies visible (Spivak 1988, 285).
7. See Spivak (2000) for an analysis for the problem with invoking the national in relation to the global south.
8. Newberg argues that the judiciary made decisions expedient to its survival against an ever-expanding center (Newberg 1995 2, 4, 7, 19).
9. On February 9, 1979, three ordinances and one presidential order were passed under Zia-ul-Haq prescribing *hadd* (punishment ordained by Holy Quran or *Sunnah* for a variety of crimes). Most damaging for women, under these *hudood* laws, consensual sexual intercourse between a man and woman not married to each other was met with stoning to death in the cases of adultery, and whipping at a public place with a hundred stripes in the case of fornication. The evidentiary system was changed under the *hudood* laws, requiring four adult males to act as witnesses to these acts (Khan 2001, 627–628).
10. In "Scattered Speculations" (Spivak 2005, 478), Spivak uses these phrases to describe her treatment of suicide in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (Spivak 1998).

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Chapter 12

The Abjection of Patriarchy: Ibolya Fekete's Chico *and the Transnational Feminist Imaginary*

Marguerite Waller

> Normally, the female film used to be concerned with so called "female issues." I was accused of not being a real woman because I wasn't dealing with those things. . . . I think if there is a female feel to the film, and I think there is, it is not the story, it is not the theme, it is the touch of the material, how you handle your heroes, how you handle the scenes, the events.
>
> —Ibolya Fekete

> Home is where your toothbrush is.
>
> —Yareli Arizmendi,
> Nostalgia Maldita: 1-900-MEXICO

One of several interrelated challenges presented by a recent film directed by Hungarian filmmaker Ibolya Fekete is her choice to collaborate with, to take as her primary interlocutor, a man, whose life story provides most of the film's events and who plays the film's fictionalized version of himself. I would argue that both the film, *Chico* (2001), and the collaborative mode of production that brought it into being enact a profoundly feminist epistemological, political, and aesthetic project, and that the film vigorously interrogates, as Rosi Braidotti has urged Western feminists to do, "the very conceptual structures that have governed the production of the theoretical schemes in which, even today, the representation of women is caught" (1994, 185). Fekete's choice of a male collaborator, though, appears to fly in the face of Braidotti's definition of the feminist subject as one who "fastens on the presence of the other woman, on the other as woman" (1994, 183).

The absence of women in *Chico* is both striking and provocative. The few female figures Fekete does project on-screen provide a

powerful antidote to the use, memorably analyzed by Laura Mulvey, of objectified glamorous, young women to privilege the patriarchal male gaze: Elderly grandmothers from Balkan towns and villages shown in documentary footage as they are being evacuated in wheelbarrows or helped onto riverboats to escape impending paramilitary attackers, a female German Red Army Faction (a.k.a. the Baader Meinhof Gang) operative passing through the Budapest airport, and an exile from junta-era Argentina bar-tending on an Italian cruise ship. There is no on-screen love interest and no sex. The few on-screen females there are index the bankruptcy and violence of state power rather than the physical and epistemological security nation-states claim to offer their citizens. Though the Argentinian woman is pleasant, the spectator's gaze is literally "barred" from her body, first by the bar she tends and then by the main character's own, shorter, and wider body, as they dance a politically resonant tango in the ship's completely empty ballroom.[1] The feminist intervention I see and feel in every detail of this intricately and rigorously crafted film takes place, instead, between the director, whose presence is indicated by the main character's glance into off-screen space during what appear to be interviews, and her source/subject, and also between the film and its spectators, who are also, of course, off-screen. Much of the film's power and its highly original feminism, I argue in this chapter, lie in its making visible and usable the transformative, interactive borderlands that it makes accessible everywhere, to everyone, whether the focus is macrohistorical or the smallest scrap of visual language.[2] The film works to create space for cross-gender, trans-positional, and, most conspicuously, transnational dialogues, and it is the nature of this space and these dialogues that marks the film both as feminist and as challenging some of Western feminism's most deeply held axioms.

Fekete's strategy in *Chico* follows in many respects from the concerns and techniques of her first feature film, *Bolse vita* (1996), which celebrated the economically stressed, but conceptually rich, transcultural space, opened up briefly by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet occupation of Hungary (Waller 2005). Refracted through this euphoric but ephemeral moment, the empirical and epistemological violence on which various nation spaces and the Cold War imperial spaces of both the Soviet Union and the United States were/are founded are made sharply visible. A Russian street musician (significantly, from Ulan Bator, a peripheral place in terms of the Moscow-centric Soviet Union), young enough not to have heard of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, discovers a cemetery full of the graves of Soviet soldiers in the forest outside Budapest. The corpses of young

men replace—for a moment, at least—the convention, linked to the cinematic use of the female figure detailed by Mulvey, of deploying beautiful young women as synecdoches for the space of nation and national identity (Yuval-Davis 1997, McClintock 1995, Burton 1992). Both the occupied nation-state of Hungary and the Soviet state that sought to control it are indexed instead by the unseen corpses of dead young men, many of them, ironically, drawn from the marginalized Asian populations of the Soviet Union, who were sent to Hungary to suppress the 1956 uprising and to maintain the political integrity of the Soviet bloc. "What are you doing here?" asks the musician from Mongolia. Recalling this discovery of the abject underside of Soviet hegemony, there is a montage, near the end of the film, of documentary footage shot during the conflicts in post-1989 Yugoslavia, Albania, and Romania. These excruciating documentary images of men shooting each other in the streets of their common cities, women and men weeping as they stumble along the roadsides of their villages and farms, a headless corpse being tossed like a sack of potatoes from the back of a truck, and refugees pleading to cross an arbitrary border to safety violently de-idealize the nationalisms in the name of which this grubby, personalized violence takes place. The logic of identity and difference, self and other, that underwrites these images of abjection, is itself, in a sense, abjected here. As if Fekete were filmically pondering the arguments of Julia Kristeva in *The Powers of Horror*, it is "meaningfulness," as it is inflected through nationalism and its attendant subcategories, rather than the collapse of such meaning, that comes to appear improper, unclean, and shameful (Kristeva 1982, 1–2).

How, though, might one discover or create, and begin to inhabit, less (self-) destructive terrains of knowing and desiring? The representation of identity and the emplotment of story become immediately problematic in the wake of such categorical destabilization. Fekete embraces this challenge in *Chico* by casting "real life" Latin American/Hungarian journalist Eduardo Rózsa Flores in the role of the film's focalizer, a Latin American/Hungarian journalist named "Ricardo," and by using Rózsa Flores's "actual biographical circumstances" as the basis for her script (Fekete 2002). The problematics of representation involved in the creation of character and story are located in the extra-diegetic world as well as in the film, and the boundary between diegetic and extra-diegetic spaces is blurred. Among the opening credits, there is an intertitle that reads as follows, "This film combines fictional and real elements. The characters and events portrayed are therefore all fictional." As I construe these words and the film they describe, Fekete is

calling attention to the space *between* the "fictional" and the "real," which necessarily transforms the "real elements" into ingredients in her film rather than the ground or referent of its images.

Chico, picking up where *Bolse vita* leaves off, opens with a further reconfiguration of the relationship between masculine subjects and the political territory of nation. Framed in close-up, but from behind so that we cannot see their faces, two men in a car drive fast toward and around multiple roadblocks in a rural landscape. There is no identification or master shot of this terrain; we later learn that it is the Voivodina front of the Croatian/Serbian conflict, soon after the fall of the Croatian city of Vukovar in the early 1990s. But the occasion for a master shot, a "bird's eye view" of the landscape with the car traveling through it, is reworked instead into a bizarre collision. Shot from the car's backseat, behind the two men's heads, a literal bird suddenly smashes against the windshield. In a cosmically witty high-angle reverse shot, the bird is shown caught in the windshield wipers of the very dirty windshield. Reading allegorically, one might say that the master shot discipline and visual transparency degrade simultaneously and catachrestically. The first words of the film are those of the passenger, who, as he starts photographing the dead bird, shouts in accented English, "Stop, Jimmy! That bird is watching me!" The car slows, but, following a loud thud, a wide, exterior shot reveals that the car has detonated a landmine. Not only will there be no (live) bird's eye view in this film, but the "ground" (geographical and metaphysical) will not be trustworthy either.

The next shots are close-ups in which both men appear to have been killed in the explosion. But unlike the driver, the photographer, who had been trying to capture an image of the bird, is himself photographed from just outside the car's grimy windshield, the dead bird in the foreground. Both of the slightly-too-quick close-ups of the men frustrate visual mastery or even minimal visual comfort. It is from the interplay *between* the cramped, claustrophobic, radically unsafe, and "unseeable" space within the car, and the position (replacing the bird's eye view) staked out by the camera just outside the car's windshield that the rest of the film could be said to unfold. Hardly a utopian or transcendent space, this slight distance/difference, nevertheless makes all the difference in the world.

The punctuation of the film's opening by carefully placed and paced credits proliferate the spaces of "betweenness" that I have been noting. (The intertextuality of this film with many others—some of them icons, others of them obscure—expands this "betweenness" to global proportions. There is hardly an image in *Chico* that does not

productively open up an interactive signifying space between itself and another film. The opening of Federico Fellini's *8 ½* , the whole of Fellini's *Toby Dammit*, and Hitchcock's *The Birds,* just to give a few obvious examples, are engaged by the opening of *Chico*. This dimension of the film, though, exceeds the scope of this essay.)[3] What Ricardo is never in a position to see, but which the film makes available to the spectator through its intricate nonlinear orchestration of flashbacks, "interviews," and voice-overs, is that the potential significance of every detail, encounter, or event remains open to change and further elaboration as life (or, for the spectator, the film) adds images and encounters that interact unpredictably with one another.

Enabling all of these interactions is the ontology-defying status of Ricardo himself as, situationally if not psychologically, a "border subject." An Eisensteinian edit following the opening sequence of the car hitting the landmine juxtaposes the claustrophobic space in and around the car with a wide shot of a lush landscape and a somewhat closer shot of a graciously proportioned veranda around the corner of which a boy of about eleven is shown running very fast (and also very slowly because the action is shown in slow motion). As the boy looks screen right into the off-screen space, he collides head on with one of the pillars holding up the roof of the veranda and crumples onto the ground. The next shot, a high-angle close-up of his face, shows him lying on the floor of the veranda with a jagged gash on his forehead. This shot is then punctuated by an intertitle that reads "Föszerepben (Starring) Eduardo Rózsa Flores." The synthesis of these two sequences, the car hitting the landmine and the boy hitting the pillar, comes with a medium close-up shot of a man, screen right, looking directly into the camera, interview-style. We recognize his scarred face, which the shot length gives us plenty of time to study, as that of the passenger in the opening sequence. While the scarred man on screen does not speak, on the sound track a voice says in Hungarian, "This is a different scar—from the explosion in Croatia. It covers the old one." The entire chain of shots, edits, visual images, sound images, and events, constitutes a cinematic version of "border writing," theorized by D. Emily Hicks as an "interference pattern" produced by the interaction of two of more referential codes (Hicks 1991, xxix). The palimpsestic scar links the figure of the boy with that of the men in the car, and the pastoral South American landscape with the war-torn southern Slav battlefield, disfiguring the man's face while figuring a border space that de-ontologizes the histories, geographies, political positions, and apparent events of both regions.

Border writing is about the interactions of different cultural codes rather than the definitions of any one code. As Gloria Anzaldúa has eloquently described such metaphysical "borderlands," they are, from the point of view of binary, analytical Western thinking, devastatingly ambiguous and excruciatingly painful—roughly comparable to Kristeva's position of "abjection." But insofar as they enact the breakdown of univocal meaning, linear thinking, social, political, and epistemic hierarchies, they become the precondition for a metamorphosis of thought and feeling:

> The new *mestiza*...learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (Anzaldúa 1987, 79)
>
> A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war. (1987, 80)

Abjection and Sublimity

If women in the film are few and kept at a distance, important male characters are numerous, finely detailed, and diverse. Ricardo's relationships with them are central to his trajectory, instantiating Eve Sedgwick's argument about the primacy of male-male bonds in "malehomosocial" societies (Sedgwick 1985). The bonds Ricardo forms in his South American boyhood and with the "boys" of the various militaries in Southern Europe that he deals with as a journalist and as a soldier are unfolded in the film with compassion, curiosity, and deadpan humor, not unlike Sedgwick's elegant unpacking of literary male subjectivities (Sedgwick 1985, 1990). An early scene, whose dynamic is repeated in different keys and other circumstances periodically throughout the film, involves twelve-year-old Ricardo and his best friend, puzzling their way through a text about revolutionary discipline. At the climax of an intimate, warmly lit sequence of close-ups, the two handsome young boys reach the conclusion that "[t]o sacrifice your life for an ideal—that's something worth living for." The irony of making an early death the goal of a worthwhile life is completely lost on the two twelve-year-olds, but all the more powerfully disrupts the spectator's intimacy with their idealism.

This sequence is followed by a voice-over by the adult Eduardo/Ricardo, articulating much the same position as that of the boys. Here it is given a slightly different slant by the film's pacing and pairing of image and sound. Speaking of Che Guevara, the adult man says (in Hungarian, thus presumably to director Fekete, as Ricardo speaks Spanish with his father and other intimates), "He [Che] really didn't care what would happen to him. He, and the others, sacrificed everything for that feeling. You get on a train, lean out the window, and let your hair fly in the wind. That's why they do it. And it's worth it, even if it's doomed to fail." The sequence of images accompanying these words begins with a beautiful close-up drawing of Che. This is followed, in the midst of the train analogy, by a disturbing still photograph of Che's face in close-up, just after his death. As Eduardo/Ricardo speaks about letting one's hair fly in the wind (strangely funny, since his own hair is cut extremely short), a grainy medium, 16 mm film shot of Che's dead face and bullet-riddled body, lying on a table in the foreground with armed men pacing in the background, fills the screen. The conjunction of the abject image of the corpse and the sublimity of Eduardo/Ricardo's words recalls Kristeva's discussion of the abject and the sublime. The subject of abjection, she argues, and the subject of the sublime are temporally spaced versions of the same discursive regime. "I become abject. Through sublimation, I keep it under control. The abject is edged with the sublime. It is not the same moment on the journey, but the same subject and speech bring them into being" (Kristeva 1982, 11). In *Chico*, though, this relationship ricochets from one side of the world to another, from one decade to another, permeating regimes in South America and Europe, both left wing and right wing, multiplying and mutating within different temporalities until it is impossible to differentiate among "moments on the journey" or to determine the boundaries of the abjected/sublimated subject.

Is the murder of Ricardo's Hungarian Jewish grandfather, shot on the banks of the Danube during the Nazi Holocaust, a moment of abjection that is "kept under control" by his son, Ricardo's father, in the sublimity of his drama about nuclear holocaust? The father, an ultra-left-wing Hungarian Jewish (baptized Catholic) exile married to an aristocratic Spanish Bolivian wife, raising a family first in Bolivia, then Chile, earns the reputation of "best living Bolivian (*sic*) poet" as a result of this play, which is first banned, after two of its audience members die of heart attacks, and then awarded a top literary prize. Is Ricardo's silver spoon boyhood in Bolivia a sublime moment also to be associated with the horrors of the Spanish Civil War, from which his wealthy, now "Bolivian" maternal grandparents once fled?

The connection between abjection and sublimity comes to a climax in a sequence that begins with Ricardo's communist father, pacing back and forth in his well-appointed studio, instructing Ricardo on the absolute difference between the violence of the *padrones* and the violence of revolutionaries. The shots of the father-and-son conversation are counterpointed by two very wide, stereotypical travelogue shots of indigenous herders and their llamas, accompanied on the sound track by the cliché of Andean flute music. These are the "poor" on behalf of whom the left-wing, urban, ethnic European students, artists, and intellectuals in La Paz are presumably engaging in violence (Moments later in film time, during a right-wing coup, Ricardo's father fires at the police in defense of the national art academy he directs.) But we never see any on-screen interaction *between* the intellectuals and the ostensible subjects of their political activity. The indigenous people of the area remain as fetishized and objectified as the celluloid female figures Mulvey deconstructs. We are given no evidence that the indigenous people want the support of these "revolutionaries," nor do we learn what they make of the spectacle of European-Bolivians shooting at each other. The cultural and cosmological differences between indigenous and European Bolivians, elided by Ricardo's father (but now with the election of Evo Morales, a significant factor in South American politics) could evoke for spectators the history of European conquest and colonization. Underlying the poverty and political exclusion of the indigenous people living in the nation-state of "Bolivia" of the 1960s—a state ironically "open" to the victims of exclusion and genocide in Europe such as Ricardo's father and maternal grandparents—are centuries of colonization, exploitation, and ethnocide. The father's subject position ("best living Bolivian poet") and his position on political violence appear much more complicated when they are read as, in a sense, made possible by the violent actions of fifteenth-century European *padrones*. Without in any way minimizing his position as a Holocaust survivor and victim of two right-wing coups in South America (first in Bolivia and then in Chile), his agency on behalf of the peasant and proletarian poor depends, nevertheless, on the conquest that materially and epistemologically abjected indigenous people, excluding them from agency within the frame of state politics.

The film's most cinematically spectacular and ideologically resonant conflation of abjection and sublimity moves geographically back toward Europe, bringing African histories—colonial and postcolonial—to bear along the way. Following the right-wing coup in Bolivia, Ricardo's father, we learn, went into hiding for a year, surfacing in Chile, where

he brought his wife and son and enjoyed a short but euphoric period as communist president Salvador Allende's artistic advisor. After Augusto Pinochet's overthrow of Allende, Ricardo's family, along with many other South American leftists who had taken refuge in Allende's Chile, dispiritedly board a UN plane, headed for Liberia. Reacting to the depression and despair of the deported passengers who represent the most committed leftists in South America, many of them in Allende's Chile as exiles already, Ricardo's father rises to the challenge of reading their apparently abject position as historically positive. Jumping up to address the entire group of passengers, he declares that as communists they have always been "internationalists," and that as internationalists they can never lose their home. He then leads them in singing an emotionally stirring *Internationale* (in Spanish).

While Ricardo's father is consolidating the comrades' sense of cohesion and groundedness, though, the camera work and the editing are working literally and figuratively to decenter his efforts. Shot at eye level from behind the back of Ricardo's father who is standing in the front of the plane, facing the passengers, Ricardo's mother's face is almost completely obscured by her husband's form. We can see enough, though, to tell that she has not joined in the singing of the *Internationale*. At the end of the song, as Ricardo's father leans over to shake hands with his son, his arm crosses between the camera and his wife's face, echoing the way his body and the position of the camera obscured her before. Meanwhile, intercut with shots of passengers singing in the plane's interior, there are several shots of the immense, arid, mountainous landscape below. The only object moving in this landscape is the tiny shadow of the plane itself. The intertextual referencing of the opening of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, where the shadow of Hitler's plane is seen traversing the terrain of Germany before the Führer arrives in Berlin for a demonstration of Nazi unity and might, is breathtakingly unexpected. The subtle intercutting of the intimate male/female familial behavior in the plane with the iconography of the Third Reich reminds us that Marxist "internationalists" can efface subject positions in the name of unity (wives and indigenous people, for example) just as effectively as nationalists. The palimpsest of the aerial shot seems to ask what other characteristics these dual political impulses of Europe's industrial age—nationalism and international communism— might share. The geological immensity and emptiness of the South American landscape also dwarf the UN plane's shadow, reworking Riefenstahl's aerial master shot trope. The monumental aspirations of the "internationalists" suddenly shrink to the size and status of a mote in the eye. By not

perspectivizing the sound of the exiled passengers' singing—a Godardian touch—Fekete simultaneously suggests the capacity of this geologically insignificant and ontologically insubstantial "mote" nevertheless to recuperate all the available space, be it geographical, ideological, or emotional. The absolute, the universal, the patriarchal sublime of European idealism is pictured, paradoxically, as a cramped, claustrophobic, and radically ungrounded conceptual space, precariously airborne *because* it is abject. The ease with which one idealism has overnight abjected another can be read as a signifier of the vulnerability of them both.

The flight from Chile to, we are told, Brazil and Liberia, over an uninhabited landscape in a UN plane raises a further set of questions about what might constitute or lie *between* (inter) the "national." Is this what the "internationalists" are singing about, or can we begin to hear in the term "inter-national" some other referent than a union of people across national boundaries? What conceptual spaces might be opened up by the perception of nations themselves as fictitious—imagined communities as Benedict Anderson has called them—and by foregrounding the political, ethnic, religious, class, gender, and other fractures that internally and externally disunite them at any given moment? Liberia (etymologically the land of "liberty") telescopes colonial, national, and transcontinental histories of slavery, exile, Civil War, racism, and a supposed "return" of Blacks from the United States to Africa. More recently Liberia has been caught up in the kinds of violence and postconflict "peacekeeping" that reduce the "opportunities" of civilian women to starvation or sex work (Higate 2007). Its evocation in *Chico* is not gratuitous, but poses very squarely versions of nation and of the international that challenge even the very complicated and traumatic national/international histories of Hungary and the former Yugoslavia. Liberia's layered history and its ongoing disjunctions among territory, language, political hegemony, gender, and ethnicity defy the notion of even an "imagined community" so deeply fixed in the dissociated, amnesiac Euro-American political imaginary. But perhaps therein lies its eponymous promise of "liberation."

After wandering with his family in the wilderness of unwelcoming Western European states for the better part of a year, Ricardo's father finally reclaims his Hungarian citizenship, thrusting his son into the thick of Cold War, Eastern European, Soviet-style communism, a sharp and painful contrast with the colorful, passionate, religiously inflected communism of his Latin American boyhood. A massive May Day parade showcasing Soviet military troops and weapons, commented on approvingly by his father, retroactively highlights for the

film's spectators (and perhaps for the young Ricardo, who watches from the balcony of the family's apartment) the very different images, occurring in the film only a few minutes before, of unarmed civilian crowds dancing in the streets following Allende's election. Ricardo's story becomes correspondingly more complex, and blackly humorous as he reaches manhood in Soviet-occupied, communist Hungary and seeks a career compatible with what he feels is his "vocation as a revolutionary." After engaging in various state-sponsored activities, including training as a KGB officer in Moscow (where he is disillusioned by the cynicism of his teachers and fellow students), working in "counterintelligence" (i.e., spying on fellow Hungarians) at the Budapest airport, and facilitating contact among ultra-left "terrorist" factions (using his fluency in five languages), he gives up, for a time, on political struggle and becomes a journalist for a Spanish newspaper.

Journalism in the late 1980s, though, exacerbates his confusion. In post-1989 Albania, it is the *communist* government that fires on students, and which has presided over a level of poverty and persecution that Ricardo has not seen since leaving right-wing-governed Latin America. On a trip to Israel, where he hopes once and for all to "sort out" his religious feelings as the son of a devout Spanish Catholic mother and an atheist Hungarian Jewish Communist father, he becomes even more bewildered and disoriented. "What an idiot I was," Ricardo/Eduardo tells the filmmaker. "A place where the same hill can mean three different things to three different religious groups…it blew my mind." At the Jewish Wailing Wall he recites the Christian Lord's Prayer and comes away weeping with frustration. Rather than dispelling his sense of living in an out-of-focus daze, without access to the political sublime, Jerusalem, where "everything is mixed up," painfully intensifies it. He cannot comprehend how these characteristics make Jerusalem "the most beautiful city in the world" to one of several spiritual advisors with whom he tries to clarify his beliefs.

Warning against reading empirical border subjects and border spaces as simply emancipatory, Katarzyna Marciniak, in her searching study of "alienhood," distinguishes between the conceptual spaces that "late-twentieth-century processes of diasporic dispersals and transnational migrations" have opened up for cultural theorists and "the material effects of alienhood…the legal, material, emotional, and symbolic impact on the daily experiences of various migrants" (2006, 20–21). Anzaldúa's borderlands, in this respect, are particularly instructive. It is not Anzaldúa's family who have emigrated or been displaced; it is their Texas home that has changed nationality

four times over the past 400 years (not unlike the besieged village in former Yugoslavia that incongruously becomes Ricardo's last hope of subjective, political, and narrative integration—a village being claimed by both Croatia and Serbia, whose majority population for over 800 years has been and still speaks Hungarian). The *mestizo* Latino(a)/ indigenous inhabitants of southwest Texas did not have to move to be recoded as alien in the wake of the land grab catalyzed by the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Similarly Ricardo does not have to take up arms or have a Croatian last name to be drawn into the conflict he is covering as a journalist. On the contrary it is the fact that he is shot at, captured, and tortured by Serb paramilitaries that impels him to abandon journalism and enlist in the Croatian militia. It is in this militia, furthermore, that he feels he has finally found himself. "I know what I'm doing," he shouts over the phone to his horrified father for whom Croatians are forever associated with "the fascists who shot your grandfather on the banks of the Danube."

His feeling of helplessness at the hands of armed Serb irregulars, it emerges, has reawakened the trauma he suffered as a boy held at gunpoint while Pinochet's soldiers ransacked the family's home in Santiago. Both torture and the destruction of one's home are intimate violations—like rape—that entail an overwhelming sensation of the meaninglessness or impotence of ones' subjectivity (Caruth 1996). This version of abjection, in Fekete's film and according to many trauma theorists, calls into being a desperate desire for an absolute, a sublime. The sense of transcendence, sometimes achieved by sufferers of "post traumatic stress disorder" through violence or addiction, does not heal the traumatic wound, however, but dissociates the self from its pain. Perception is narrowed to a single focus that seems to offer a new source of meaning and potency (Herman 1996). Anzaldúa's borderland entails a rejection of this sublime. Speaking of a nonbinary connectedness between conceptual and material effects, she locates the struggle to heal in the space brought into being by their "morphogenetic" or shape-changing interaction (Anzaldúa 1987, 81). "The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (Anzaldúa 1987, 87).

Because Fekete's film grounds itself in a specific autobiographical testimonial of *male* abjection, enunciated by a figure who, by class, vocation, and profession, represents and enforces the representable, she and her collaborator/character bring helplessness and rage into such tight contiguity with the masteries promised by the symbolic

structures of patriarchal nationalisms, ideologies, and theologies that the two modalities implode. In the final shot of the film, after the war and his near death in the explosion of the landmine, Ricardo has returned to the ruins of the village where "everything came together" for him for a few weeks. There he stands beside a pillar that no longer holds anything up in a bombed-out religious edifice no longer recognizable as a church, a mosque, or a temple. On the sound track a ballad (sung in Hungarian), whose words take the point of view of a dead soldier, evoke the anonymous bodies of men, fallen in foreign lands, which are reduced to dust and blown away in the wind. Paradoxically, it is the abjection of the abjecting categories of identity and substance themselves—something that has to occur "for real" in order for it to work in "fiction"—that the remarkable collaboration between Fekete and Rózsa Flores, between feminist filmmaker and veteran militarized male, enacts.

Notes

1. The intertextual reference here to exiled Argentinian director Fernando Solanas's film *Tangos*: *The Exile of Gardel* (1986) is one of a dense web of intertexts evoked and put into play by *Chico*.
2. Space does not permit me to include here a shot-by-shot analysis of how the film language works when Ricardo does something as apparently simple as change cars, leaving his Italian driver and his press car for the black Mercedes of an American diplomat, in pursuit of a story about a supposed cease-fire. Fekete's camera angles, cuts, use of windows and window frames, and coordination of image with dialogue speak volumes about the heterogeneous political and conceptual spaces Ricardo traverses in the space of a few feet.
3. *Chico*'s opening sequence references the attempts to escape from claustrophobic car interiors at the beginning and end of Fellini's *8 ½* (1963) and the fatal drive across a broken and barricaded bridge in *Toby Dammit* (1968). These films, too, challenge spectators to read between conventional frames of time, space, and subjectivity, though the glamor of Marcello Mastroianni and Terence Stamp has tended to romanticize their characters' epistemological shipwrecks in the eyes of audiences.

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