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Moving Images Against The Current  
The Aesthetics and Geopolitics of (Im)mobility in Contemporary Europe

by

Nilgun Bayraktar

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Performance Studies

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Film Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Shannon Jackson, Chair

Professor Miryam Sas

Professor Deniz Göktürk

Fall 2011

Moving Images Against The Current  
The Aesthetics and Geopolitics of (Im)mobility in Contemporary Europe

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Abstract

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Nilgun Bayraktar

Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies  
and the Designated Emphasis in Film Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Shannon Jackson, Chair

This dissertation investigates the historical and contemporary tensions around mobility and identity in Europe since WWII, with particular emphasis on their contemporary configurations. Drawing on recent theories of migrant and diasporic cinema, moving image art, and mobility studies, I provide close and historically situated readings of films, videos, and installations within a larger historical and geographical scope of European migration that encompasses the Middle East and Africa. The films and videos I study establish a non-Western *countergeography* of Europe that has produced multiple “others” in its constant efforts to recompose its borders and identity. They address psychological and sociological processes of integration and cultural syncretism as well as discrimination and racism against minorities and migrants. Although the geopolitical focus of my dissertation is Europe, the works I analyze challenge territorially bounded conceptions of identity and culture. They extend representation to socially disenfranchised groups such as undocumented migrants by narrating multiple, and often times perilous, forms of travel and border-crossing from migrants’ perspective. With attention not only to the shifting political and geographic borders of Europe but also to the shifting institutional and aesthetic borders of cinema, these works likewise invoke a powerful *cinematic-countergeography* that investigates the changing terrains of cinema and contemporary art.

The first chapter, on *The Edge of Heaven* (2007) by Fatih Akin and *Countess Sophia Hatun* (1997) by Ayşe Polat, focuses on second-generation Turkish German labor migrants and analyzes the cinematic production of heterogeneous diasporic spaces and subjects that transcend binaries of host-home or migrant-citizen. My second chapter, on *Hidden* (2005) by Michael Haneke and *Exiles* (2004) by Tony Gatlif, discusses the second-generation North African migrants in France and the violent history of French colonization of Algeria in relation to contemporary (postcolonial) French society. The third chapter, on the site-specific video installation *Küba* (2004) by Kutluğ Ataman, focuses on the counter-stereotypical representation of migration in relation to the multichannel installation format as well as traditional forms of political cinema. The fourth and fifth chapters, on the video essay *Sudeuropa* (2005-7) by Raphaël Cuomo and Maria Iorio and the video installation *Sahara Chronicle* (2006-9) by Ursula Biemann, respectively, examine the relationship between “illegal” migration and the creation of new borderlands in Southern Europe and North, West, and sub-Saharan Africa.

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Berkeley, California  
November 2011

*To My Dear Family*

*and*

*To My Love William*



## INTRODUCTION

### Critical Cinematic and Artistic Takes on Migration, Mobility, and the New Border Regime in an “Expanding” Europe



Figure 1 Adrian Paci *Center for Temporary Stay and Assistance* (2007)

*Centro di permanenza temporanea* (Center for Temporary Stay and Assistance),<sup>1</sup> a single-channel video installation produced in 2007 by Milan-based Albanian artist Adrian Paci,<sup>2</sup> opens with a wide-angle long shot of an airport runway. A static camera frames a mobile stairway, which seems to be attached to a plane that has been left out of the frame. Cut to another static shot in which the camera is located at the top of the stairs, looking down on the concrete runway. Ten seconds later, a group of people walking in a line enter the frame and begin climbing the stairs toward the camera. Cut to their feet, which reluctantly move forward, filmed

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<sup>1</sup> *Centro di permanenza temporanea* was first exhibited in Smith-Stewart Contemporary Art Gallery in New York. The video can be viewed at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EY1fpo0DRc>>

<sup>2</sup> Adrian Paci, born in 1969 in Albania, trained as a classical painter in Tirana. He left Albania for Milan in 1997, escaping the violence of the civil war. He works mainly in video, photography and sculpture, exploring issues of exile, displacement and migration.

by a camera located on the ground. Back to the opening wide-angle shot of the stairway, which this time is crowded with a group of men and women hoping to board the plane. As the passengers gather, the camera, which has been filming them from a distance, begins to linger on their faces in close-ups, compelling the viewer to ponder the identity of these people—who appear to be from Africa, Asia, and South America—and their reasons for flying.

For affluent first-world viewers, this long line of working-class people on an airport runway might evoke images of refugees, detainees, or migrant laborers being deported to another country or another detention camp. The title of the video refers to the Italian name for the camps used to hold undocumented migrants, figures often portrayed in the media and mainstream political discourse as “invaders,” smugglers, or victims. As the camera pans back, we see that the aircraft steps now appear to be freestanding, unattached to a plane. Suspended on this stairway to nowhere, the passengers-in-transit can do nothing but silently observe the artist filming them or the noisy planes swarming around them. The camera alternates between various long shots of the boarding steps, underscoring the immobilized position of these non-Westerners without a destination. They are not a cosmopolitan, mobile elite. They are dislocated migrants, detained in camps or forced to maintain illegalized and vulnerable lives with low-paying jobs. In his video, Paci has transformed the airport, a quintessential symbol of globalization and mobility, into a space of arrested movement for a group stranded in legal limbo.

*Centro di permanenza temporanea* points to the complex relationships between mobilities and immobilities by referring to the conditions of deportability—a threat that has become pervasive in the lives of the millions of (undocumented) migrants who are radically immobilized in transitory spaces. The unspecified setting of the video evokes a universal sense of displacement. By naming this work after Italian transit/detention camps, Paci refers to the recent geopolitical changes in the European mobility regime: the militarization of border controls, the securitization of migration, and the increasing precariousness of migrants’ lives. The recent reformulation of the borders of the European Union (EU) is highly focused on managing the flow of so-called “illegal” migrants and refugees. Indeed, Paci’s video underscores the privileges and deprivations of the major resource of mobility that is not equally accessed by all people.

I have deliberately chosen to open this dissertation, which studies various cross-border mobilities, with a video that visualizes arrested movement. Evoking a sense of temporal and spatial hiatus, Paci’s video underscores the complex and intimate connections between mobilities and moorings—a major concern of this study. *Centro di permanenza temporanea* reveals the extent to which borders, no longer mapped to the physical boundaries of the nation state, are increasingly deterritorialized and reterritorialized in transitory places such as airports, which function as strategic nodes within a transnational network of control. This dissertation extends beyond the condition of deportability materialized at the airport in Paci’s video to examine the complex social networks, infrastructures, and locations produced by diverse historical and contemporary migrant mobilities within and beyond Europe’s shifting territorial borders.

New and diverse practices and modes of mobility, migration, and border regulation have continually reconfigured the “New Europe” of the post-Cold War era. Since the early 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Europe has seen some of the most important developments in its history: the induction of ten post-socialist countries into the EU, the increased visibility of non-Western minorities in Europe, and the rise of migratory routes with new points of departure (e.g., sub-Saharan Africa) and arrival (e.g.,

Mediterranean Europe and Maghreb).<sup>3</sup> These sociopolitical and economic developments have been engendered to a great extent by the expansion of the EU and the implementation of the Schengen *acquis*, which eliminated border controls between European countries and established a common external border, generating a new border regime<sup>4</sup> characterized by the racialization, criminalization, and securitization of migration and numerous major shifts in asylum policies beyond the EU territory. Indeed, Europe has encouraged the expansion of the EU while simultaneously strengthening and closing its borders against migrants and refugees from non-European areas. The physical disappearance of borders in the Schengen Area (which comprises the twenty-five countries—twenty-two EU members and three non-EU states—that have signed the Schengen Agreement) is intricately linked to the proliferation of detention centers and refugee camps on the margins of Europe and beyond. Ironically, European integration has coincided with the emergence of a very flexible and highly precarious transnational labor force that is now essential to the European economy. Yet the new mobility regime has reinforced right-wing extremism and racism against migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, negatively informing the public discourse and policies surrounding the minority laborers so integral to today's Europe.

Against this backdrop, an increasing number of films and other artworks have critically engaged various European (im)mobilities in relation to broader questions of space, place, and identity. This dissertation examines cinematic and artistic representations of migration, mobility and the new border-regime in an effort to delineate the historical and contemporary tensions that have inflected discourses around mobility and identity in Europe since World War II, with particular emphasis on their contemporary configurations. I investigate the affective and political experience of migration in relation to the shifting institutional practices and discourses of border control, focusing on diverse forms of mobility such as labor migration, postcolonial migration, undocumented migration, and tourism. I aim to identify the new, alternative, or counter-hegemonic geographic and political imaginations that these films and videos invoke, and explore the ways such projects both reflect and are informed by various contemporary forms and contexts of moving image production and exhibition.

This dissertation finds its theoretical and analytical framework at the intersection of three fields: migrant and diasporic cinema in Europe, moving image art, and mobility studies. Navigating these fields, this study provides close and historically situated readings of films, videos, and installations within the larger geographic and historical scope of European migration, including migrants and minorities in Germany and France, refugee (im)mobilities in Italy, internal migration in Turkey, and trans-Mediterranean and trans-Saharan migratory networks. In each of these contexts the representation of migratory spaces and subjects is conditioned by interconnected but distinct histories and practices of migration. Indeed, this study carefully attends to the disjunctures and points of overlap between these contexts as well as the impact of particular localized histories and geographies—concerns I shall fully explore below.

Over the last three decades, migrant and diasporic cinema in Europe has gained wider public recognition, challenging the notion of national cinema and transforming mainstream and

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<sup>3</sup> Especially following its enlargement to include twenty-seven member-states, most analysis of European space and identity has involved the processes of the EU enlargement.

<sup>4</sup> I use the concept of “mobility/border regime” deliberately, for the term emphasizes the entanglements of political, economic, and transnational processes. The concept of regime “include[s] a multitude of actors whose practices relate to each other but are not ordered in the form of a central logic or rationality.” Furthermore it “implies a space of conflict and negotiation” (Hess 133).

art-house European cinema from within. In fact, in the last ten to fifteen years, filmmakers with a migrant background, most famously the Turkish German director, screenwriter, and producer Fatih Akın, have come to be seen as ambassadors of contemporary European auteurist cinema. The first two chapters of this dissertation track the recent shift in the cinematic representation of migration, from tales of isolation and alienation to tales of transnational mobility and cross-cultural encounter, particularly in the context of Turkish German and French Maghrebi cinema. The last three chapters concentrate on video essays and installations that address border-crossings and migratory routes across the Mediterranean and African space. This shift is contextualized in relation to the recent cross-pollination of cinema and art seen in the growing prominence of film and video-based works and cinematic installations in international art exhibitions and biennials worldwide. The chapters devoted to moving image art take the formal and thematic experimentation of the films explored in the first section a step further by analyzing the ways video essays and sculptural installations contribute to or challenge the representation of migrancy and mobility in the gallery context, exploring the play between the virtual space of the moving image and the actual site of the installation. Such installations allow a reconsideration of what Eric de Bruyn has called the “shifting network of various public spheres” (qtd. in Leighton 26), interrogating the ways social experience is articulated and negotiated in multiple forms. As Michael Newman has argued, “At stake in much moving image work is the possibility of a critical relation in a thoroughly mediated corporate global culture” (88). Within this framework, moving image installations are perhaps uniquely well equipped to approximate the experience of migration, which has become highly fragmented and multifarious in recent years, as it has expanded to include multiple points of departure and arrival. The movement of the viewer through these installations thus acquires new meaning, paralleling the mobility of the bodies on the screen and raising fresh aesthetic and sociopolitical questions about the borders between spaces, subjects, and mediums.

The field of mobility studies provides dynamic new ways of thinking about films, videos, and installations in relation to evolving geopolitical configurations and socioeconomic changes, while simultaneously critiquing the systems with which these genres engage. This dissertation asserts that the recent transformations in cinematic form parallel Europe’s recent geopolitical transformation. As European borders have become more flexible and deterritorialized, expanding to embrace non-European territories and the routes back to European metropolises, the aesthetic borders between cinema and art have also become blurred, producing a new form of moving image art that defies easy categorization. In the following pages I approach these shifts from numerous angles, attending in each case to the specific historical and social contexts underlying the particular films, videos, and installations central to each chapter.

## **Migrant and Diasporic Cinema in Europe**

*Migrants must, of necessity, make a new imaginative relationship with the world, because of the loss of familiar habitats. And for the plural, hybrid, metropolitan result of such imaginings, the cinema, in which peculiar fusions have always been legitimate . . . may well be the ideal location.*

—Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 25

The shifting sociocultural landscape of the New Europe, shaped by the conditions of diaspora and migration, has been explored in cinema and art since the 1960s and 1970s. Using very limited resources, first-generation minority filmmakers in Europe have made many independent documentary, short, or experimental films that address the migrant experience. In the mid-1980s, projects by migrant and diasporic filmmakers that explore displacement and exile began to receive wider public recognition.<sup>5</sup> Feature-length narrative film has emerged as the dominant mode of filmmaking in this field; it has been argued that the use of this form has contributed to “the mainstream cross-cultural appeal of migrant and diasporic cinema” (Berghahn and Sternberg 4). Prominent filmmaking practices in this genre include Black and Asian British cinema, *beur* and *banlieue* (or French Maghrebi) filmmaking, and Turkish German cinema.

Such cinematic categories are both a result and a reflection of post-WWII labor migration to Western Europe from former colonies and other outlying regions. Since the 1990s, cinematic representations of European (im)mobilities have diversified and expanded to encompass spaces and subjects located at the margins of Europe and beyond. As the countries of southern Europe, transitional embarkation points for migrants, have become the desired endpoints of new migratory routes from Africa and the Middle East, migrant and diasporic films have emerged in Spanish, Italian, and Greek cinema. Contemporary filmmakers have increasingly been preoccupied with themes such as clandestine and transitory migration across the geographic and historical terrains of the Middle East, the Mediterranean Maghreb, and sub-Saharan and Western Africa. As a result, a growing number of recent films stage the question of “New Europe” textually and attempt to rethink Europe in terms of its sociopolitically and legally excluded groups. Indeed, they reveal that the contradictory implementation of various kinds of mobility on the continent produces complex and socially, politically, and economically differentiated communities.

Various film scholars have detected a shift away from the earlier stereotypical representations of victimhood and isolation to a new cinematic language that involves transnational and transcultural encounters and multiple border crossings. Writing in 1996, Sarita Malik argued that Black and Asian British cinema had witnessed a shift from “cinema of duty”<sup>6</sup> to explorations of the “pleasures of hybridity.” For Malik, “cinema of duty” describes a type of diasporic cinema that takes it upon itself to be representative of the political and social agendas of the marginalized community. Critics of this construct have underlined its tendency to subdue the aesthetic qualities of film in favor of effective political discourse. Nevertheless, films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) by Stephan Frears, *Bhaji on The Beach* (1993) by Gurinder Chadha, and *East is East* (1999) by Damien O’Donnell enacted a shift in cinematic representations of Black and Asian British identity by foregrounding the heterogeneity of British society and employing mainstream narrative techniques in order to reach wider audiences.

In Turkish German cinema, several film scholars, including Deniz Göktürk, Barbara

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<sup>5</sup> These second-generation filmmakers “gain[ed] access to film production roughly simultaneously in Britain, France and Germany in the 1980s” (Berghahn and Sternberg 4).

<sup>6</sup> Cameron Bailey defines these kind of ethnic and social problem films as: “Social-issue oriented in content, documentary realist in style, [and] firmly responsible in intention.” According to Bailey, “the cinema of duty” “positions its subjects in direct relation to social crisis, and attempts to articulate ‘problems’ and ‘solutions to problems’ within a framework of center and margin, white and non-white communities. The goal is often to tell buried or forgotten stories, to write unwritten histories, to ‘correct’ the misrepresentations of the mainstream” (qtd. in Malik 203-4).

Mennel, and Rob Burns, have observed a similar move away from themes of victimhood and oppression to post-unification transcultural perspectives—in other words, film has seen a “shift from a ‘cinema of the affected’ to a ‘cinema of hybridity’” (Burns 2007: 375).<sup>7</sup> Departing from victim narratives, Turkish German directors such as Ayşe Polat, Fatih Akin, Aysun Bademsoy, Yüksel Yavuz, Seyhan Derin, and Thomas Arslan, among others, have contributed to a new wave of filmmaking that fosters a hybrid and plural Turkish German cultural identity (Göktürk 2002; Mennel 2002). In the context of French Maghrebi cinema, critics have also observed that in recent years, *beur* films have diversified in terms of themes and settings, taking their minority characters outside the borders of the claustrophobic *banlieue* (housing projects) in order to avoid center-periphery models that confine minorities to marginal spaces (Tarr 2005). Alec Hargreaves in particular has defined these new directions as a “welcome widening of the themes and subject positions explored by second-generation Maghrebi filmmakers” (2000: 343). The first two chapters of this dissertation track such shifts in Turkish German and *beur* and *banlieue* cinema, with a specific focus on formal and thematic continuities and discontinuities in the cinematic representation of migrancy.

These recent developments do not undermine the historical validity of traditional categories of Turkish German or French Maghrebi cinema. Such older models make an important contribution by accounting for specific histories and geographies of migration. Nevertheless, the reductive markers of “immigrant,” “minority,” and “ethnic” used in scholarly circles can also push diasporic films into what Hamid Naficy has defined as “discursive ghettos.” The discursive ghetto can “lock filmmakers into genre or ethnic categories that fail to account adequately for the filmmakers’ personal evolution and stylistic transformations over time” (Naficy 2001: 204). Furthermore, as Sandra Ponzanesi argues, “migrant cinema remains a rather controversial notion, since cinema depends on an extensive collective effort, more so than other creative forms (i.e., literature, art, photography) and therefore complicates the limitations of the label of ‘migrant’ via a correlation to the director. ‘Migrant cinema’ stretches along more complex lines of modes of production, distribution channels and targeted audiences” (2011: 74). Indeed, contemporary films often include actors, directors, producers, and funding bodies from various countries, making it very difficult to specify a project’s national identity (Göktürk 2002b: 214).

In an effort to avoid ethnic and territorial categories, many film scholars have attempted to mark the distinctive artistic, aesthetic, and thematic elements of films about migration and mobility by coining terms such as “accented cinema” (Naficy 2001), “intercultural cinema” (Marks 2000), “transnational cinema” (Ezra and Rowden 2006), and “post-migrant cinema” (Leal et al. 2008). Films that fall into these scholarly categories typically explore the exilic and diasporic spaces emerging in Western metropolises. By documenting and detailing the many faces of the “other” in Europe, whether cultural, religious, racial or ethnic, such films investigate the psychological and sociological processes of assimilation, integration, and cultural syncretism as well as discrimination and racism against minorities and migrants. Recent critical literature on migrant and diasporic filmmaking has established that the fostering of identity voiced by the so-called “other” in such films has encouraged the development of a counter-discourse that allows

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<sup>7</sup> Burns argued that “The ‘cinema of the affected’ as represented by [Tevfik] Baser’s work can thus be seen as continuing the tradition of the ‘guest-worker cinema’ (*Gastarbeiterkino*) of the New German Cinema, the perspective it brought to bear on the alien culture was one in which the focus was unremittingly on alterity as a seemingly insoluble problem, on conflict of either an intracultural or intercultural variety” (2006: 133).

for new ways of conceptualizing difference and migrant subjectivity. Hamid Naficy's notion of an "independent transnational film genre" (later termed "accented cinema") proves particularly helpful in this context, for this genre "cuts across previously defined geographic, national, cultural, cinematic, and metacinematic boundaries" (1996: 119). Transcending the analytical frameworks that privilege discrete national cinemas, Naficy's work on "accented cinema" features analyses of global exilic filmmaking and covers a wide variety of contemporary diasporic cinema created by directors from different geopolitical locations.

In the first two chapters of this dissertation I explore Turkish German and *beur* and *banlieue* films, relying heavily on Naficy's notion of "accented cinema" to analyze the ways in which recent examples both incorporate and challenge the conventions of migrant cinema. Naficy focuses on the ways in which exilic and diasporic filmmakers "translate" their individual and collective experiences of displacement and exile into cinematic production. Even though reservations must be raised about Naficy's emphasis on filmmakers' biographical trajectories in his readings of films—an emphasis that might essentialize diasporic cultures and identities—the notion of accented cinema is particularly helpful in analyzing the spatial relations of borders, borderlands, and mobilities that are central to the aesthetics of these works. Covering a large and heterogeneous corpus of films from different regional and cultural contexts, Naficy suggests that "accented films are interstitial because they are created astride and in the interstices of social formations and cinematic practices. Consequently they are simultaneously local and global" and "in dialogue with [the filmmakers'] home and host societies, and their respective national cinemas, as well as with audiences, many of whom are similarly transnational" (2001: 4, 6). Naficy's analysis of homecoming and home-seeking journeys in accented cinema figures into my discussion of Fatih Akın's *The Edge of Heaven* (2007) in chapter one and Tony Gatlif's *Exiles* (2004) in chapter two in a more complex form, influenced by the multidirectional mobilities that challenge the binary home/away. These films employ travel and motion to move beyond the discursive ghettos of Turkish German, *beur* and *banlieue*, or migrant cinema. Naficy's discussion of claustrophobic and agoraphobic spaces of exile in turn helps to frame my discussion of Ayşe Polat's *Countess Sophia Hatun* (1997) in chapter one and Michael Haneke's *Hidden* (2005) in chapter two. Along with Naficy's notion of accented cinema, I employ the framework of "Western" film genres such as heritage cinema, the road movie, and fractal films or network narratives in order to account for the formal and thematic complexities of these cinematic tales of mobility and confinement.

The films and videos examined in this dissertation are what Leonard R. Koos defines as "films without borders." They are part of "a recent wave of internationally acclaimed films that actively situate themselves between nations and cultures," including *Le Grand Voyage* (The Great Voyage, 2004) by Ismaël Ferroukhi, *Gegen die Wand* (Head On, 2004) by Fatih Akın, *In This World* (2002) by Michael Winterbottom, *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002) by Stephan Frears, *Welcome* (2009) by Philippe Lioret, and *Eden à l'ouest* (Eden is West, 2009) by Costa Gavras. "Multilingual and multicultural," Koos argues, "these films illustrate the transnational and transcultural realities of existence in an era of globalization" and challenge narrow definitions of national cinema (3). Here the trope of the journey opens an investigation of transnationally displaced subjects and unequal access to mobility. These films portray border-crossings not as an activity of the cosmopolitan traveler but as a vital act on the part of individuals and groups who have been displaced for socioeconomic or political reasons. In this sense, they depict (im)mobilities as multidirectional, interdependent, and differential. In presenting European

identity as always already complex, transnational, and decentered, they contest the closed, monolithic conception of Europeanness and the inside-outside binaries inherent in such a construction. Moreover, through tales of multiple border-crossings, they subvert conventional representational models and the static binary formulations of identity on which they are typically based.

### **Moving Image Art**

*These installations, and the forces that animate them, may seem to be the effect of the so-called “crisis” within cinema and the difficulties of contemporary art, of which installations are probably the most vivid manifestation. But if it is difficult to assimilate these works to the tradition of the plastic arts, the very framework of which they explode, it is no less difficult to take them as belonging to traditional cinema or as a supplement of cinema. ... The strange force of these works is thus to open ever more clearly the indefinable expansion of an other cinema, according to which the conditions of an aesthetics of confusion are clarified and amplified. It is better to try to describe its nuances than to pretend to be able to escape them.*

—Raymond Bellour, “Of An Other Cinema,” 408

Operating in a clear if unintentional parallel to cinema, contemporary art has also addressed migration in the context of the recent geopolitical reconfiguration of Europe, notably in large-scale exhibitions such as *Projekt Migration* (2005–6) in Cologne, Germany, as well as in an increasing number of Western and non-Western biennials such as Manifesta: European Biennial of Contemporary Art (established in 1996) and the Istanbul Biennial (established in 1987). In addition, a number of museums devoted to migration have been established since the end of the twentieth century in Germany, the United Kingdom, the Balkans, and elsewhere. As Kerstin Poehls has argued, these transformations in the European museological space result from a “need to make the relation between a preserved past inside the museum and complex realities outside the museum more *explicit*, and focusing on migration is apparently an appropriate way to do this” (349, original emphasis). The increasing visibility of non-Western artists such as Shirin Neshat, Mona Hatoum, Zineb Sedira, Kutluğ Ataman, Esra Ersen, Nevin Aladağ, and Ergin Çavuşoğlu in Western art spaces has also contributed to the widening interest in issues of identity, postcolonialism, and diaspora in contemporary art circles.

Significantly, many of the artists who grapple with these issues employ the moving image<sup>8</sup> in order to explore migratory spaces and subjectivities, and experiment with different forms of display, for example, installation and multiple-projection in the gallery setting. Museums and galleries increasingly commission pieces of video art, soundscapes, and media installations. Such emphasis on the moving image in artistic representations of migrancy is part of a wider popularization of cinematic video installations, which, in the contemporary gallery setting, allow artists to experiment with the spatialization of image and narrative temporality. Cross-pollination between cinema and art is also reflected in the increasing number of

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<sup>8</sup> Critics such as Tanja Leighton and Michael Newman prefer the term moving image art to medium-specific terms such as video art, for “Moving images today are not only ubiquitous, but also infinitely transformable.” This “remediation,” according to Newman, is “facilitated by digitalization where the image is easily transferred across different platforms—monitor, projection, screen, TV” (88).



filmmakers who “have translated their works into installation or conceived new works only accessible in the darkened space of the gallery, while continuing to produce films for traditional theatrical release” (Kim 126). For example, the works of artists/filmmakers such as Harun Farocki, Atom Egoyan, Steve McQueen, Chantal Akerman, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Isaac Julien, Peter Greenaway, and Chris Marker journey through art spaces (in the form of installations) as well as appearing at film festivals and on alternative circuits (as theatrical films), blurring the boundaries between the cinematic and the artistic. These aesthetic border-crossings testify to the interstitial status of the moving image, as well as its uneasy assimilation within “the physical, institutional, or discursive space of either the art gallery or the cinematic theater” (Uroskie 398). Indeed, as Raymond Bellour suggests, this expanded form of cinema can only be fully considered in relation to “the thousand and one ways to show moving images in the vague and misnomered domain known as Art” (2003: 56). Fundamental to such a consideration is an investigation of what happens to the moving image when it is transferred from the black box to the white cube and vice-versa. How do we re-think cinema when it is exhibited or re-contextualized within the gallery or the museum, where spectatorship is conditioned by the sculptural qualities of film and video installation? How does the increasing use of moving images by artists alter the consumption of moving images?

One of the underlying goals of this dissertation is to extend these questions specifically to experimental films, video essays, and film/video installations that engage issues of mobility and migration. In contemporary practice, this is particularly rich terrain. Recent scholarship on the intersections between cinema and contemporary moving image art suggests that “the practice or ‘medium’ of film and video installation is now the dominant form of contemporary art” (Leighton 7). Indeed, As Sabine Breitwieser pointed out in relation to the exhibition *Cinema like never before*, curated by Harun Farocki and Antje Ehmman, the white cube that has traditionally defined exhibition space has been transformed into “an ensemble of black boxes, several miniature cinemas with screened videos and installations” (10). The increasing use of moving images by artists has also fostered new forms of spectatorship that have altered consumption patterns by playing with film’s temporality and spatiality (e.g., in multichannel projections, installations, fragmented narratives, time lags between a video’s image and sound tracks). Cinema has likewise been transformed and expanded to include new media such as video and video/film installation as well as new spaces such as the gallery and the museum. Challenging simple classification, the films, videos, and installations I analyze in this dissertation have applied such techniques in order to investigate the relationship between visuality and migrancy. In particular, they manipulate the spatialization of narrative, the physical and psychological involvement of the viewer, and the practice of montage in the perambulatory space of the gallery in order to illuminate the geopolitics of European (im)mobilities.

The intersection of cinema and art can be traced back to the 1960s, when artists’ films emerged as a recognizable artistic category. The decade witnessed experimentation with the filmic form in the gallery, particularly in terms of the site of display or projection, as well as “the creation of hybrid filmic objects, installations, performances and events” (Leighton 14). Informed by diverse practices of Postminimalism, artists such as Marcel Broodthaers, Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman, and Richard Serra were among those who critically investigated the possibilities of film (Leighton 18). The collapse of disciplinary boundaries in the visual arts fostered new forms of re/presentation, shifting the art world’s focus from medium specificity to site specificity and putting an emphasis on the space of display. As art historian Alexander

Alberro has argued, the meaning of film and video installations is not merely a question of material or materiality, nor of a work's thematic concerns; rather, meaning is "intricately dependent on the way a particular work comes together in formal terms and dialogically negotiates the site of its display" (424). The third chapter of this dissertation considers this emphasis on site specificity in relation to Kutluğ Ataman's video installation *Küba*, which presents interviews with the residents of a socioeconomically and politically marginalized neighborhood in Turkey and uses the particular spatial characteristics of a chosen public site (e.g., a train station) as the basis for the viewer's relationship with the exhibition space. Significantly, Ataman's *Küba* is the most recognizably site-specific work in this dissertation—the other works I explore are devised for gallery, museum or cinema context.<sup>9</sup>

Such focus on the site of display challenges the borders of an artwork and affords the viewer an important role in creating its multiple meanings. Contemporary moving image installations in galleries and museums further unsettle conventional dynamics of viewership by offering a multitude of competing images and presentations that propel viewers through the exhibition space, challenging the "false absolutization of time to which cinema is prone" (Osborne 72). Significantly, Peter Osborne suggests that "There is a complex overlay of rhythms condensed into the casual act of viewing a work of art," and moving image installations might retain their criticality in today's media-saturated era by opening up this complex "network of temporal connections (psychic, social, historical) to a reflective and transfigurative view" (73). Video-based images have become part of increasingly theatrical and sculptural demonstrations of *mise-en-scène* in the gallery. And artists such as Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Janet Cardiff, Douglas Gordon, Steve McQueen, and Janet and Louise Wilson have variously experimented with breaking the form of experience common to classical cinema with tactics such as the rejection of "linear narrative" and the production of highly psychological image spaces that "mirror, double, split, echo, and multiply the projected image" (Leighton 36). As Laura Mulvey argues, "the ties that bind films to the linear literary conventions of the screenplay have been replaced by spatial narrative forms that can only be fully realized in the field of visual arts—or more generally, in the context of visual arts as a constantly expanding field" (2003: 32).

The moving image works I analyze reflect the mutual proliferation of cinematic and artistic traditions, uniting fields that have usually been considered distinct. While the films and videos I examine defy generic categorization, they also mobilize, subvert or re-code aesthetic conventions from specific modes of filmmaking such as social-realist film and documentary. For example, the video installations *Sudeuropa* (2005–7) by Raphaël Cuomo and Maria Iorio and *Sahara Chronicle* (2006–9) by Ursula Biemann display quasi-documentary techniques and aesthetics such as location shooting, voice over, and archival footage, blurring the boundaries between documentary and fiction. Thus, these works problematize the claim to "truth" traditionally posed by documentary film, while making use of its forms and techniques in their attempt to depict the complexity of the politically charged issues they tackle. Indeed, an engagement with and revitalization of experimental documentary modes has marked numerous forms of contemporary moving image production.

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<sup>9</sup> The curatorial project *Küba: Journey Against the Current* (April and July 2006), in which the installation *Küba* traveled aboard a converted container barge up the Danube River from the Black Sea to Vienna, inspired the title of my dissertation. The project was a collaboration between Kutluğ Ataman and the Viennese gallery Thyssem-Bornemisza Art Contemporary,

On the whole, my project revolves around heteronomous forms and relations as opposed to autonomous ones that insist on the aesthetic independence of an artwork.<sup>10</sup> In other words, this project is based on the premise that aesthetic or formal issues are interdependent with sociopolitical ones. As performance studies scholar Shannon Jackson has asserted, “in the last few decades, both art-making and social inquiry have been induced to avow their heteronomy, the degree to which their making and their thinking were ‘governed by external rules,’ that is, contingent and inter-dependent with a world that they could not pretend to transcend” (2008: 144). Each chapter of this dissertation examines particular films, videos, and/or installation works in relation to the cinematic forms or genres they draw on and delineates the ways in which they depart from and/or re-signify these genres’ narrative, thematic, and formal conventions. With an emphasis on what Doreen Massey (1994) calls “power geometries,” that is, the complex webs of relations of domination and subordination, I explore films and videos as “spaces for resisting processes of homogenization and . . . the compartmentalizing and stratifying tendency of the Euro-empire” (Pratt 17). The films, videos, and installations I consider cross the borders between such distinct genres and modes of moving image production as documentary-fiction, mainstream-art cinema. They likewise challenge aesthetic boundaries as well as national, cultural, and political ones.

### **Mobilities and Moorings**

Recent theoretical articulations of mobility place much more emphasis on the dialectical relationship between mobilities and moorings, even insisting that “mobilities cannot be described without attention to the necessary spatial, infrastructural and institutional moorings that configure and enable mobilities” (Hannam et al. 2).<sup>11</sup> These studies involve immobile infrastructures that organize the sporadic mobilities of people, information, and images, as well as the borders and boundaries that limit, channel, and regulate movement. In this context, the dialectics of mobilities and immobilities or moorings (Urry 2003) challenge binary oppositions such as inclusion-exclusion, sedentary-nomadic, national-transnational, and proximity-distance, and take into account differences in regard to race, gender, sexuality, age, and class. This inevitably leads to consideration of different (im)mobilities in relation to each other as a way to unpack the “systems of differentiation between mobile subjects” (Fortier 314). Indeed, mobility studies insist on the examination and articulation of mobility and migration in “historically grounded, carefully contextualized, and concretely particularized ways” (Margaroni and Yiannopoulou 7). This new paradigm is constituted by “studies of corporeal movement, transportation and communications infrastructures, capitalist spatial restructuring, migration and immigration, citizenship and transnationalism, and tourism and travel” (Hannam et al. 9-10). Research within the mobilities paradigm “examines the embodied nature and experience of different modes of travel, seeing them in part as forms of material and sociable dwelling-in-

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the complex debates around artistic autonomy and heteronomy see Jackson 2008 and 2011. As Shannon Jackson explains, “autonomy, in both aesthetic and ethical discourses, is defined as ‘self-governing,’ opposing itself to objects and subjects who are heteronomously ‘governed by external rules’” (2011: 15). In her seminal book *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, Jackson examines recent experiments in socially engaged art and performance, focusing mainly on artists who conceive social issues/problems in relation to formal or aesthetic ones.

<sup>11</sup> “There are interdependent systems of ‘immobile’ material worlds and especially some exceptionally immobile platforms, transmitters, roads, garages, stations, aeriels, airports, docks, factories through which mobilizations of locality are performed and re-arrangements of place and scale materialized” (Hannam et al. 3).

motion, places of and for various activities” (Hannam et al. 13).

Significantly, mobility studies problematize the opposition between what Tim Cresswell defines as “sedentarist metaphysics” and “nomadic metaphysics.” Sedentarist metaphysics designates a fixed notion of place, and valorizes roots over routes, stable identities over mobile forms of identification or disidentification. Conversely, the more recent development of a “nomadic metaphysics” in social and cultural theory “values the ‘routes’ of the traveler and the nomad above the ‘roots’ of place” (2002: 11). According to Cresswell, nomadic metaphysics, as manifested in theories of Marc Augé, James Clifford, and Iain Chambers, replaces “the distaste for and suspicion of mobility with an overly general celebration and romanticization” (2002: 17). Within this schema, mobility is understood as a means to subvert, criticize, or transgress oppressive power structures. In many ways, the more traditional, celebratory discourses of mobility ignore registers of race, gender, and sex and thereby, as Ien Ang has suggested, serve to “decontextualize and flatten out difference” (qtd. in Cresswell 2002: 17). In a similar vein, feminist theorists such as Caren Kaplan argue for a critical use of terms such as nomad and nomadism, acknowledging that the Euro-American celebration of these terms is rooted in “dominant orientalist tropes in circulation throughout modernity” (66) and carries the risk of neo-colonization while attempting to delimit a site of resistance to Western hegemony. Sara Ahmed asserts that the “idealization of movement, or transformation of movement into a fetish, depends upon the exclusion of others who are already positioned as *not free in the same way*” (2004: 152, original emphasis). Similarly, Doreen Massey’s concept of “power geometry” insists on differentiating between mobilities and the distinct ways they are constructed for various groups: “Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it” (1994: 149). Massey further argues that “mobility, and control over mobility, both reflects and reinforces power. . . . The mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people” (1994: 150). For example, the EU’s new mobility regime enables free movement of European citizens and the cosmopolitan elite while defining the border as a space of constant surveillance and regulation for non-European migrants and refugees: “The freedom of mobility for some (citizens, tourists, and business people) could be made possible only through the organized exclusion of others forced to move around as migrants, refugees or illegal aliens” (Verstraete 2010: 94).

Ultimately, these are among many new paradigms that allow a critical investigation of the discourses and practices of mobility vis à vis the generation of both movement and fixity. We have come to understand mobilities and moorings as relational and interdependent; they “constitute, and are constituted by, social relations” (Adey 87). In this new framework, place emerges as a “heavily trafficked intersection” of multiple itineraries and diverse subjects, challenging the traditional divide between stability and mobility. Rather than being contrary to fluidity and mobility, place appears as inflicted not only by national borders and other forms of oppressive regulations but also by the transnational economic circuits of capital (Conquergood 145). The sites of mobility “are thus not so much fixed but are implicated within complex networks by which ‘hosts, guests, buildings, objects and machines’ are contingently brought together to produce certain performances in certain places at certain times” (Hannam et al. 13). Indeed, mobility studies provide an analytical framework within which to consider changes in infrastructure technologies, institutional formations, and social relations.

## The Changing Mobility Regime in Europe

The spectrum of movement into Europe has diversified and in many ways become more clandestine in the post-Schengen period.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the most notable legacy of the Schengen Agreement is the internal border zones it produced: an increasing number of transit spaces such as railway stations, airports, and highways were redefined and politicized as border areas. In fact, the Schengen zone, which now includes almost every EU member state (with the exception of the United Kingdom and Ireland) and three non-EU states (Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland), has been criticized for leading to a “Fortress Europe.” Indeed, Europe’s new border regime has endorsed tighter border controls, enforced to an increasing degree by the EU agency FRONTEX, with partial externalization of responsibilities to countries such as Morocco and Libya.<sup>13</sup>

South European countries, which were for several decades the primary source of migration to Northern Europe, have become the destination of substantial migrant flows from North Africa. Undocumented migration to this area from Maghreb countries such as Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia has grown exponentially since Italy and Spain introduced visa requirements in the early 1990s. But today, sub-Saharan Africans en route to Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, or Morocco are the largest category of undocumented migrants. Since the 1990s, the EU has responded to the phenomenon of undocumented migration primarily by intensifying immigration control and militarizing its borders. Notably, the EU countries have “attempted to ‘externalize’ border controls by transforming Maghreb countries into a ‘buffer zone’” that deflects migratory pressures from Europe’s southern border. They have accomplished this by pressuring North African countries to restrict undocumented migration, readmit undocumented sub-Saharan migrants who have been blocked from Europe, and expel them from their own national territories (De Haas 2008b: 11). Such practices move migrants from the margins to the center of European geopolitics.

From a historical perspective, the Europeanization of migration policy appears to be an outcome of the EU’s integration efforts more than a predetermined act by the member states. Yet the migration policy currently developing in Europe has “advanced to the point that it has become a central, generating moment of the new postliberal transformation of Europe” (Papadopoulos et al. 162). Thus, the political and social transformation of Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 has generated a new border regime and a highly contested geopolitical space at the external borders of the EU. In fact, this new regime is based not only on the elimination of borders within the EU but also on the expansion of borderlands both beyond and inside the European territory. Ultimately, it has set in motion a very flexible and highly precarious transnational labor force striving to make a living in unstable (and oftentimes “illegal”) socioeconomic contexts. As Markus Euskirchen asserts, the Fortress metaphor does not adequately describe the recent changes in European border and migration regime. In fact, “entire sectors of the European economy—such as agriculture, construction, the domestic service industry, and sex work” depend on a highly vulnerable, cheap, and unregulated migrant labor

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<sup>12</sup> The Schengen Agreement, which was first signed by France, Belgium, West Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands in 1985 and took effect in 1995, set in motion the creation of a borderless Europe and eliminated border patrols between participating countries in favor of establishing a common external border.

<sup>13</sup> Etienne Balibar argues that “the flexibility and mobility of European borders” is a “key characteristic of the institutional architecture of the European Union itself.” Indeed, the EU continuously revises its borders both within and beyond the European territory (Bojadžijev and Saint-Saëns 10).

force (Euskirchen et al. 4). Thus, the Schengen borders are much more porous and permeable than they appear to be in the dominant discourses of migration.

Sandro Mezzadra has noted that the “processes of continuous undoing and re-composing of borders and boundaries” are “reshaping the territory of the main European metropolises, are penetrating within the European labor market and are inscribing themselves within the very shape of European citizenship and constitution in the making.” Significantly, drawing on Enrica Rigo, Mezzadra suggests that “borders are becoming mobile in Europe without ceasing to produce fixed mechanisms of closure; they are becoming ‘deterritorialized’ without ceasing to invest in particular places.”<sup>14</sup> As Rutvica Andrijasevic has argued, high-tech border controls and visa-regimes do not “prevent people from moving from their countries of origin nor from reaching the EU. . . . Rather, they increase undocumented modes of travel, the involvement of trafficking networks and profit for third parties” (2007: 26). Instead of serving as territorial markers, borders have become “socially performed conceptual entities,” producing the difference they mark (Green 261).

The ever-evolving European border and the geographical and historical contexts of migration to Europe are central to this dissertation, which charts their impact on non-European geographies. The experience of workers from Turkey, Italy, and Portugal who came to Germany during the 1960s and 1970s through guestworker programs is a key example. Even though these migrant workers were by definition “guests” who were to be in the country only temporarily, their migration to Germany has produced large diasporas that assert their rights to German citizenship and identity. The position of migrants in France is also instructive. Although the country has a long colonial history, dominant French society has never accepted the postcolonial migrants as an integral part of France, and minorities are therefore socioeconomically and politically marginalized. In Italy, on the other hand, migrants and refugees are increasingly coming not only from former Italian colonies in the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia) but also from the Maghreb and other African countries, and from Latin America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, “especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the war in Yugoslavia” (Ponzanesi 86). Since the 1980s, the influx of migrants has dramatically changed the make-up of Italian society. The effects of immigration have been “received as something of a shock,” and migration is often “framed as a national ‘emergency’” (Ponzanesi 86), a characterization that has led to draconian immigration laws as well as the racialization and criminalization of migrants. The film and video works at the heart of my project establish a countergeography of the expanding Europe that has produced multiple “others” in the process of continually recomposing its borders and identity. With attention not only to the shifting political and geographic borders of Europe but also to the shifting institutional and aesthetic borders of cinema, these works likewise invoke a powerful cinematic-countergeography that investigates the changing terrains of cinema and contemporary art.

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<sup>14</sup> Enrica Rigo aptly defines this process as the diffusion and stratification of borders across Europe: “The common assumption that controls were subsequently relocated from national borders to the external frontiers of the European Union is only partially true. In reality, the very concept of borders underwent deep transformation. Borders are no longer dividing lines between political territorial units which clearly define separate sovereignties. On the contrary, they develop into areas where sovereignty is shared among different actors and is sometimes delegated to private agents. Borders delocalize governmental policies over populations and individuals far beyond either the territory of national states or the territory of the European Union. At the same time, the legal institutions which define the status of aliens generate lines of continuity between external and internal boundaries: in other words they internalize borders in the form of diffuse mechanisms of control” (1).

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The dissertation is structured in two parts: *Transnational Mobilities in Cinema and Fragmented Journeys in Moving Image Art*. The first section focuses on more traditional or established categories of migrant and diasporic cinema. The first chapter explores two experimental cinematic narratives that emerged in the context of Turkish German cinema, and argues that Ayşe Polat's experimental short film *Gräfin Sophia Hatun* (Countess Sophia Hatun, 1997) and Fatih Akin's feature film *Auf der anderen Seite* (The Edge of Heaven, 2007) subvert the notion of migrant and diasporic cinema by employing diverse genres and styles such as heritage cinema and fractal films that are not immediately associated with stories of migrancy. These films underscore the diversity and complexity of exilic and diasporic situations, rendering it difficult to think of migrancy as a one-way story from a homeland to a host country. They force us to rethink the category of Turkish German cinema, which proves to be inadequate in explaining the formal and narrative complexity of these films as well as contemporary transnational mobilities. Another key goal of the first chapter is to reconsider the binary notions of mobility and immobility, home and away, host and guest by juxtaposing two highly different films that both contributed to a shift in the cinematic representation of migrancy from stories of victimization and confinement to stories of multiplicity, heterogeneity, and mobility.

Ayşe Polat's film is set in a castle, in the rich house of an aristocrat German family, which appears in the film as the prison of a German Countess and the workplace of a Turkish refugee. In that sense, the film takes us into an aristocratic, upper-class space, where the story of confinement unfolds. Hence, this film takes the issues of Turkish German migration into the heart of the German high culture, unsettling both in doing so. The use of the heritage cinema style further reinforces this disjuncture between the story of (forced) mobility and confinement and the rich setting of the upper-class German domestic space. *The Edge of Heaven*, on the other hand, portrays multidirectional journeys between Germany and Turkey undertaken by various characters for different reasons (to escape state violence, to help a beloved one, to come to terms with traumatic events, etc.), expanding beyond urban spaces like Istanbul and Hamburg into rural parts of Turkey. Thereby, analyzing these films together allows a rethinking of Turkish German labor migration from the perspective of German heritage cinema and the multifarious journeys between Turkey and Germany, juxtaposing home and travel, immobility and mobility, inside and outside within a critical framework.

The second chapter explores French-Algerian (post)colonial mobilities and *beur* cinema that has developed in the last three decades by the filmmaking practices of second-generation French Maghrebi immigrants. Following the first chapter's structure, this chapter juxtaposes films with diverse settings: one based in a bourgeois home and the other charting a transnational journey that expands beyond the borders of the "host" country. I investigate Austrian director Michael Haneke's *Caché* (Hidden, 2005) in relation to *Exils* (Exiles, 2004) by French director of Romani Algerian ethnicity Tony Gatlif. *Hidden*'s story, which concentrates on the life of a bourgeois Parisian family, leads to an excavation of the historical trauma of the October 17, 1961 massacre of Algerians in France. *Exiles* revolves around second-generation French Algerians who travel to their parents' homeland Algeria to work through the inherited trauma of forced displacement and contemporary alienation from the dominant French society. Both *Hidden* and *Exiles* invoke contemporary issues around migration, minorities, and borders that are particularly relevant in France, a country with a deeply rooted history of colonialism in North Africa. These

films show that the memory and legacy of French colonization of Algeria (1830–1962) and the Algerian War (1954–62) continue to inflect multicultural French society, and demonstrate the extent to which Algeria remains a vital reference point in metropolitan France.

The last three chapters of the dissertation explore video-installations in gallery settings. My third chapter, on Turkish film director and artist Kutluğ Ataman's works, serves as a bridge between the two sections of this dissertation, the first one focusing on cinema and the second one on moving image art, for Ataman constantly crosses the borders between the two. Ataman began and continues to work as an independent filmmaker. Yet he has made several video-art installations that challenge the conventions of cinema with their extended duration and fractured formal structures embodied by multiple screens. Ataman's name has also featured in discussions of migrant and diasporic cinema. His feature film *Lola + Bilidikid* (Lola and Billy the Kid, 1998), has been extensively discussed within the frame of a new wave of Turkish German filmmaking that has flourished since the mid-1990s—despite the fact that Ataman did not personally experience migration to Germany. The significant role assigned to *Lola and Billy the Kid* in this context encourages us to formulate new ways to approach migrant and diasporic cinema, moving beyond ethnic or territorial definitions that fail to account for multidimensional mobilities and moorings of the global age. *Lola and Billy the Kid* aptly illustrates Ataman's artistic and political concerns that pervade his cinematic and video works: the issue of mobility and marginality, performative and constructed nature of identities, and idiosyncratic senses of places. Ataman's multichannel, sculptural installations expand these issues to include experimentation with different forms of presentation and exhibition as well as incorporation of the viewer and the site as integral parts of the artwork. In my third chapter, I focus on Ataman's forty-channel video installation *Küba* (2004) in relation to the issues of migration, displacement, and urban marginality in Turkey as well as embodied spectatorship and site specificity. In *Küba*, Ataman subverts essentialist notions of identity politics through embodied spectatorship and the extended duration of the installation, challenging conventional forms of cinematic narrative. Furthermore, he offers countermodels to the stereotypical representation of others by incorporating traditional forms of political cinema such as documentary and social-realist filmmaking.

The last two chapters focus on the relationship between “illegal” migration and visuality, exploring two video works that were both produced as part of *The Maghreb Connection: Movements of Life Across North Africa*, a collaborative research and art project on the North African migratory space that was initiated and directed by Ursula Biemann.<sup>15</sup> The fourth chapter, on documentary video essay *Sudeuropa* (2005–7) by Raphaël Cuomo and Maria Iorio, examines the relationships between undocumented mobilities and visuality that underlie the video's account of the barren Sicilian island of Lampedusa as a place of migrancy. Since late 1990s, the touristic island of Lampedusa has become a major crossroad in transnational migratory routes across the Mediterranean, where the material effects of border securitization and militarization are heavily felt. *Sudeuropa* underscores the interdependency of seemingly unrelated mobilities: undocumented migration, tourism, and journalism. It reveals the significant role of migrant labor in the development and maintenance of tourism by focusing on migrant workers involved in the hospitality industry. I analyze the video in relation to theories of essay film, which provide a highly productive and politically revealing understanding of the dynamic between migrancy and visuality.

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<sup>15</sup> For further information on this curatorial project, see Biemann's website <<http://geobodies.org/>>



The fifth chapter, on Ursula Biemann's multichannel installation *Sahara Chronicle* (2006-9), examines the installation's rendering of the interplay between the trans-Saharan migration network and border control technology—both of which demand complex infrastructures. Taking viewers to the key zones of the African migration network, *Sahara Chronicle* provides an alternate mode of encounter with images of migrancy that prompted a shift in the perception of migrant experience. By presenting migratory networks as a system of information and social organization that operates on a widespread geographical scale, Biemann offers an investigation on the relationship between visibility and undocumented migration to Europe that redefines the Sahara and North Africa as a lively and contested space of migratory networks, military control, and surveillance. Focusing on the aesthetic strategies as well as the material realities the installation documents, this chapter explores the ways *Sahara Chronicle* activates a critically engaged, self-reflexive, and participatory spectatorship that is attuned to the complex social infrastructures and networks produced by diverse mobilities. Biemann's multichannel installation maps out the social infrastructures of migrant networks, incorporating various screens, monitors, and wall-projections in order to mirror the ways that communication and transport technologies have advanced the expansion of social networks and opened up new transit spaces for migrants, smugglers, and traders. By distributing the work across several loosely interconnected screens and projections, Biemann alludes to the ever-longer and highly fragmented nature of the migrant journey, with its elusive departure and arrival points, and allows the viewer to compose and assemble diverse trans-Saharan journeys and navigate various social and geographic realms within the gallery space. This chapter argues that in this sense the terms of the installation's display and reception parallel its content. This parallelism creates a productive tension between the virtual space of representation and the actual site of the installation and critically adjusts the spectator's perceptual apparatus. Indeed, the expanded form of Biemann's video installation defamiliarizes the normative representation of migration and challenges the viewer to make sense of the wider apparatuses of migratory infrastructure across the Euro-African space.

PART ONE: TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITIES IN CINEMA

CHAPTER I

Cross-border Mobility and Confinement in Turkish German Cinema: *Countess Sophia Hatun* (1997) and *The Edge of Heaven* (2007)



Figure 1

In their 1975 book *A Seventh Man: A Book of Images and Words About the Experience of Migrant Workers in Europe*, writer John Berger and photographer Jean Mohr documented the early years of massive labor migration from “underdeveloped” countries such as Turkey, Portugal, and parts of North Africa to industrially “advanced” areas of Europe (see fig. 1). The book was titled “A Seventh Man” because “in Germany and in Britain, one out of seven manual workers [was] an immigrant” at that time (Berger and Mohr 12). The European policy of importing foreign labor was a solution to the growing need for “able-bodied” male workers to power the industrial developments of the second half of the twentieth century. The explicit political commitment of *A Seventh Man* was to demonstrate the interdependency between a violent form of exploitation and the globally generated processes of modernization and industrialization.

Berger’s narrative, complemented by Jean Mohr’s black-and-white photographs, told the story of a highly disenfranchised group: first-generation migrant workers who left their homes, mainly in rural areas, for employment in Western Europe as unskilled or semiskilled laborers in fields that require heavy manual labor, shift work, and repetitive production methods. In *A Seventh Man*, the immigrant worker was portrayed as suffering a double alienation: the loss of the familiar cultural codes and the difficulty of reattachment to the social life within the context of the industrial metropolis. For Berger, the alienation experienced by the newly arrived immigrants was different from that of “a long established, ‘indigenous’ proletariat or sub-proletariat” (Berger and Mohr 65). The social identities of migrant workers were circumscribed by the contested rhetorical figure of the “guestworker,” a term that quite literally defined the hundreds of thousands of foreign laborers according to their economic utility and insisted on the temporary nature of their stay.

The central character of *A Seventh Man* is “HE.” The narrative is structured around his subjective experience as a migrant worker, following a cycle of Departure-Work-Return: “To re-become a man (husband, father, citizen, patriot) a *migrant has to return home*” (Berger and Mohr 58, emphasis mine). In a poetic Marxist language, Berger’s narrative characterizes labor migration as a one-way traffic, a form of economically forced exile. Mohr’s photographs captured migrants in liminal or transitory spaces such as train stations, barracks, recruitment offices, compartments, shantytowns, and construction sites. The representation of migrant bodies in the act of physical, cultural, and socioeconomic border-crossing not only displays their liminal status but also their sense of alienation created by leaving the homeland behind to build a new life in the host country. As Levent Soysal has written, the Turkish migrant in *A Seventh Man* is “not heard and seen, remaining invisible beyond walls that separate him from European imagination” (497). He is a figure of absence of speech and gesture. Now thirty-six years since Berger and Mohr created their visual and literary representation of migrancy, it is worth asking how the figure of the speechless and alienated male Turkish *Gastarbeiter* (guestworker) has changed. Indeed, the “melancholy view of migrant identity located in a twilight zone of ‘in betweenness’” (Sieg 260) captured in *A Seventh Man* has given way to a multiply located and mobile sense of migrant identity.

The experience of Turkish German labor migration has been explored in literature and cinema since the 1960s by a diverse group of writers and filmmakers. As a result of labor shortages induced by the post-World War II economic boom, the German government signed a series of bilateral recruitment treaties with countries including Italy, Greece, Spain, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia, and Yugoslavia. The workers recruited from these countries were considered a

temporary labor force of guestworkers who were expected to leave Germany once their contracts expired. Nevertheless, Turkish labor migration resulted in the creation of a diverse diasporic community that has become an integral part of the changing sociocultural environment in Germany. Today the nearly three million Turks residing in Germany are the nation's largest minority group. Due to the presumed differences between German and Turkish cultures, the Turkish minority have recently found themselves at the center of debates around integration, assimilation, and German national identity.

Such debates are widely reflected in the media as well as in contemporary artistic forms. In general terms, literary and cinematic representations produced in the 1970s and 1980s treated German and Turkish culture as fixed, homogenous, and stable, focusing on the incompatibility of the two highly "different" cultures. Defining this "between two worlds" paradigm as a "cultural fable," literary scholar Leslie Adelson called for new conceptual frameworks to better understand the stylistic and thematic diversity and complexity of post-1990s Turkish German cultural and artistic production (2005: 5).<sup>16</sup> Indeed, literary and cinematic works in the post-unification period marked a departure from the earlier forms of *Gastarbeiter* literature and film, which centered on social problems around assimilation and integration. Earlier films produced by New German Cinema directors Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Helma Sanders-Brahms, and Hark Bohm, as well as by first-generation Turkish German filmmakers such as Tevfik Başer, focused on the alienation felt by first-generation migrant workers in German society and typically depicted Turkish women as victims of gender-based oppression and violence (see Göktürk 2002). This "cinema of the affected" (Burns 2006) portrayed the migrant as either an "object of desire" in need of protection (Fassbinder's 1974 film *Angst essen Seele auf/Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*), or as "a helpless and oppressed woman who either is killed, imprisoned, or oppressed and eventually rescued by a German" (Başer's 1986 film *Vierzig Quadratmeter Deutschland/Forty Square Meters of Germany*; Hark Bohm's 1988 film *Yasemin*) (Lee 71). These directors attempted to raise questions about social inequality and gender issues; however, as Tessa Lee argues, "using the migrant as a political vehicle for venting their own personal critiques of contemporary German society unwittingly reinscribed marginalization and victimization of their subjects . . . These films fed on binary oppositions, reinforcing stereotypes of the mute migrant as being incompatible and noncommunicative" (72). Nevertheless, film scholar Deniz Göktürk has detected a remarkable change in representations of migrancy since the mid-1990s, from earlier examples of "cinema of duty" to "pleasures of hybridity." Writing in the 2000s, Göktürk argued that recent films that address Turkish German migrancy offer alternative forms of cultural diversity and mobility, leading to an awareness of intensified experiences of transnationalism. In that sense, they undermine static definitions of ethnicity and culture and challenge presumed understandings of fixed borders and identities. Filmmakers including Buket Alakuş, Fatih Akın, Thomas Arslan, Aysun Bademsoy, Seyhan Derin, Ayşe Polat, Yüksel Yavuz, and Turkish

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<sup>16</sup>Leslie Adelson further argues that "the cultural fable we like to tell about migrants 'between two worlds' differs with increasing frequency from stories that literary texts born of migration actually set in motion at the turn of the twenty-first century. This is in any case true of Turkish migration in Germany. Because the gap between these two modes of narration has widened considerably since 1989, I seek a new critical grammar for understanding the configuration of cultural contact and Turkish presence in contemporary German literature. . . . Such critical reorientation is necessary because 'between two worlds' as an explanatory model does more to assuage anxieties about worlds, nations, and cultures in flux than it does to grasp the cultural innovations that migration engenders" (2005: 5).

director Kutluğ Ataman made films that prompted a shift toward representations of migrant subjectivity as self-confident and multiply located (Göktürk 1999, 2000; Burns 2006; Menzel 2002).

This chapter explores the relationship between migrancy and cinematic production in the context of Turkish German migration since the late 1990s. I discuss a relatively early example of what Rob Burns defines as “cinema of cultural hybridity” next to a more recent box office success and a popularly embraced one: Kurdish-German director Ayşe Polat’s 1997 experimental short film *Gräfin Sophia Hatun* (Countess Sophia Hatun, 1997) and Turkish German director Fatih Akin’s 2007 feature film *Auf der anderen Seite* (The Edge of Heaven, 2007), respectively. I will argue that these films inscribe multidirectional (im)mobilities both at the level of content and form. They intertwine the stories of subjects with different ethnicities, affiliations, and cultural backgrounds by drawing from different film genres and styles that are not immediately associated with migrant and diasporic cinema. *Countess Sophia Hatun* mimics the genre of European heritage cinema, employing its aesthetic strategies in telling an entangled story of confinement and forced mobility. In doing so, Polat’s film ostensibly complicates traditional notions of heritage cinema as representative of European high culture. *The Edge of Heaven*, on the other hand, mobilizes road movie genre, network narratives, and accented cinema, with references to political Turkish Cinema and New German Cinema of the 1970s. By reworking the conventions of different genres, these films enable us to draw connections across previously discreet categories such as nostalgic heritage films and migrant cinema. I will argue that they also pluralize and diversify the singular “other” of John Berger’s *A Seventh Man*, so that different histories and mobilities may be connected to each other without being collapsed into singular figuration.

It might seem odd to analyze these films together, given that they were produced ten years apart. *The Edge of Heaven* is a fairly recent film that has been widely distributed and very successful at the box office, appealing both to film critics and scholars and to popular audiences.<sup>17</sup> *Countess Sophia Hatun*, on the other hand, was only screened at film festivals and has not been the subject of in-depth analysis in scholarly studies. In addition, Akin’s film is a high-budget feature-length film, whereas Polat’s film is a low-budget, experimental short film. Nevertheless, in spite of the stark differences between their styles, narratives, and production and distribution contexts, discussing these films together expands and diversifies a discourse of migrant and diasporic cinema that has mainly focused on feature-length narrative films.<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that both Ayşe Polat and Fatih Akin began their film careers by making experimental short films and documentaries and moved on to making feature-length narrative films later. In a sense, Akin’s *The Edge of Heaven* can be considered an experimental film due to its fractured, non-linear narrative and multiple interlocking storylines. Yet unlike Polat’s *Countess Sophia Hatun*, Akin’s experimentation joins a growing trend in both mainstream and independent cinema that celebrates fragmented and multilayered storytelling, as seen in films

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<sup>17</sup> The box office figures for the film: USA= \$742,349, Foreign= \$17,062,216, and Worldwide= \$17,804,565. For further information, see <<http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=edgeofheaven.htm>>

<sup>18</sup> In his article on “Experiments in Turkish German filmmaking,” Randall Halle argues that scholarly work on the cinematic representation of migration has largely focused on narrative fiction film, neglecting “other engagements with the moving image.” He insists on expanding our critical focus to include experimental, non-narrative and documentary films that address migration. Significantly, he draws attention to early careers of “contemporary established directors, such as Fatih Akin and Ayşe Polat, [who] began with short films and initially favored more experimental modes of film-making” (Halle 39).

such as Wong Kar Wai's *Chong qmg sen lin* (Chunking Express, 1994), Tom Tykwer's *Lola Rennt* (Run Lola Run, 1998), *Code Inconnu* (Code Unknown, 2000) by Michael Haneke, *Babel* (2006) by Alejandro González Iñárritu, and *The Tree of Life* (2011) by Terrence Mallick. In this context, exploring a unique experimental film made in 1997 next to a recent one made in 2007 provides historical depth to the unconventional filmmaking practices of second-generation Turkish German directors who deviated from the dominant narrative paradigm.

Hamid Naficy's notion of "accented cinema," defined as films by exilic, diasporic, and postcolonial directors made in Western countries since the 1960s, runs through this chapter, informing my discussion of claustrophobic/agoraphobic spaces produced by exile in Polat's film and homecoming journeys in Akin's film. According to Naficy, accented films share specific stylistic and thematic features such as narrative hybridity (the juxtaposition of multiple voices, spaces, and times) and a specific visual style of nostalgia for the homeland. Concerning the home and host societies as well as the deterritorialized conditions of the filmmakers, these films are thematically preoccupied with journeying and displacement. Both *Countess Sophia Hatun* and *The Edge of Heaven* expand and complicate the accented style as developed by Naficy: Polat's film integrates Turkish German migration and German high culture in a critical form by taking us into an aristocratic German space, where story of confinement unfolds. *The Edge of Heaven*, on the other hand, portrays multidirectional journeys between Germany and Turkey undertaken by various characters for different reasons, expanding beyond urban spaces like Hamburg and Istanbul into rural parts of Turkey. In that sense, analyzing these films together allows for a rethinking of the binaries of home and travel, mobilities and moorings, inside and outside within a critical framework. Indeed, the first part of the chapter finds more mobility and fissure amid the apparently inert conventions of "home" and landscape in the heritage film; whereas the second part finds fleeting but tangible anchors, longings for home, and connection within the apparently fractal, mobile conventions of dispersed, deconstructed film.

Another interesting connection between *Countess Sophia Hatun* and *The Edge of Heaven* is the well-known Turkish actor Tuncel Kurtiz, who plays a first-generation migrant in both films. Best-known for his key roles in Turkish director Yılmaz Güney's political films of the 1970s, Kurtiz has had an impressive acting career in Turkish theater and cinema as well as in international productions in Germany and England. Today he is a celebrated figure in Turkish cinema whose presence in these films was used by Akin and Polat to deliberately evoke the history of Turkish political filmmaking. Yet this is not a story of men. Although the development of Turkish German cinema has been discussed mainly in relation to the works of male directors, Turkish German women directors have also contributed significantly to the world of film (Ferrara 2006). This paired analysis of films directed by a woman (Polat) and a man (Akin) deliberately disrupts the extensive focus on internationally successful male directors in both scholarly and popular discourses. Both films show that the story of migration as a one-way movement from home to host country as a guestworker is somewhat outdated in the global era. These films problematize and transcend binaries of home-host, guest-host, Turkish-German, and migrant-citizen, moving beyond national and cultural boundaries to evince a transnational and global cultural frame of reference.

## **Whose Heritage? Which Heritage? *Countess Sophia Hatun* (1997)**

Independent filmmaker Ayşe Polat was born to a Kurdish family in Malatya, Turkey, in 1970. She moved to Germany as a child in 1978. She made several short films on 8mm and video between 1985 and 1991, and studied philosophy, cultural studies and German in Berlin and Bremen between 1991 and 1993. Early in her career, she made several experimental short films, including *Fremdennacht* (Stranger's Night, 1992), *Ein Fest für Beyhan* (A Feast for Beyhan, 1993) and *Gräfin Sophia Hatun* (Countess Sophia Hatun, 1997). Following these experimental shorts, Polat “turned to more straightforward narrative film, although in her feature films one can still recognize motifs of migration, displacement, estrangement, family, and melancholy” (Halle 45). Her subsequent feature films *Auslandstournee* (Tour Abroad, 2000) and *En Garde* (On Guard, 2003) show “a growing a resistance to reductive homogeneity” (Halle 45).

My analysis of *Countess Sophia Hatun* will be brought in relation to the notion of heritage cinema, in particular British and German practices of heritage cinema, which display stark differences in their attitudes toward the national past and intercultural relations. As mentioned before, Polat's film also incorporates the stylistic and thematic preoccupations of accented cinema, especially agoraphobic and claustrophobic spaces produced as a result of exile and displacement. Indeed, *Countess Sophia Hatun* rewrites the genres of heritage cinema and accented cinema in a highly stylized and self-reflexive manner that emphasizes searching for new forms of filmmaking and storytelling beyond inherited forms and structures.

### **Confinement in a Castle: The Countess and the Refugee**

In her sixteen-minute short film *Countess Sophia Hatun*, Polat tells the “real” story of an eighteenth-century German aristocrat. Countess Sophia (played by Sabine Wolf) was imprisoned for many years in a castle by her husband because of her love affair with another man. In the film, this historical story provides a basis for the fictional relationship between an upper-class German woman and a lower-class migrant from Turkey (Tuncel Kurtiz). The film's narrative revolves around two exilic characters and two different ways of being incarcerated. The Countess, an internal exile in her husband's castle, strives to establish some sort of connection with her Turkish servant, who is escaping from war in his native country of Turkey. The Countess talks only with the Turkish servant because she believes that the other servants are her husband's spies. She thinks that she shares a common destiny of restlessness and isolation with the Turkish servant. Therefore, every day she invites the servant to her room to tell him her story. However, the servant refuses this imposed friendship, until finally his complete silence and short (non-explanatory) answers to her questions annoy the Countess. For her, the Turkish servant should be with his family instead of staying in a foreign land. She believes that since he is free, unlike her, he should go back to his homeland. The fact that the servant does not see this newly gained freedom as bliss tremendously disturbs the Countess, and she angrily expels him from her property. The servant freezes to death, and his body is found later on the castle grounds.

## Encounters Between Heritage Cinema and Accented Cinema



Figure 2

The film opens with a black screen bearing its German title: *Gräfin Sophia Hatun*. Superimposed on this title screen, we hear the sound of birds, waves, and wind, indicating that we are at the countryside. We next see a still landscape image—a lake surrounded by green fields and trees. As the camera begins slowly panning left, we hear the voice of a man singing a Turkish folk song. The camera moves forty-five degrees until it centers on a hunched-up old man ornamented with snow crystals (see fig. 2). He is singing “Haydar Haydar,”<sup>19</sup> a folk song from southeastern Turkey. He sings (in Turkish with no subtitles): “At times I ascend into the sky and watch over the world. At times I descend down to earth and the heavens watch over me. Haydar Haydar, they watch over me.”<sup>20</sup> Cut to a black screen with opening credits. The man continues singing: “I get lost, yet I keep seeking that elusive lover of mine. . . nobody knows.”<sup>21</sup>

As we listen to the singer, the camera follows a person on horseback, riding toward the man from afar. The rider turns out to be a well dressed, seemingly upper-class woman (see fig.

<sup>19</sup> Haydar is a traditional Turkish male name that means lion. The translations from Turkish to English and German to English are mine.

<sup>20</sup> “Kah çıkarım gökyüzüne seyderim âlemi. Kah inerim yeryüzüne seyreder âlem beni. Uhhh.. Haydar Haydar, seyreder âlem beni. Uhhh.. Seyreder âlem beni.”

<sup>21</sup> “Ben yitirdim ben ararım, o yar benim, kime ne?”



3). The old man continues singing: “At times I journey to my garden and pick my roses . . . nobody knows. . .”<sup>22</sup> The woman gets closer to him. When he hears the horse approaching, he stops singing and stands up anxiously, without looking back at the woman. When he turns around, he sees the woman and tries to hand her the horsewhip she has just dropped. She hesitates to take the whip at first, but then takes it back in an aggressive manner and begins to ride rapidly in the opposite direction. As the horse carries her away, we hear a non-diegetic classical music piece, “La sonnerie de Sainte Geneviève” by the French composer Marin Marais. The man watches her depart and then begins to follow her. The camera maintains the fixed frame of the opening landscape. The screen fades to black.



Figure 3

With its lush Northern German landscape and historical eighteenth-century costumes, the opening sequence of *Countess Sophia Hatun* evokes the expectation that we are about to watch a heritage film or costume drama like BBC’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), Sally Potter’s *Orlando* (1992) or Robert Altman’s *Gosford Park* (2001), to name a few. In the last few decades, heritage films have become quite popular. Marking a revival of interest in a “pure,” upper class, (Western) European culture, these films serve as an “artful and spectacular projection of an elite conservative vision of the national past” (Higson 1996: 223). In that sense, Polat’s short film

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<sup>22</sup> “Kah giderim öz bağuma gül dererim, kime ne?”

joins a recent trend in European and Hollywood cinema, conforming to the formal conventions of heritage films. Nevertheless, these conventions are unsettled by the presence of the Turkish guestworker, played by famous Turkish actor Tuncel Kurtiz, who serves as one of the main protagonists in the drama. While the film's cinematic style and references to German aristocracy evoke the notion of heritage cinema, the theme of confinement and forced migration speaks instead to Turkish German cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, which "featured images of captivity and claustrophobic spaces" (Burns 2009: 11). For example, the aforementioned 1986 film *Forty Square Meters of Germany* by first-generation Turkish German director Tevfik Başer tells the story of a woman, Turna, who is brought to Germany from rural Turkey by her patriarchal husband and imprisoned in their forty-square-meter house until her husband's sudden death. Portraying Turna as a victim of her oppressive cultural background, the film consists almost entirely of interior shots, creating a sense of claustrophobia and alienation. Indeed, there are strong thematic affiliations between *Countess Sophia Hatun* and migrant and diasporic films like *Forty Square Meters of Germany*. Polat's film evokes what Hamid Naficy defines as "accented," "exilic" films, which resignify "prevailing cinematic modes" by means of their artisanal and collective means of production (2001: 22). Hence, Polat uses the rich visual style of heritage cinema to reimagine typical migrant topics like confinement and displacement. Consideration of the film's story of forced (im)mobility in relation to the visual pleasure of the landscape image demonstrates the porousness of the heritage film/migrant cinema boundary.<sup>23</sup>

Such consideration leads to further questions. For example, how does the formal mastery of *Countess Sophia Hatun* as a heritage film inform or affect a narrative commonly found in exilic and diasporic cinema, and vice versa? In other words, how is the story of forced complicity between a Turkish refugee and a German aristocrat, both exiled and imprisoned for completely different reasons, altered within the lush *mise-en-scène* of historical film? A discussion of the employment and subversion of the genre of heritage film requires examination of the inherited notions and conventions of heritage cinema as it developed in Britain and Germany. While it is not easy to define the conventions of heritage cinema, the following general qualities are usually seen as markers of the genre: the use of "high production values to fill a *mise-en-scène* with period detail," representation of a national past through magnificent costume and beautiful landscape, and "adaptations of well-known literary novels" (Galt 2006: 7). Heritage films mostly depict eras such as the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Significantly, the popularity of heritage films has increased the support of Western European state funding bodies for such films. As Rosalind Galt has suggested, "by popularizing the historical in terms of nostalgia and *mise-en-scène*, the heritage film has opened up a space within European film culture, not only for increased American and domestic box office but also for a renewed circulation of national identities" (2006: 7). From the 1980s onwards, most heritage films were produced as a result of the rise of European co-productions and television funding for feature films through TV channels such as Channel 4 in the UK, France Télévision 1 (TF1) in France, and Zweiten Deutschen Fernsehen (ZDF) in Germany, which helped support a more commercial European mode of film production and exhibition. Galt further argues that these financial support systems also brought about a "redefinition of 'art house' or art cinema, a shift towards films that could remain

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<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that heritage film genre is not fully compatible with the notion of mainstream cinema: "by comparison with mainstream Hollywood star vehicles, heritage films are relatively low budget productions, with the emphasis on authorship, craft, and artistic value. They are valued as much, perhaps more, for their cultural significance as for their box office takings" (Higson 2003: 4)

conceptually distinct from American higher-budget genre films but would have the potential for a wider distribution than an earlier form of modernist European art film” (2006: 29).

Thus, heritage films and costume dramas are generally attributed to “official” European cinema. Andrew Higson criticizes the genre for celebrating stunning *mise-en-scène* at the expense of political engagement. Higson claims that the lush landscape and excessive period detail undercut any political efficacy that the narrative might have. Similarly, film critic Antoine de Baecque has argued that heritage films do not offer any critical consideration of history, place, or image, and thus erase the cultural heterogeneity of Europe.<sup>24</sup> Contemporary British heritage films produced from the mid-1980s onward have engaged with subject matter and discourses that have “traditionally played a major part in determining how the heritage and identity of England and Englishness have been understood” (Higson 2003: 1). In this context, British heritage cinema, with its insistence on visual pleasure and spectacular displays of the iconography of the past, is part of a general cultural trend of the same period, namely, the consolidation of a heritage industry as “a potent marketing of the past as part of a new enterprise culture, a commodification of museum culture” (Higson 2003: 1). Higson further argues that the popularity of heritage film in the 1980s coincided with the emergence of multicultural societies in Europe, and offered the white middle-class audiences images of a national past “untainted” by the presence of ethnic or cultural “others.” Within the larger framework of the so-called long-established, “superior” European culture and identity, such films conform to the idea of Europe “as a place of history and antiquity” and “the front of Western culture.” British heritage films, for the most part, according to Higson, insist on the “purity and distinctiveness of a traditional Englishness.” Set in the past, they tell the stories of “the manners and proprieties, but also the often transgressive romantic entanglements of the upper and upper middle class English,” in carefully detailed and visually splendid period reconstructions. As Higson notes: “The luxurious country-house settings, the picturesque rolling green landscapes of southern England, the pleasures of period costume, and the canonical literary reference points are among the more frequently noted attractions of such films” (2003: 1). Such heritage films “privilege *mise-en-scène* over narrative development, fluid camera moves over fast cutting, and self-conscious panorama shots over close-ups. Concerned with character, place, and atmospheric detail rather than goal-oriented action, the British heritage films of the 1980s reproduced English history as a museal object of identification, consumption, and exportability” (Koepnick 2004: 191).

Within the context of German cinema, Lutz Koepnick suggests, “Shell-shocked by the demise of New German Cinema, a climate of cultural stagnation and a radical transformation of the domestic media landscape, the German cinema of the 1980s offered little that matched the historicist fantasies of British cinema” (2004: 192). However, in the second half of the 1990s, German cinema created its own version of the heritage genre or historical melodrama that “reproduced the national past, including that of the Nazi period, as a source of nostalgic pleasures and positive identifications” (Koepnick 2004: 193). German feature productions “turned the nation’s past into a space for the spectacular display of heritage properties, whether material or symbolic in nature.”<sup>25</sup> For Koepnick, the rise of German heritage films is not a return

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<sup>24</sup> See Rosalind Galt’s discussion of Higson’s and de Baecque’s critiques of heritage cinema (2006: 7-10).

<sup>25</sup> Koepnick states that “German feature productions such as *Comedian Harmonists* (1997, Joseph Wilsmaier); *Aimée & Jaguar* (1999, Max Färberböck); *Viehjud Levi* (1999, Didi Danquart); *Ein Lied von Liebe und Tod--Gloomy Sunday* (1999, Rolf Schübel); *Marlene* (2000, Joseph Wilsmaier); *Gripsholm* (2000, Xavier Koller) turned

of nineteenth-century inventions of national identity but, on the contrary, is “a symptomatic and theoretically challenging expression of postmodern globalization” (2004: 194). Moreover, unlike the German auteurs of the 1970s and early 1980s, this new heritage cinema is clearly guided by Hollywood standards of commercial filmmaking and box office success. German heritage films of the late 1990s and early 2000s “document the extent to which in today’s world touristic self-representations have become one of the dominant ways of articulating collective belonging” (Koepnick 2004: 198).

However, German heritage films display fundamental aesthetic and political differences from earlier British heritage cinema. Koepnick mentions two main differences that impact my discussion of *Countess Sophia Hatun*. The first lies in their attitudes toward the present sociocultural heterogeneity of contemporary British and German societies: while British heritage cinema avoids any engagement with the multicultural present by presenting “pastoral images of upper class imperial grandeur,” German cinema presents examples of “social consensus” to work through a traumatic past marked by genocide. In this context, British heritage cinema valorizes an elitist notion of a national past whereas German heritage cinema depicts an elite political group, namely Nazis, as destroyers of a culturally and ethnically diverse nation. The second main difference emanates from the source material: whereas British heritage cinema is mainly based on high-culture literature, contemporary German melodramas celebrate the popular. Koepnick notes: “In some cases, these films even re-inscribe the popular as the nation’s most viable common ground—one that dissolved under the historical pressure of Nazi politics but one that German filmmakers ought to recuperate for the present” (2004: 202). New German heritage film thus serves present political needs and functions, presenting retrospective images of Jewish-German reconciliation and foregrounding successful moments of German-Jewish cooperation before or during the Nazi period. In other words, heritage films in Germany attempt to foster a historical national narrative inclusive of the Jewish people and culture and to normalize the multicultural present and the future. In many of these films, the images of German-Jewish love and cooperation facilitated the transformation of German cinema into a heritage cinema, presenting the past “not only as a site of violence and trauma, but also of precious properties and valuable assets, of splendid decors and richly textured signifiers of pastness” (Koepnick 2002: 49).

In German heritage films, the depiction of German-Jewish reconciliation in the past is an attempt to foster Jewish culture in the present, with the underlying goal of working through the historical trauma of the Holocaust. Polat’s film, on the other hand, views the German past through the lens of the present day multicultural German society with its population of nearly three million Turkish Germans. Polat avoids creating a Turkish German dichotomy, however, by employing a film genre that had traditionally been deployed to foster Jewish-German affinity. *Countess Sophia Hatun* invokes Andreas Huyssen’s call for a genuine relationship between diasporic communities in Germany, in particular the Turkish German minority, and the past of the national majority culture. Such a relationship, according to Huyssen, has the potential to expand the exclusive focus on contemporary issues such as citizenship, labor, cultural and religious differences, and the underlying sense of loss in diaspora into examinations of the past and other domains of social and cultural life (2003: 153). Indeed, the opening up of the German past to the diasporic communities might foster mutual integration, cultural diversity, and

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the nation’s past into a space for the spectacular display of heritage properties, whether material or symbolic in nature” (2004: 192).

heterogeneity. Yet this is no simple matter. Rather than providing easy reconciliation or collaboration between seemingly different cultures or ethnicities, as seen in dominant German heritage films, *Countess Sophia Hatun* unpacks power relations entangled in deterritorialization and exile as well as within gender dynamics.



Figure 4

Polat's stylistic use of heritage cinema is also central to her expansion of the genre's potential. In the opening sequence explored at the beginning of this section, the imagery perfectly fits the conventions of heritage cinema: beautiful landscapes in which upper-class characters wander around riding horses. The melancholic Turkish song performed by an old man, however, radically alters the meaning of the landscape image, inserting it within the discourse of contemporary Turkish presence in Germany. Therefore, an ostensibly spectacular heritage landscape becomes a politically charged site of contemporary migration debates in Germany. In representing a luminous landscape, the camera style of *Countess Sophia Hatun* is pictorialistic, displaying its self-conscious artistry. Here, the insertion of the sociopolitical registers of contemporary Turkish German migration into the magnificent iconography of the national past produces an alternative that moves the concept of heritage beyond the realm of a cultural elite. This film attempts to understand past lives, values, lifestyles, and living conditions from the perspective of "ordinary" people. Indeed, it hints at the memories and representations of "ordinary" people as well as the heritages of diasporic communities who have found a home in Germany.



Figure 5

Following the focus on the natural landscape in the opening sequences (see fig. 4), the film moves to a magnificent interior setting. We see both characters in the Countess's room inside the castle, where the Turkish servant is serving her morning coffee (see fig. 5, 6, 7). The Countess has invited him into her room and keeps him there until she has finished her coffee *and* her monologue. The invitation was prompted by fear of being caught by her husband; when she encountered the servant outdoors, she was in the *forbidden* part of the fields. Because both she and the servant were prohibited from going there, she assumes that he will keep their meeting to himself. Otherwise, the revelation of their disobedience might seriously affect them both.

Countess: You can imagine why I called you here. This morning I strayed off my path. But what were you looking for out there?

Man: Go for a walk.

Countess: Go for a walk?

Man: I sleep badly at night. Then I walk early in the morning.

Countess: As you are bound to know, it is forbidden for me to leave the castle grounds. But you are also forbidden to go outside the castle. So it would be both in your interest and mine if we were to forget this morning.



Figure 6

The spatial configuration and structure of this first dialogue is repeated in the following episodic scenes: we see the old Turkish man standing still in the middle of the room and holding the coffee tray until the Countess finishes speaking about her own story of loss and incarceration. The servant remains indifferent to her stories, which for her have the potential of forming a link between them. While the Countess is talking, the man's gaze remains fixed to one point. He is as motionless as a statue. He displays no facial expression or bodily gesture and makes no eye contact with the Countess, although she constantly circles around him as if she is interrogating him, occasionally getting very close to him. Their dialogue, or better yet, her monologue, unfolds as follows:

Countess: My husband is strict. The servants are my husband's eyes and ears. But early in the morning they devote themselves to sleep rather than to a Count...*(Blackout)*

Countess *(wearing a different costume)*: ...Count, who lives in another castle *(Blackout)*

Countess *(wearing a different costume)*: The Count and his family had waited a long time for a reason. When they found my letters from that man ... After that came the imprisonment in the castle five years ago until now...*(Blackout)*

Countess *(wearing a different costume)*: Both my sons were kept from me too...*(Black out)*

Countess *(wearing a different costume)*: The waiting wears you out. You become restless inside all the time...*(Blackout)*

Countess *(wearing a different costume)*: I am often tired. I have been told that it's restlessness...*(Blackout)*

Countess (wearing a different costume): I can't read anymore, nor write. Always this restlessness... The silence... I can't listen to this silence anymore... (*Blackout*)



Figure 7

Before delving into the implications of these (imposed) conversations, it is worth unpacking the rich visual style of these scenes: throughout these episodes of coffee drinking and talking inside the castle, the decoupage and the camera work are sluggish. The cinematography includes long takes and deep staging as well as long and medium shots (rather than close-ups) and rapid or dramatic cutting. The angles, shots, and camera movements of the film seem to go beyond narrative motivation. The camera is mostly fluid, scanning the setting and décor to create a beautiful *tableau* rather than following the characters' actions. Moreover, the shots of the movie are divorced from characters' point-of-view, and are often used to display the *mise-en-scène* and the spatial orientation of the characters vis-à-vis each other. These striking visual scenes tend to shift the viewer's attention away from the story or content to the grandeur of a setting captured by deliberately choreographed camera movements. This might suggest that the film prioritizes the *tableau* image over the story, and disavow any genuine engagement with sociopolitical thematic preoccupations such as confinement and forced migration. Nevertheless, the repetition of the scene over and over again, each time slightly differently (Polat uses different costumes to signal the change of scenes), creates a disorienting effect and evokes a sense of



claustrophobia that is reinforced by the dialogue. In that sense, the *tableau* image becomes an exhausting repetition instead of being a seductive cinematic device.

### **Imposed Dialogue: Confinement, Restlessness, and Forced Mobility**

In *Countess Sophia Hatun*, the indifference and silence of the Turkish servant do not originate from his inability to communicate (we hear him speak German very well) or operate in a seemingly unfamiliar environment of the location of exile. Rather, he chooses to remain reserved and quiet vis-à-vis the Countess's insistence on dialogue and potential collaboration or complicity. The chosen silence of the servant is a response to the ways in which stereotypical images of Turkish migrants operate in public, popular, and scholarly discourses: they "appear, at best, as relentless advocates of revitalized Turkishness or Islam, or, at worst, as essentially inassimilable agents of foreignness. Furthermore, this attribution of radical otherness, in cultural or ethnic variety, sets the migrants apart from public spaces in their country of residence, renders their participation invisible, and presents their situation as anomie" (Soysal 2003: 493), even almost five decades after their first arrival to Germany. The servant's indifference to the Countess's paternalistic attitudes—she imposes freedom on him by ordering him out of the castle—becomes a form of resistance. The Countess assumes that freedom from the castle would bring the servant happiness, because, according to her, he has nothing to lose in leaving the castle whilst she would lose everything (including status, abundance, servants, and protection):

Countess: By now, I know each blade of grass in the garden... And you, how did you come to be here?

Man: From Turkey.

Countess: Yes, yes, I know... I mean here?

Man: From the war.

Countess: ...and do you have family there?

Man: Yes ladyship.

Countess: And do you also have children?

Man: Yes ladyship.

Countess: It is easy for you. You can pack your things and leave. You have nothing to lose. (*Here, we see a facial expression on the man's face for the first time*)

Countess (*continues*): ...I, on the other hand, have status and reputation.

(*The man attempts to leave, but Countess stops him*).

Countess: Wait a moment. How long have you been here?

Man: Eight years.

Countess: A long time. Too long... It's about time to go before it gets too late. Go! Pack your things and leave the castle tonight. I let you free!

(*The man stays indifferent to such a strong statement*)

Countess: I don't think you've understood what I said. Do you understand me?

Man: Yes, ladyship.

Countess: ...and have you also understood you can go? You don't need to stay here anymore. Do you understand?

Countess: Yes, ladyship.

Countess: So why aren't you pleased? Anybody else would be jumping for joy. Or do you think that you cannot take seriously the words of an imprisoned Countess? It's not a gift but an order. You can pack your things and go tonight.

Man: Ladyship, it is a long way.

Countess: That's no obstacle. If one has the opportunity to go, one should take it.

Man: Go where? (*Countess gets more and more angry*)

Countess: Where? Back to your family of course... Get out of my sight! And tomorrow you will no longer be here. It's an order. Go! (*Blackout*)



Figure 8

In this scene, the man's unwillingness to leave the castle infuriates the Countess (see fig. 8). She makes no effort to understand why he might not be willing to go back to his "homeland," even though the man earlier revealed that he is a war refugee. Her attempt to help him reunite with his family transforms into violent orders and attacks when met with his lack of desire to go back to Turkey. After he has been forced by the Countess to leave the castle, we see the man waiting outside the next morning.

Countess (*comes out of the main door in an anxious manner*): What are you still doing here?

Man: It is still too dark.

Countess (*drags the man*): Come! Come! (*Blackout*)

(*We see from afar the Countess and the man walking rapidly through the fields*)

Countess: That's south. No this way. You can ask the peasants. Now go! It's not that far. Go! Go! (*She starts to push him because he resists moving*).

Countess: Go! Away with you! Go! Go! Go!

(*She gets angry and starts hitting his shoulder until the man screams*).

Man: *Safiye Hatun!* Leave me alone...

Countess (*in a desperate manner*): I forbid you ever to step inside the castle again. Go!

After this hassling, the Countess leaves the camera frame. We see the man looking around a borderless natural landscape. He starts walking without any clear direction, and then leaves the frame. The camera is indifferent to his movement. (*White out*).



Figure 9

Indeed, the Turkish servant undergoes an unsettling spatial experience when he is forced to leave the castle grounds. The film does not identify the borders of the castle; we see only endless green fields and beautiful views of nature. The Countess's inability to identify their position (she does not know which direction is the North) turns the castle grounds into an unidentifiable territory (see fig. 9).



Figure 10

In the scene that follows the servant's wanderings, we see a long tracking shot of the Countess riding her horse in the landscape that opened the film. Then, we see her near a silhouette. The camera cuts to a close-up of the silhouette: it is the servant's body lying on the ground. He is motionless. He seems abandoned and exhausted. The camera circles around his body, recalling the Countess's circular movements around him inside the castle. The Countess gets closer to the body, and finally realizes that he is dead. She looks around for a moment, then takes off her glove and closes his eyes (see fig. 10). When she starts riding her horse again, the camera moves toward the body and repeats her circular movements—this time in the opposite direction. After completing the circle, the camera focuses on the Countess as she moves away from us. She disappears into the landscape and the credits begin to roll (see fig. 11, 12).

This sequence showing the servant's dead body immersed in boundless space illustrates the ways in which the certainty and wholeness of the body is challenged as a result of exilic dislocation, especially when encountered with racism and/or hostility in the new country of residence. The image of the servant's dead body seems to suggest that, forced from home and divorced from the past, the exile can find no solid ground. His/her body becomes a place of exile. Here, exile refers not only to forced evacuation, but also to deliberate destruction of the body and the subjectivity of the exilic person.



Figure 11

The opening and closing landscape imagery of the film produces complex and ambiguous meanings. Rather than serving as a neutral background, the landscape functions to produce not only a sense of abundance but also agoraphobia, particularly in the scene where we see the long shot of the wandering refugee. Contrary to the sense of confinement articulated in the interior scenes, the stunning landscape images inserted into the narrative convey a profound sense of openness and boundlessness. The imagery and the pacing create a feeling of unboundedness surrounding the perpetually bounded characters. This agoraphobia emerging from forced mobility also complicates the sense of claustrophobia, or even restlessness like that experienced by the Countess inside the castle. Hamid Naficy defines the dominant spatial configurations of the accented style as “phobic spaces” which primarily circulate around claustrophobia and agoraphobia. He states: “For many transnationals, the voluntary or forced separation from homelands, the state of seemingly permanent deterritorialization, and the pervasive controlling modulations which postmodernist late capitalism has engendered may constitute a sufficiently ‘excessive adverse life event’ to lead us to expect to see in their films agoraphobic and claustrophobic spatiality. ... The inscription of phobic spaces, which is often based on their experience of incarceration in their indigenous disciplinary societies, also reflects the conflicting and confining social and political conditions in their homelands” (1996: 130). In this sense, *Countess Sophia Hatun* conforms to the conventions of accented cinema in its exploration of claustrophobic and agoraphobic places emanating from the experience of exile. Nevertheless, by expanding this story to a German character, the film unsettles one-dimensional representations of

migrants as victims of exile and displacement. Hence, rather than offering reified visions of self and other, *Countess Sophia Hatun* stresses the fundamental contingency, openness, and malleability of distinctions between binaries such as inside-outside, private-public, and Turkey-Germany.



Figure 12

In relation to the dead body of the man and the Countess's despair, the landscape also works to structure a sense of mourning and loss—unavoidable feelings of exile. The spectacular image of the dead body functions similarly to the visual structuring of the landscape image that “fall[s] out of the narrative” (Higson 1993: 117).<sup>26</sup> The camera patiently lingers on the dead body and the landscape, allowing us to pay attention to the visual details of the frame. Hence, the extended duration of the takes highlights the possibility of alternative meanings other than those provided by the narrative. Indeed, the tension between narrative and image might provide diverse readings beyond the immediate story (Galt 2006: 61). In this sense, the visual pleasures of *la belle image* in *Countess Sophia Hatun* foreground ideologically complex relationships within the narrative and indicate the ways in which meaning is produced in a visual and narrative structure that is gendered, classed, and ethnicized. By juxtaposing the beautiful landscape with the

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<sup>26</sup> Higson claims that such pleasurable moments of spectacular imagery thwart production of narrative meaning and hence “fall” out of it.

decaying body of an exilic character, the film emphasizes not only the notion of forced movement, but also of devastation that comes with it. Here, exile is registered as an effect of force exerted upon a person (or people) resulting in a condition that is not freely chosen but inflicted by a displacing power. The “spectacular” dead body of the exilic person turns into a site of critical reflection, and no longer occupies a naturalized, uncontroversial place. Therefore, the body as site becomes a place of exile, and defines exilic conditions not in abstract but in material terms.

*Countess Sophia Hatun* suggests that heritage cannot simply be delimited as an elite version of the national past, and that the past can be appropriated in all sorts of ways. These truisms are also central facets of many diasporic cultures. Rather than articulating a nostalgic and conservative celebration of the values and life styles of the privileged classes, and reinventing the national past as something fondly remembered and desirable, the film casts a critical light on the debates around contemporary migration into Germany in relation to borders, class, and identity. The film underscores that the boundaries between the past and present, inside and outside, self and other are not clearly defined, but rather are fluid and shifting. With *Countess Sophia Hatun* Polat infuses the genre of heritage film (a genre associated with the aristocratic European culture) with contemporary debates around migration and exile in Germany, unpacking the social, symbolic and political constructs that endorse these seemingly different domains. The other significant binary the movie unsettles is the notion of “pure” German past versus the “multicultural” German present. Andreas Huyssen criticizes this binary trope for its reification of the notion of diaspora, an act which, for him, “prematurely block[s] out issues of memory, history,” and nostalgia. Huyssen contends that “the relationship between diasporic memory and the memory formations of the national culture within which a given diaspora may be embedded” needs to be further explored to achieve a multicultural conviviality (2003: 151). Along those lines, *Countess Sophia Hatun* not only problematizes the generic distinctions between heritage film and migrant cinema but also the sociopolitical boundaries between German past and German (and Turkish German) present, and suggests that diasporic memory and identity is necessarily constructed in a dialectical relationship with the discourses and practices of the “host” nation. This resignification of the German past, filtered through the prism of Turkish German labor migration, casts fresh light on issues such as assimilation, integration, citizenship, and everyday life in contemporary Germany. *Countess Sophia Hatun* uses the setting of the German past to explore contemporary forms of exile. By depicting a Turkish war refugee, whose name we never learn, as part of an aristocratic German past, the film raises the questions “Which heritage? Whose heritage?” In doing so, it points to the diverse and multicultural present of Germany, and to the ways in which cinema, as Eric Rentschler suggests, “figures within much larger and more powerful transnational and global constellation” (2002: 4).

*Countess Sophia Hatun*, a parable on exile, holds a unique place in Turkish German filmmaking, for it simultaneously employs and subverts the genre of heritage cinema. While the film uses beautiful images, excessive *mise-en-scène*, lavish costumes, and dramatic lighting to construct a spectacular past, the surrealist setting it creates stages painful experiences of exile, imprisonment, and deterritorialization that are shared by both the Turkish guestworker and the German host. In that sense, the film contributes to the discourse on mobility by showing that we can find diverse (im)mobilities even in heritage genres. Ultimately, the film defies categorization: its dream-like, fairy tale qualities juxtaposed by the darkness of the subject are equally counter to the dominance of social-realism in traditional representations of migrancy in

cinema. Despite its insistence on immobility and confinement in the suffocating wonderland it depicts, the film articulates the multiplicity of exilic identities and spaces without reproducing the discourses of victimhood and in-betweenness that have marked Turkish German film production in the 1980s and early 1990s. Indeed, in its subversion of both heritage film and migrant cinema, *Countess Sophia Hatun* interrogates the arbitrary nature of divisions based on gender, ethnicity, and culture.

### **Parallel Crossings: Road Movie with Interlocked Storylines** *The Edge of Heaven (2007)*

Like Ayşe Polat, director Fatih Akin has contributed to significant shifts and changes in cinematic representations of migrancy in Germany and Europe with works that defy conventional categories and explore new forms of filmmaking. Born to an immigrant Turkish family in Hamburg in 1973, Akin began his film career by making short films and documentaries. His first feature film, *Kurz und schmerzlos* (Short Sharp Shock, 1998), is a gangster melodrama reminiscent of Martin Scorsese's early work (Berghahn 2007: 143). Akin moved on to feature films but also continued making documentaries such as *Wir haben vergessen zurückzukehren* (I Think About Germany – We Forgot to Go Back, 2001), which focuses on the personal histories of Turkish labor migration to Germany, and *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* (2005), which captured the Istanbul music scene. He gained international recognition and box office success with his 2000 road movie *Im Juli* (In July, 2002) and especially with his award-winning and highly acclaimed movie *Gegen die Wand* (Head-On, 2004), which won the Golden Bear award at the Berlin Film Festival.

Following *Head-On* (2004), *Auf der anderen Seite* (The Edge of Heaven, 2007) is the second installment of Akin's *Love, Death and the Devil* trilogy. In *The Edge of Heaven*, which won the Best Screenplay Award at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival, Akin juxtaposes three different yet interrelated tales of six main characters set in various places in Germany and Turkey. The three-part structure of the film is based on delicate visual and narrative links among different stories, places, and characters, creating multiple tales with a common ground and a sense of simultaneity. Experienced on a transnational level, these tales are marked by broken communication, misunderstandings, near misses, separation, and violence as well as love, forgiveness, and compassion. Akin connects the intimate realm of relations between children and parents, lovers, and strangers to ever-expanding global contexts. Indeed, film scholar Deniz Göktürk has criticized the use of narrow categories such as Turkish German cinema or migrant cinema, insisting that *The Edge of Heaven* needs to be analyzed in a transnational framework that considers both locality and cross-border mobility (forthcoming). In a similar vein, film scholar Barbara Mennel argues that the film "constitutes a sophisticated and complex, and in part seemingly paradoxical, response to globalization" (2007: 2). Indeed, Akin's film speaks—both visually and narratively—to the globalized world of long-distance affiliations, frequent crisscrossing of borders, and diverse forms of belonging and being at home. Its nonlinear episodic narrative, told in chapters, is in dialogue with other examples of "world cinema" based on complex plot structures and interwoven storylines.

Akin's film follows a recent trend in world cinema that requires active audience engagement in the construction of the film's multiple stories. Fragmented narratives and



convoluted plots have become popular in contemporary cinema, making their way into commercial filmmaking. Films such as *Crash* (2005), *Syriana* (2005), *The Good Shepherd* (2006), and *Premonition* (2007) represent only a few of the most recent examples of this narrative and stylistic experimentation in mainstream cinema. On the DVD extras, Akin admits that the editing of *The Edge of Heaven* was a highly challenging process during which he watched Mexican director Alejandro Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006) four times. The story of *Babel* takes place in four different places across the globe, including Japan, the US, Mexico, and Morocco. The film's dialogue is spoken in six languages: French, English, Spanish, Berber, Arabic, and Japanese (spoken and signed). Indeed, it is not surprising that Akin aligns his film with an experimental Hollywood movie that celebrates geographic diversity and interlocking storylines. Since the beginning of his film career, Akin resisted being categorized as a Turkish German director or a German director with a migrant background. Rather, he identifies himself with internationally established auteurs such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Yılmaz Güney, Martin Scorsese, and Alejandro Iñárritu. Nevertheless, instead of merely repeating *Babel*'s style, which is based on intercutting short scenes from different stories that are developing simultaneously in different parts of the world, Akin created an episodic structure in *The Edge of Heaven* in which we follow one story all the way to the "end," which is marked by the death of a major character, and then move to the next one. Chapters are punctuated by inter-titles and narration stops to start again following a different character in a different place and situation. In the film, the events of the first two episodes occur simultaneously: Akin uses cinematic devices such as repetition, doubling, time-space overlap, and near misses to underline the intersections or overlaps between the stories.<sup>27</sup>

Within this framework, older narratives of migration from homeland to a host country prove to be inadequate in explaining the complexity of spatio-temporal relations articulated in Akin's movie. In fact, *The Edge of Heaven* does not refrain from addressing issues of integration, citizenship, intergenerational conflicts, and gender inequality—prevalent issues in many examples of Turkish German cinema. The film even maps out trajectories that take second-generation Turkish Germans on "homecoming" journeys to Turkey and lead to back-and-forth movement between Turkish and German spaces. But Akin's film transcends clichéd stories of migration by intertwining different types of (im)mobility and underlining their distinctiveness in historical and sociopolitical terms. Moreover, it constructs an expanded and connected global landscape where people are connected through environmental disasters and death.<sup>28</sup> Destabilizing presumed understandings of fixed borders and identities, mapping transnational connections, and revealing shared cultural histories, *The Edge of Heaven* offers ways of thinking beyond the divisions ostensibly inscribed in cultural, ethnic, and national forms of belonging and filmmaking. The film calls for an alternative poetics of space that emphasizes connectedness, flows, linkages, and networks marked by inequality and unevenness. Hence, instead of celebrating flawless mobility, it stresses the ways mobility enhances placemaking and shows how different senses and ways of being at home are configured in relation to mobility.

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<sup>27</sup> See Barbara Mennel's article "Crisscrossing in Global Space and Time: Fatih Akin's *The Edge of Heaven* (2007)" for an analysis of "the temporal and spatial organization of film's narrative" in "doublings, pairings, and crossings" (2007: 8).

<sup>28</sup> See Deniz Göktürk, "World Cinema Goes Digital: Looking at Europe from the Other Shore" (forthcoming), for an analysis of the film in relation to the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl in the Ukraine on 26 April 1986.

In the following, I will analyze *The Edge of Heaven* through the lens of accented cinema, road movie genre and fractal films, genres that have been evoked in different explorations of the film but have not been mobilized to investigate the film's thematic and formal preoccupations in a systematic manner and in dialogue with each other. Akın's film cannot be categorized as a typical road movie in which two characters hit the open road to escape from societal constraints and embark on great adventures. Yet theories of the road movie support an understanding of the transformation of the characters in Akın's film in relation to multidirectional (im)mobilities.<sup>29</sup> The film reimagines conventional notions of home-away, host-guest, and here-there, calling for an alternative poetics of space that fosters liminal spaces in which narratives intersect, clash, or cooperate in multifarious forms.<sup>30</sup>

### Three Chapters, Six Characters

*The Edge of Heaven* is structured in three episodes featuring six main characters: two mother-daughter pairs and a father-son pair. Following a short, geographically and temporally undefined prologue that will be repeated later in the work, the film opens with Akın introducing the first chapter, *Yeter's Death*. Set in Bremen, Hamburg, and Istanbul, this chapter focuses on the encounter between a Turkish prostitute, Yeter (Nursel Köse), and a first generation Turkish migrant, Ali (Tuncel Kurtiz). After visiting Yeter in her workplace a few times, Ali invites her to live with him under the condition that she will sleep only with Ali and in return will receive the money she would make monthly in her job. Ali has a son, Nejat (Baki Davrak), a professor of German literature at Hamburg University. The relationship between Ali and Nejat is depicted as a caring and loving one as we learn from Ali that he brought up his son alone after his wife's death when Nejat was six months old. Yeter decides to accept Ali's offer after being threatened by a pair of Turkish fanatics on the train. Shortly after Yeter moves-in, Ali accidentally kills her in a jealous frenzy. Following Yeter's death, Ali is taken to jail and Nejat brings the body to Istanbul and begins looking for Yeter's estranged daughter Ayten (Nurgül Yesilçay), a twenty-seven-year-old sociology student, whose studies he plans to fund as reparations for his father's crime. While searching for Ayten, Nejat abruptly decides to buy a German bookstore, abandoning his academic career and his imprisoned father in Germany.

The second chapter, *Lotte's Death*, is set in Hamburg and Istanbul and centers on an intimate encounter between Ayten and Lotte (Patrycia Ziolkowska), a student at Hamburg University. While the first chapter opens with Ali's first visit to Yeter during May 1 celebrations in Bremen, where we see colorful bands and a cheerful crowd, the second chapter unfolds in a different May 1 landscape—this time in Istanbul. Indeed, the second chapter does not follow the first one chronologically, as it initially seems to, but rather overlaps with it. The first scene opens on a violent conflict between the police and various political groups demonstrating for

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<sup>29</sup> The notion of the road movie needs to be complemented by more complicated understandings of mobility—best captured by terms such as “network narratives,” “fractal films” or “disordered cinema”—in order to account for interlocking storylines of the (im)mobile characters that expand beyond national borders. In this framework, Akın's film also challenges the notion of “accented cinema” (Naficy 2001) that casts “homecoming, home-seeking and border-crossing” as main themes in films made by exilic and diasporic filmmakers. The sense of unidirectional mobility invoked in Naficy's terms does not do justice to the complex forms of mobility explored in the film.

<sup>30</sup> The sense of space produced by *The Edge of Heaven* speaks to Doreen Massey's notion of space as “the sphere in which distinct stories coexist, meet up, affect each other, come into conflict or cooperate. This space is not static, nor a cross-section through time; it is disrupted, active and generative. It is not a closed system; it is constantly, as space-time, being made” (1999: 274).

democratic rights. The camera follows one demonstrator who is trying to escape from the polis in order to hide a gun that belongs to her political resistance group. She stashes it on the rooftop of a high-rise apartment and then leaves for Germany with fake documents following the arrest of her comrades. She briefly lives in a shelter that seems to welcome political refugees, but she leaves after arguing with the man who runs the place. Homeless, hungry, and having failed to find her mother Yeter, who she thinks is working at a shoe store, Ayten begins living at the Hamburg University because it is the cheapest place to buy food. She meets Lotte while asking around to borrow some money. Lotte takes Ayten to her house despite her mother Susanne's (Hanna Schygulla) unwillingness to help her. The two fall in love, but the police catch Ayten while they are looking for Yeter at the shoe stores in the area. Consequently, she applies for asylum in Germany; her application is rejected on the grounds of Turkey's accession process to the European Union (EU). As a result, Ayten is deported to Turkey and put in jail. Lotte immediately follows her to Turkey. Lotte meets Nejat at the German bookstore and rents a room in Nejat's house. Nejat and Lotte both came to Istanbul to look for Ayten but they do not know that they share the same cause because Lotte was instructed by a Turkish lawyer not to mention Ayten's name to anyone. When they meet in the prison, Ayten asks Lotte to take the gun she hid during the May 1 demonstrations. Before Lotte can complete the task of saving Ayten, street children who stole her bag accidentally kill Lotte.

The third chapter, *The Edge of Heaven*, witnesses Susanne's trip to Istanbul following her daughter's death. It begins with Ali and Susanne's arrival at Istanbul Ataturk Airport on the same plane--Ali as a deportee, Susanne to mourn her daughter's death. Ali goes to his hometown in the Black Sea region without meeting Nejat, for he thinks that Nejat would not want to see him. Meanwhile, Susanne stays in Nejat's house in order to be able to sleep in Lotte's room. She decides to rent the room and stay in Istanbul to help Ayten after reading Lotte's diary, in which she talks about how she has been following her mother's steps. A conversation between Susanne and Nejat during *Kurban Bayramı* (*Eid el-Adha* or The Festival of Sacrifice) makes Nejat remember the loving and caring relationship he had with his father. This chapter ends with Nejat leaving to visit Ali in his hometown.

This summary in no way does justice to the visual details and narrative complexity of the film, but still it hints at the multidimensional (im)mobilities portrayed by Akin. With this irreducible complexity in mind let us move to a discussion of the road movie genre followed by an analysis of the road-movie segments of *The Edge of Heaven*, which frame the three-part narrative structure and provide a meta-cinematic, self-reflexive device that speaks to Akin's own journey of making the film.

### **The Elusive Road Movie Genre**

The road movie has been identified as an American genre *par excellence* due to its exploration of "peculiarly American dreams, tensions, and anxieties, even when imported by the motion picture industries of the other nations" (Cohan and Hark 1997: 2). In his influential study of the genre, *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie*, David Laderman extensively discusses "the road movie ... as a dynamic manifestation of American society's fascination with the road" (2). Laderman further explains that "Road movie genre is visually identifiable by its recurring use of panoramic shots that align the freedom of the road with the horizontal space of the camera screen and by the repeated employment of traveling shots produced by mounting the camera on the edge of a moving vehicle" (14-5). In general terms, a journey narrative involving one or two

protagonists characterizes the road movie genre. Road movies usually have an episodic structure comprised of people and situations encountered en route. The physical journey across space reflects the inner psychological journeys of the characters, who change and grow as a result of their traveling experiences. In American road movies, the open road is often depicted as a symbol of freedom, promising an escape from societal responsibilities and expectations and reflecting the cultural belief in “the freedom to move upward and outward” (Eyerman and Lofgren 55). Indeed, many American road films, such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *Easy Rider* (1969), and *Thelma and Louise* (1991), celebrated the idea of escape from societal constraints through hitting the road. In discussions of the American road movie tradition, the spaces and means of transportation occupy a central place in relation to the characters’ journey. The focus is on the characters’ inner transformation through the traveled landscape and through encounters with the strangers on the road.<sup>31</sup>

Recently, scholarly work on European road movies has attempted to extend the genre beyond its American context by highlighting the transnational cinematic exchanges that began taking place even before the consolidation of the genre in the 1960s with films such as Dennis Hopper’s *Easy Rider* (1969). Although many scholars have claimed the road movie genre as a quintessential American product (Cohan and Hank 1997; Laderman 2002), Devin Orgeron insists that the consolidation of the road movie genre in the 1960s and 1970s was in fact a result of post-war transcontinental traffic, in particular between American and European filmmakers. He points out that “a wave of existentially inflected, formally inventive European cinematic productions” influenced the “newly forming, highly educated and deeply skeptical” post-war American youth culture that questioned the inherited notions of American culture/values, including popular Hollywood filmmaking practices (4). In his book *Road Movies: From Muybridge and Méliès to Lynch and Kiarostami*, Orgeron explores the international cinematic dialogues since the postwar era and focuses on the shared use of the road imagery by diverse cinemas across national borders: “Road movie is the product of one of the twentieth century’s most enduring international cinematic conversations” (Orgeron 78). For example, the three directors whose names have come to be associated with the road movie genre, Jean-Luc Godard, Dennis Hopper, and Wim Wenders, “have all participated in this practice of cinematic reference and borrowing, drawing from cinematic history generally as well as from each other in their repeated cinematic explorations of the journey” (Orgeron 78).

In their recent study *Crossing New Europe: Postmodern Travel and The European Road Movie*, Laura Rascaroli and Ewa Mazierska set out to define the notion of European road movie as a distinct genre and “determine to what extent travel films have engaged with the notion of a changing European socio-geographical space” (1). Like Orgeron, they argue that the European road film “developed alongside the Hollywood road movie, being influenced by and influencing it at the same time” (4). Analyzing a wide range of filmic texts, they claim that this underanalyzed genre category is reflective of an increasingly transnational Europe marked with displacement, migration, exile, diaspora, and the blurring of the national borders in a context of ever increasing globalization. Rascaroli and Mazierska argue that “the journey as a cultural

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<sup>31</sup> Drawing on Deleuze, Wendy Everett argues that “Through its self-conscious exploration of the relationship between the spatial and temporal displacement of journey and the discourse of film itself, [the road movie genre] has been widely recognized as one of the most telling expressions of modernist and postmodern cinema. ... At the same time, it is a form whose inherent flexibility makes it ideally suited to the exploration of complex social tensions and concerns” (2009: 167).

critique, as an exploration both of society and self” appears as a general generic characteristic of the road movie genre (4). Nevertheless, they insist that European road movies differ in many ways from the American ones: “the open spaces of North America, with their straight, boundless highways and the sense of freedom and opportunity to reinvent one’s life” differ from the tangible multiplicity and diversity of European nations, cultures, languages and roads, which are separated by geographical, political and economic boundaries and customs. European road movies often depict (national) border-crossings, traversing an ever-changing landscape or regions with different cultures and characteristics. While the main vehicle of transportation appears to be a private car in the North American context, European road movies choose “public transport (trains, buses), if not hitchhiking or traveling on foot.” The identity of the travelers is another difference: while American road movies feature outcasts or rebels as main characters, European road movies portray the “‘ordinary citizen’ who is on the move, often for practical reasons (for work, immigration, commuting or holiday-making)” (5). Laderman also draws attention to European road movies’ tendency to “quest more than the flight, and imbue the quest with navigations of national identity and community—navigations that often take on sophisticated philosophical and political dimensions” (248). Wendy Everett, however, views these attempts to delineate the differences between American and European road movies somewhat unproductive due to the elusiveness and fluidity of the genre that has “assume[d] vitally different functions in different places and at different times on its own historical and cultural journey” (167).

I am less interested in exploring intersections and crossovers between American and European road movies than in thinking about how Fatih Akin’s mobilization of the specific characteristics of the road movie genre helps to construct the multifaceted (im)mobilities that mark each character’s experience in the film. *The Edge of Heaven* revolves around varied outward and inward journeys. The road movie segment starring Baki Davrak as Nejat emphasizes the journey as much as the moment of arrival, the experience of space as much as the destination. Thus it values places and resists their transformation into a series of what Marc Augé (1995) has defined as “non-places” such as airports, highways, and motels, which are defined by their transitory character and lack of identity. A good example of the film’s emphasis on locality is the opening scene in which we see Nejat stop at a gas station somewhere in the countryside; the conversation between Nejat and the owner of a gas station identifies the place as Turkey’s Black Sea coast through dialect and references to local music and a global environmental disaster (Chernobyl) that has had great impact on the region (see Göktürk forthcoming and Mennel 2007).<sup>32</sup> A specific road movie characteristic used in *The Edge of Heaven* is that the outward journeys of the characters are accompanied by an inward quest for some kind of internal fulfillment, reconciliation with oneself, and/or understanding of the other. The route of this inward journey becomes most explicit in the case of Nejat, who goes to meet with his father Ali in his hometown to come to terms with the events that have happened ensuing Yeter’s death. Toward the end of the movie, it becomes clear that after abandoning his father and living in

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<sup>32</sup> Göktürk argues that “The reference to the nuclear accident at Chernobyl in the Ukraine on 26 April 1986 as the cause of increased cases of cancer in the region suggests the connection of destinies across the sea and national borders. Indeed, the extent of the long-term effects of the radioactive contamination twenty years after the biggest nuclear catastrophe in the history of atomic energy (meanwhile equaled by Fukushima) is difficult to measure. Decisive is the interdependence between the mediatized incident and lesser-known fates, which the resident explains to the traveler” (forthcoming).

Turkey for several years, Nejat has actually been going through a process of radical transformation.



Figure 13

This inner transformation is underscored in several other scenes in which we see him inhabiting transitory spaces such as trains, buses, the airport, the highway, and streets. In the movie, he is identified with technologies of mobility that define him as a world citizen, a cosmopolitan traveler, who is at home in transitional spaces. Nejat is perpetually and self-confidently on the move, both with a precise destination in mind and the air of the *flaneur*, delighting in leisurely strolls in the urban ambience. One long shot places him against a moving backdrop, involving a play between the immobile passenger and the mobile world (see fig. 13). The contemplative tone of such shots suggests the intellectual and emotional depth and complexity of the character and further reinforces his role as a hub for other characters. Furthermore, Nejat's road trip along the Black Sea coast extends beyond the frame of the fictional movie into Akin's own life: before making the film, Akin took a similar trip to his own grandfather's hometown (also Nejat's destination), where he used to spend every summer as a child, in order to decipher the story of *The Edge of Heaven*—an issue I will return to later in the chapter.

## Road Movie within a Movie



Figure 14

The opening credits of *The Edge of Heaven* are accompanied by the sound of rolling waves that continues into the film's first shot (later resurfacing in the very final shot of the film). The film starts with a wide-angle, long shot that centrally frames a small cottage, presumably located in the countryside (see fig. 14). As the camera slowly pans right, we hear a song that for the informed audience who knows the language would suggest that we are somewhere in Turkey. The mobile camera captures a man repairing a bus parked near an old gas station. As the camera moves from left to right, a white car enters the frame from the opposite direction. The camera stops when the car is at the center of the frame (see fig. 15). A young, bohemian-looking man gets out of the car and is greeted by the owner of the gas station. As the young man enters the shop to buy some food and bottled water, he inquires about the song that we have been hearing since the first shot—we realize that the song is coming from a music player inside the gas station and hence is diegetic. The owner explains that the singer is Kazım Koyuncu, a well-known musician in Turkey, especially in the Black Sea region, who died of cancer two years ago due to radiation from Chernobyl. This conversation suggests that the young driver is not familiar with the region and its cultural codes—he is a stranger on the road to an unknown destination. The scene cuts to a close-up shot of the young man, who is now on the road driving the car. Kazım Koyuncu's song "Ben Seni Sevdiğimi" continues through the next scene as a non-diegetic song, marking the entire road sequence of *The Edge of Heaven*. The film cuts to a shot of the road filmed by a camera mounted on the car. As the car goes through a short tunnel we see another tunnel followed by another one on the curving highway. When we enter the second tunnel the screen goes black, followed by the title of the first chapter, introducing *Yeter's Death* in Bremen.



Figure 15

This prologue reveals very little about the young man. The destination and purpose of his journey is unknown. Indeed, the film's opening and its sudden cut to an inter-title is disorienting for its lack of narrative clarity—it does not provide the viewer with the usual narrative anchors, such as the identity of the character and his relationship to the space around him. In addition, the abrupt change of setting from Turkey's Black Sea region to Germany suggests that this opening is not the beginning of a classical "communication model of narrative" that provides the necessary information for the logical flow of the story (Bordwell 2008: 129). Spatial relationships and locations are not immediately clear, especially for a viewer who is not familiar with the region. It is only toward the end of the film, as we learn more about the tangled stories of six main characters, that the opening scene makes sense. In the prologue, narrative clarity has been replaced by alluring road imagery and (auto)mobility<sup>33</sup>—cinematic elements that are familiar to most viewers regardless of their location or nationality. The opening road movie sequence structurally frames the film, appearing at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. As Dimitris Eleftheriotis observes, this sequence is "presented as converging parts of a journey fragmented by the narration but temporally uninterrupted" (132). In fact, the road imagery and *mise-en-scène* of automobility used in the prologue punctuate the fragmented and layered narrative structure; alternately, one might say that the other stories rupture the time-space continuum of the road movie segment.

<sup>33</sup> For a further discussion on automobility, see Urry 2004 and Featherstone 2004.





Figure 16

The second road movie sequence comes at the end of *Yeter's Death*. The film cuts from Ali's radical immobilization in the German prison to Nejat's arrival at Istanbul Ataturk Airport with Yeter's coffin. Later we see Nejat telling his cousin of his decision to buy a German bookstore and move to Istanbul. Nejat disowns his father, who is now in jail for murder: "Başka insanı öldüren benim babam olamaz /A murderer is not my father," he asserts. This scene is followed by the second road movie sequence, again marked with Kazım Koyuncu's song "Ben Seni Sevdiğümi." We see shots of a white car (Nejat's car) traveling through wide-open and sometimes sparse landscapes. Often the climate resembles a dry desert with few other travelers and minimal foliage. Sometimes we see mountains with greenery in the distance; perhaps this is a representation of where the character is headed. Visually, these traveling scenes have strong, straight lines that intersect with each other at various angles, often directing our eye to the part of the frame where the car is going and pulling our protagonist toward an ever more defined destination. These lines, formed by roads, bridges, tunnels and city lights could be interpreted as visual representations of paths and directional changes that the characters have pointed themselves toward through the various actions and events that unfold in the story. Throughout the film, all of our characters cross and sometimes connect with each other. In one shot, the camera moves along a separate converging road from the car that draws nearer to it until we eventually meet with the car (see fig. 16, 17). Indeed, this shot symbolizes the converging paths of the characters throughout the film. To a degree, these brief road movie sequences offer a bit of a breather in which viewers can watch the protagonist (Nejat) and imagine feelings that he might be having. Inevitably, we feel a sense of uncertainty about where the character is headed.

The powerful road imagery Akin deploys anticipates and resonates with the complex narrative structure of the film. The road movie sequence spatio-temporally belongs to the final chapter, also titled *The Edge of Heaven*, and thus logically comes after the first two chapters, which happen simultaneously in separate but overlapping geographies. The road movie sequence

is rather short in comparison to the other interlocking stories that make up the film. Nevertheless, it is central to the film's narrative and form. It reflects the multifarious journeys of the six main characters and literally inscribes the theme of journey into the film's visual space by employing an aesthetic that celebrates automobility and romanticizes alienation. The road imagery is also used to disrupt the idea of a one-way migratory journey from the homeland to the host country and back, for road movies in general are about the experience of hitting the road for an unknown or shifting destination, oftentimes for ambiguous reasons. In that sense, road stories challenge the classical migrant story of moving to a foreign country to find economic or political stability. In fact, *The Edge of Heaven* does not neglect that kind of migrant mobility, as seen in Ali's labor migration to Germany and his repatriation to Turkey, but entangles it with new, diverse forms of (im)mobility and transnationalism that extend across national borders with complex dynamics of departure, arrival, border-crossing, and extended social networks.



Figure 17

While the road movie segment encapsulates key themes of the film such as quest, uncertainty, and traveling to unfamiliar places, it also evokes the traveler's need for stillness or moments of stasis to refresh and recharge for the journey. Interestingly, it begins with a pause: a character stops at an old gas station to buy gas and refreshments. According to Christopher Morris, "The hiatus in the road journey—whether a police arrest, an interpolated story, or a way-station—literalizes the necessity for pauses, gaps... (29). In that sense, the road movie segment, which seems to be celebrating mobility and the fusion of the automobile and the male character, is somewhat questioned or challenged by a necessary pause that foregrounds self-reflexivity. Furthermore, the final static shot of the movie (Nejat waiting for his father on the beach in Filyos) evokes the aesthetics of still images more than the aesthetics of moving images, underscoring the tension between stillness/stasis and mobility that pervades the film from beginning to end (see fig. 18). The scene seems frozen except the soft movement of the waves.

This play between stillness and mobility evokes the possibility that something might happen—something that will be transformed by the characters into lived experience and memory. Indeed, the contextualization of Nejat’s road trip does not work as a literal progression but only as a form of open-ended investigation. The final shot symbolizes the ongoing search for meaning, for encounters, for stories, and perhaps for new ways of filmmaking that calls for being *on the other side*, at the edge of heaven.



Figure 18

The opening road movie segment emphasizes mobility as a central, metaphorical idea for Akin. However, in *The Edge of Heaven* in particular, differentiated mobilities such as forced migration and deportation are explored in the individual yet connected stories that constitute the film and counter the sense of freedom of movement, adventure, and discovery produced by the road imagery’s legendary and romantic connotations.<sup>34</sup> This countering also underlines Akin’s self-reflexive skepticism of his own mobility as a filmmaker. Indeed, his relationship to the subject of mobility is decidedly conflicted. This may explain why the journeys in Akin’s films are such expansive and highly self-reflexive adventures—yet this is not to suggest that Akin’s films are based solely on (auto)biographical elements. Dimitris Eleftheriotis defines the theme/motif of “converging routes” as the main characteristic of Akin’s oeuvre: “the converging routes in Akin’s films inform and interact with each other placing different types of mobility and traveling in a dialogic, mutually dependent relationship, which is informed by contesting power structures, histories and politics” (133). Indeed, *The Edge of Heaven* reimagines Europe from a

<sup>34</sup> Eleftheriotis also makes a similar point: “The modern sensibilities that inform quests are contextualized and problematized by the broader spectrum of mobility involved in Akin’s cinematic journeys” (138). Furthermore, “The routes and destinies converge but do so in conflict and with difficulty, foregrounding and negotiating deeply rooted differences, belonging to different types of traveling and involving different emotive registers” (Eleftheriotis 133).

perspective of the “converging routes” that extend beyond European borders. It foregrounds interconnectedness, reflexivity, and flexibility, while tapping into the issue of new regimes of border control that are designed to stop (undocumented) migration to Europe. In that sense, it highlights the differences in the ways in which particular bodies connect to the experience of mobility and displacement. For example, Ali’s imprisonment in Germany is followed by Nejat’s voluntary trip to Turkey; Ayten’s imprisonment in Turkey after being deported from Germany is followed by Lotte’s trip to Turkey to help her.<sup>35</sup> But what is the role of the road movie in relation to these diverse (im)mobilities? It functions both as a breather and as connective tissue for historically specific and different types of mobility. The fact that the fragments of Nejat’s journey are dispersed within the other stories of the film without any exposition connects his road trip to the (im)mobilities of other characters, touching everything from the arrival of Yeter’s body in Turkey to Lotte’s quest to help her lover to Susanne’s grief over her daughter’s death. Indeed, Nejat’s freedom of mobility is counterbalanced by the film’s extensive representation of distinct types of mobility pertaining to various cultural and political landscapes. The layering of these diverse journeys is unraveled in the film in a gradual way.

### **Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return**

Akın’s intimate and autobiographical attachment to the Black Sea coast adds resonance to the issues of home, homecoming, and journeying explored in the film. This personal dimension suggests the ways a traditional migration story, namely Turkish German labor migration, might be complicated by a journey that seems to be a second-generation migrant’s (Fatih Akın’s) return to his “ancestors’ homeland.” The road journey is in fact used by Akın not as a way of returning to his “roots” but as a *resource* to set his imagination in motion during the pre-production phase of *The Edge of Heaven*. As Deniz Göktürk reports, in his audio commentary on the German edition of the film’s DVD, Akın recounts that he took a three-day, 1000-kilometer-long road trip to Trabzon with his crew and actor Baki Davrak, who plays the Nejat character. The traveling shots were filmed from two cars: “two cameras ran through the front and back windows in one of the cars, while a third camera allowed for shots of the first car with Baki Davrak as the driver – ‘pure road movie,’ says Akın contentedly” (Göktürk forthcoming). The notion of “pure road movie” suggests a kind of identification with mechanized transportation and evokes a fluid alignment of cinema and automobility,<sup>36</sup> linking the car’s movement with cinematic freedom.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Akın’s use of journey to create the cinematic story defines his filmmaking as a way of becoming mobile, exploring cross-border mobilities, local attachments, and extended socialities as part of his creative process. Indeed, *The Edge of Heaven* exploits a wide-range of transportation modalities by putting characters in scenes of transit that involve cars, buses, planes, and ships. Here, transitory sites such as the airport are narratively and emotionally charged.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> In Akın’s *Head-on*, the main protagonist Sibel decides to go to Turkey after her husband Cahit is imprisoned for accidentally killing one of her ex-lovers.

<sup>36</sup> The term automobility “works off the combination of autonomy, and mobility. In its broadest sense we can think of many automobilities – modes of autonomous, self-directed movement” (Featherson 1).

<sup>37</sup> Indeed, road movie genre testifies to the “technological intersection of automobility and motion pictures” (Coan and Hark 2).

<sup>38</sup> Orgeron argues that road movies exemplify cinema’s “trans-national, trans-historical, and trans-generic attraction to the subject of transportation;” yet “this vehicular curiosity arises from the cinema’s perennial though rarely discussed skepticism of modernity and its social costs” (2).

Akın's journey along the Black Sea coast evokes a sense of discovery and adventure. He describes this exploration of his parents' homeland in the documentary *Fatih Akın: Diary of a Film Traveler* (2007), made by his wife Monique Akın.<sup>39</sup> Akın explains that the road trip to his grandfather's village Çamburnu, along the Black Sea near the Georgian border, enabled him to finalize the film's story. We learn from Akın that the trip led him to transform his original idea of bringing together two film stars of different cinematic traditions: New German Cinema auteur Rainer Werner Fassbinder's star Hanna Schygulla and Turkish auteur Yılmaz Güney's actor Tuncel Kurtiz, whose film career reflects the fifty-year history of Turkish Cinema. As Akın says, "these are two living legends, who have made film history." The opportunity of having a Fassbinder actor and a Güney actor in the same film sparked an idea in Akın's mind: "A German woman goes to Istanbul, where her daughter has died. Her only ally is a Turkish taxi driver who lived in Germany and who speaks German." In July 2005, Akın took a road trip to his grandfather's village Çamburnu with his partner Andreas Thiel. Akın recounts: "I thought I would find something for the script along the way. This trip was crucial to the film. Suddenly I saw the story: six characters, their destinies and how they could interweave. It didn't have much to do with the original idea and there was just one small scene left with Hanna and Tuncel although the whole thing had been conceived for them. But that's how it goes. *Sometimes you don't know where the journey will lead*" (my emphasis). In fact, the journey led Akın to come up with a multilayered plot structure that interweaves multiple storylines and characters.<sup>40</sup>

A director hitting the road in search of the story of his upcoming film as well as the locations he wants to shoot is very telling: a Turkish German auteur, who lives in Hamburg, travels to the rural parts of Turkey to develop his story in the hope that the trip will trigger new ideas. The road movie sequence in *The Edge of Heaven* is the meta-reflexive moment in the sense that it is marked with the director's search for a story. Akın's autobiographical relation to the landscape testifies to the inextricable link between the cinematic representation of the journey and the region's geographical and historical specificity. This connection also evokes a road movie sensibility that provides a textual emphasis on the traveled space.

Orgeron argues that despite cinema's "obsessive" focus on mobility and transportation, "the [road] films themselves repeatedly focus on the consequences of a culture moving, often quite rapidly, away from the stabilizing structures of community and communication" and "posit a hopeless and lamentable mobility in an effort to eulogize or find *stability*" (Orgeron 2, original emphasis). Orgeron's point is valuable because it expands the discussion of mobility into stability, exploring the dynamics of movement and stillness in varied road movies including Godard's *Breathless* (1960), Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969), and Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* (1997), among others.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, Akın does not easily succumb to the romantic connotations of the road as a space of discovery and adventure, or to the idea of home as a place of safety and stability. He is keenly aware of his "outsider" position and his transnational auteur role in depicting the Black Sea region for a transnational audience. Akın's uneasiness with the landscape might also explain the narrative fragmentation of the road movie sequences—this

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<sup>39</sup> Available on the American edition of the film's DVD, under Special Features section.

<sup>40</sup> Eleftheriotis also points out that at the end of the journey, Akın "opted for a plot structure that revolves around clearly delineated story strands that keep the two stars apart. As a result Schygulla and Kurtiz share only a few seconds of screen time during which they do not even address each other" (134).

<sup>41</sup> Orgeron argues that road movies "extend a longstanding cinematic tradition that posits a hopeless and lamentable mobility in an effort to eulogize or find stability" (2).

journey is neither continuous nor frictionless but rather disrupted by other (im)mobilities. Akın's attempt to genuinely engage with his parents' migration was not simply a nostalgic act.<sup>42</sup> Instead, this engagement prompted new cinematic directions and forms of storytelling. Like Nejat, Akın has a complex relationship with the traveled landscape and the destination, and he is not simply interested in the metaphorical potential of the road but also the physical traffic of bodies and vehicles as well as the traffic of cultures and ideas and also memories and histories across national borders.

*The Edge of Heaven* challenges the idea of the distinction between home and away as well as the idea of the homecoming journey.<sup>43</sup> The film does not explore "the tragedy of mobility, its mistaken directions" as seen in Godard's *Breathless*, nor is it a critique of "the seductive powers of modern motion and ... its often empty inspiration" such as Hopper's *Easy Rider* (Orgeron 102). Even though it explores dynamics of mobility and stillness, it does not frame them as loss of community or longing for stability (themes that are commonly found in migrant and diasporic films). Characters develop attachments not on the basis of traditional communities or homeland but through investment in non-biological relationships with "foreigners." Except Ayten and Ali's forced departures, mobilities in this film are often driven by a desire to connect with another person, to nurture relationships, and to help each other. In that sense, these mobilities do not oppose to a sense of community or stability of relationships but are facilitators in nurturing them. Hence, the film counters Orgeron's understanding of home and family as "mythically stable structures" and the idea that road films have an underlying desire for "community and stability" rather than "independence and mobility" (12). Akın's multifarious journeys are variously triggered by necessity, force, the will to help someone, or the desire to reconnect.

### **From Accented Film to Network Narratives**

The issue of home and homecoming journeys evoked by *The Edge of Heaven* both on cinematic and meta-cinematic levels resonates with the theory of "accented cinema." Writing in 2001, Naficy argued that accented cinema refers to a wide range of films that share similar thematic preoccupations and stylistic characteristics despite the filmmakers' different experiences of diaspora and displacement. The concept of accented cinema draws on auteur/authorship theories—but authorship is inscribed in accented films through autobiographical gestures and the use of autobiographical narratives instead of individual genius. Indeed, Naficy insists that the "accent" emanates from the filmmaker's personal experience of displacement and migration and the artisanal and/or collective modes of production. Emphasizing the distinctions between the home and host societies as well as the individual and collective experiences of deterritorialization, accented films are "interstitial because they are

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<sup>42</sup> This challenges and expands Hamid Naficy's point that accented films are infused with nostalgia for the homeland as expressed in homecoming journeys (2001: 222-36).

<sup>43</sup> Critical literature on the road movie has demonstrated that road movies in general are deeply concerned with the notion of home as much as the traveled space. In her article "Home and Away: Friends of Dorothy on the road in Oz," Pamela Anderson argues that: "If the road movie is in some deep sense about the road itself, and the journey taken, more than about any particular destination, it is still a genre obsessed with home. Typically, the road takes the traveler away from home. ... While it provides an escape from and alternative to home, and home can be 'anywhere, and everywhere' on the road (or, in another formulation, 'anyplace I hang my hat'), the trope of the road still requires the concept of home as a structuring absence" (271).

created astride, and in the interstices of, social formations and cinematic practices” (Naficy 2001: 4–5).

In Naficy’s analysis, which includes a range of different diasporic contexts, home appears as a place of incommensurable safety and security that cannot be replicated. Such a notion of home suggests that for migrants and exilic characters there can be no place like home, for they belong elsewhere and cannot be at home where they reside. According to Naficy, the notion of home redefined in relation to journeying and displacement is central to accented cinema (2001: 222). Indeed, the experience of exile and diaspora is defined as a troubled relationship to a lost home/homeland. In that sense, recurrent topics such as home-seeking, homelessness, and homecoming journeys are manifested in a nostalgic and sometimes fetishistic quest for wholeness. Naficy proposes three possible relationships between the displaced subject and the home/homeland: exilic, diasporic and postcolonial. For the exile, the absence of the homeland is most visceral and immediate. Their relationship to it is defined by a sharp sense of loss, while diasporic and postcolonial positions are characterized by growing connections with and within the host country and a relationship to the homeland that is increasingly mediated through new forms of belonging. In accented cinema, therefore, it is the differing relationships to the concept of home that, for Naficy, come to define these films.

Akın’s autobiographical gesture, visually and narratively inscribed in *The Edge of Heaven*, like the journeys of his characters, which might also be defined as homecomings, invokes the notion of accented cinema. Nevertheless, I argue that Akın’s film rewrites notions of accented cinema/migrant and diasporic cinema as well as the notion of home/homeland. In fact, the development of Akın’s career as a director reveals the complexities and contradictions of contemporary transnational, independent filmmaking. Transnational collaborations or co-productions more accurately characterize contemporary Turkish German cinema than do notions of “cultural authenticity” or “ethnic identity.” As mentioned earlier, *The Edge of Heaven* is part of a recent filmmaking trend that celebrates fragmented, interlocking stories that deviate from and challenge conventional forms of storytelling in cinema. Scholars have seen this trend as a response to or reflection of the increasing globalization and the widespread use of telecommunication technologies. These films challenge the distinctions between home and away, migrant and native. In fact, themes of home, belonging, and displacement are prevalent in analysis of migrant and diasporic cinema, and I do not intend to claim that these issues do not exist anymore or are irrelevant. They do exist, but they are depicted in relation to other (im)mobilities, different ways of inhabiting the world, and new forms of social relationships. They call for a rethinking of notions of community, homeland-host country, and interpersonal connections. They do that with a historical sensibility—for example Turkish German labor migration does not disappear in Akın’s films but rather gets complicated, becoming a form of mobility among diverse (im)mobilities.

In recent years, global film culture has come to foreground fractures, interconnectedness, simultaneity, and multiple border crossings, moving beyond explorations of the experience of migrancy and diaspora. I propose the consideration of accented cinema in relation to these multilayered stories. While *The Edge of Heaven* does address the familiar cultural and linguistic issues produced by Turkish German migration, for example the assimilation of second-generation Turkish Germans, political exile, and generational conflicts, the film rewrites this genre to such an extent that it creates a bridge between traditional heroes and “new transnational characters who share the difficulties experienced by the protagonists of globalized narratives”

such as Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006). As Mireille Rosello suggests, in those films, "national identities or national boundaries do not define the border between inside and outside, or familiar and strange" ("Ismaël Ferroukhi's *Le Grand Voyage*").<sup>44</sup>

In *The Edge of Heaven*, Akin represents the complexities and contradictions of transnational mobility and globalization by invoking the contradictions and complexities of filmmaking and the film medium itself. Indeed, Akin's film interweaves multiple main characters, multiple storylines, multiple spaces, and different temporalities, creating a multilayered formal, narrative, and stylistic structure that reflects today's global era. *The Edge of Heaven* belongs to an increasing number of films including *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991) by Krzysztof Kieslowski, *Short Cuts* (1993) by Robert Altman, *Pulp Fiction* (1994) by Quentin Tarantino, *Magnolia* (1999) by Paul Thomas Anderson, *Traffic* (2000) by Steven Soderbergh, *Code Unknown* (2000) by Michael Haneke, *Crash* (2004) by Paul Haggis, *Syriana* (2005) by Stephen Gaghan, and Alejandro González Iñárritu's trilogy *Amores Perros* (2000), *21 Grams* (2003), and *Babel* (2006), that have been variously defined as "network narratives" (Bordwell)<sup>45</sup> "modular narratives" (Cameron), "hyperlink cinema" (Quart), "aesthetics of the mosaic" (Pisters) and "fractal films" (Everett). Earlier examples of this complex narrative structure can be found in Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), Akira Kurasawa's *Rashomon* (1950), and Stanley Kubrick's *The Killing* (1956), but only in the last decade or so have we seen an increasing adoption of this kind of formal experimentation in both mainstream and independent cinema.

Many have argued that the complex aesthetics and layered narratives of these films are tied to globalization, transnationalism, and globalized media culture. According to Charles Ramirez Berg, this increasing trend of non-classical narratives is linked to "the fragmenting 'postmodern condition' and its revolt against master narratives; the ubiquity of shorter narrative media forms such as music videos; video games, which stress multiple kinds of interactive narrativity, require various sorts of player strategies including role playing and team building, and repeatedly take players back to the same situations; the branched experience of surfing the net; and hypertext linking that allows users to create a personalized sequence of disparate types of artifacts that might include text, image, video, and sound" (6). Indeed, these films evoke a spatial poetics that accounts for multidirectional (im)mobilities and global interconnectedness, albeit taking different stands in respect to contemporary transnational flows and their implications. In general terms, these films have multiple storylines and feature multiple characters who are often strangers yet unintentionally affect each other's lives. Different stories are intertwined in highly complex and sometimes random ways. The characters often cross paths with one another without realizing it. Furthermore, this new cinematic form often arranges

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<sup>44</sup> Mireille Rosello argues that in films like *Babel*, "national identities or national boundaries do not define the border between inside or outside, familiar or strange. Multilingualism and multinationalism are the rule rather than the exception, so that in order to represent the heroes' trajectory, filmmakers have to deal with many sets of assumptions about what is familiar and what is not, what is understandable and what is not, given that characters and spectators do not necessarily belong to the same imagined community. Stories cover territories that the spectator and the characters are not expected to recognize but to discover and chart at the same time. The issue is verisimilitude is thus redefined. Both audience and characters are involved in inventing different scales and different sets of symbols, rather than in simply relying on previously established maps or landscapes" ("Ismaël Ferroukhi's *Le Grand Voyage*").

<sup>45</sup> David Bordwell suggests that "The central formal principle [in network narratives] is that several protagonists are given more or less the same weight as they participate in intertwining plotlines. Usually these lines affect one another to some degree. The characters might be strangers, slight acquaintances, friends, or kinfolk. The film aims to show a larger pattern underlying their individual trajectories" (2006).



different stories “in radically achronological ways via flash-forwards, overt repetition, or a destabilization of the relationship between present and past” (Cameron 65). Last but not least, by presenting complex, fragmented and multiple stories and characters, these films trouble the distinction between center and periphery, displacing the traditional central position of Western cultures.

*The Edge of Heaven* explores interrelationships between multiple characters of different ethnicities and socioeconomic positions by employing counter-classical strategies, including temporal disruption and multiple narratives, chance encounters, and near misses. Akin’s film foregrounds love, forgiveness, reconciliation, similarities, and personal transformation, despite the fact that violence serves as a narrative engine as well. Akin’s cinematic language emphasizes similarities and intersections over separation, divisiveness, and impassable borders, and reflects the ways technology and cross-border mobility have affected social relationships. Unlike some fractal films, *The Edge of Heaven* is not merely based on randomness—the different storylines are in fact tightly connected around themes such as death, parent-child relationships, regret, and forgiveness. Instead of offering a strikingly segmented plot such as we see in *Babel*, the film provides parallel, simultaneous stories that are told in a non-linear fashion. Nevertheless, the multilayered narration disorients the viewer’s sense of time and space by visually and narratively interconnecting the parallel stories in unpredictable ways. As a result, the film undercuts the traditional hierarchy of narrative temporality. The opening of the film, for example, does not clearly distinguish between events from the past and those from the future, nor does it provide a clear framing narrative for the movie. Instead, the film is structured by parallelism, repetition, doubling, and near misses, abandoning chronological storytelling in order to cross-reference the intertwining stories of multiple characters.<sup>46</sup>

In the first chapter of the film, Nejat is giving a lecture at Hamburg University. The camera circles around him as he explains that “Goethe was opposed to revolution. Not on ethical grounds but because it seemed to him to be too uncontrollable.” Nejat quotes Goethe: “Who wants to see a rose bloom in the depths of winter? Everything to its own time. Leaves, buds, flowers. Only a fool could want this untimely intoxication.” As Nejat utters the last sentence, the camera cuts to a close-up of a woman sleeping at the back of the lecture hall, and then cuts to another scene in which we hear Ali and Yeter having sex. The close-up assigns an unexplained narrative significance to the woman, who will appear as the revolutionary Ayten in the next episode (see fig. 19). Nejat’s lecture on German philosopher Goethe’s anti-revolutionary ideas is somewhat linked to the revolutionary ideals that forced Ayten out of Turkey. The same lecture scene is repeated in the second chapter as well when Ayten enters Germany. When the image of Ayten sleeping during Nejat’s lecture appears on the screen, we know who she is and why she is sleeping in class. The scene starts with the same close-up shot of Ayten as we hear the quote “Who wants to see a rose bloom in the depths of winter? Everything to its own time. Leaves, buds, flowers. Only a fool could want this untimely intoxication.” The camera then cuts to Nejat, who continues his lecture: “Secondly, I am opposed to revolutions for they destroy as many good old things as they create good, new ones.” This twist on the scene creates a sense of spatial-temporal disorientation, for while the repetition suggests that the narrative has not progressed

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<sup>46</sup> Barbara Mennel suggests that “this element of the film ... captures the increase in multidirectional mobility and multidimensional cultural production and reception under globalization” (2007: 9). Mennel further argues that the non-linear structure of the film is set up by “doublings of shots [that] subvert conventions of linear narrative storytelling, but also create the rhythm of the film’s poetics” (2007: 10).

further in time, when the second chapter opened we had actually traveled back in narrative time.

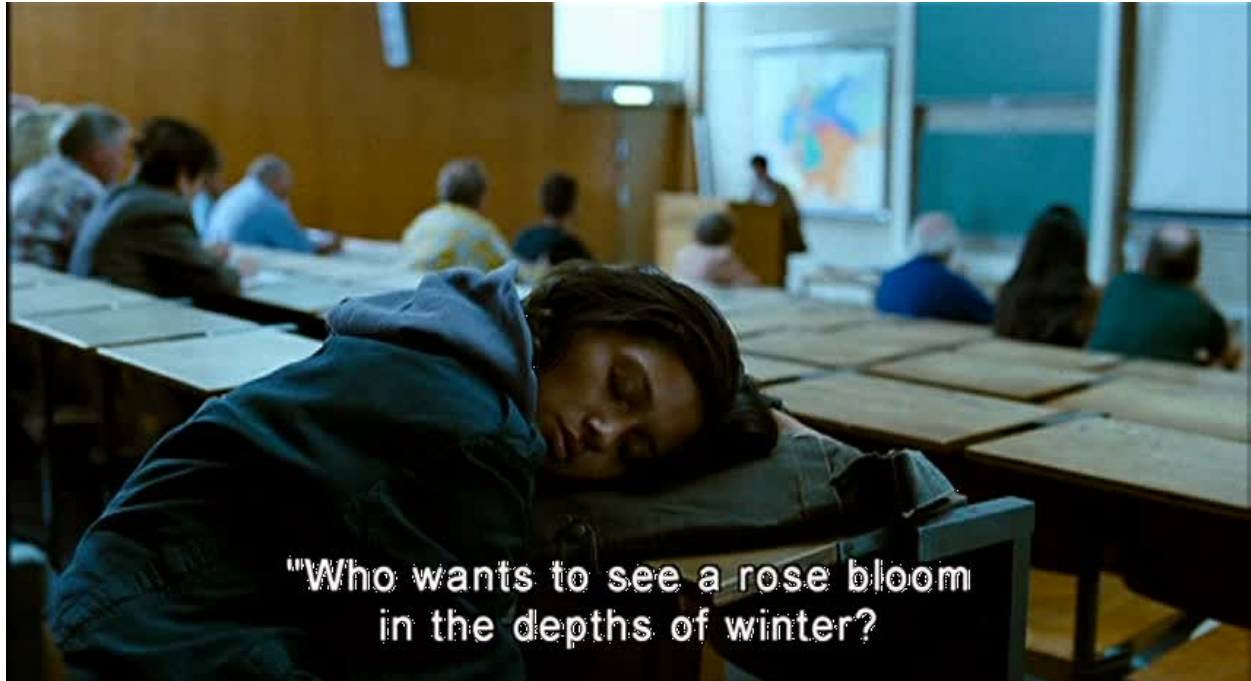


Figure 19

Another scene in which we see our characters converge on their separate and interweaving paths happens an hour into the film, when Ayten and Lotte are searching for Yeter, Ayten's mother. The camera shows an over-the-shoulder shot of Ayten looking at a map on which all the possible shoe stores in Hamburg are marked, as her mother has always told her daughter that she works in such a place. In the following shot we see that Ayten sits next to Lotte, who is driving (see fig. 20). The shot stays on the two women for a little while, swaying slowly from side to side until the car speeds through the frame to reveal a bus in the background, also traveling in the same direction, and pans up until we see Yeter and Nejat in the window of the bus. Our eye is immediately drawn to Yeter, who, even through the bus window, seems to exude strong emotions of loss and longing. Indeed, the car and the bus are moving on two parallel planes (see fig. 21). The characters, unaware of this "coincidence," continue their search for each other. The routes of the bus and the car do not intersect, unlike the converging highways in the second road movie sequence discussed above. Nevertheless, these routes meet on a metaphorical level through the themes of loss and longing. Such "near misses" are used in the film not to emphasize randomness but to emphasize parallels—even though their paths do not cross, the characters remain connected in multiple ways.

Significantly, both the characters in the car and those on the bus appear trapped inside boxes or cells made up by the rigid and square elements of the car and bus window. It is as if the composition of the unnatural structures and geopolitical barriers governing the characters' actions throughout the story are also subtly reflected in the compositional aesthetics of this scene. A closer look at the window reveals a cubed structure reminiscent of a jail cell. Fittingly, the next shot takes us to a new scene in which Ayten and Lotte are pulled over by the police and arrested. Interconnectedness is also visually inscribed in the filmic space of *The Edge of Heaven*. The glass of the bus and car windows that separates the characters even as they come ever so close

together furthers the sense of parallelism and separation that pervades the film.



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23

This also becomes manifest in the scenes in which we see Susanne and Ali appear on the same frame in customs at the Istanbul Airport when they come to Turkey at the beginning of the third chapter—Susanne to come to terms with her daughter’s death and Ali to be repatriated to

his hometown following his sentence in Germany (see fig. 22, 23). These characters' children, Nejat and Lotte, both come to Turkey to help Ayten and share the same house until Lotte's sudden death. Unaware of this connection, Susanne and Ali continue their individual paths unaffected by this random encounter at the airport. Yet this coincidence adds another twist to the already complex narrative of the movie and suggests the possibility of an encounter or meeting between the two characters in the future. Indeed, at times the characters and their stories seem to move the narration (and themselves) by crossing paths; at other times they just brush without being conscious of their overlapping narratives.

In this chapter, I have explored two experimental cinematic narratives that emerged in the context of Turkish German cinema, and argued that Ayşe Polat's short film *Countess Sophia Hatun* (1997) and Fatih Akin's feature film *The Edge of Heaven* (2007) challenge the notion of migrant and diasporic cinema by employing diverse genres and styles such as heritage cinema and fractal films that are not immediately associated with stories of migrancy. These films push the categories of Turkish German cinema and accented cinema, which prove to be inadequate in understanding their formal and narrative complexity as well as the multifarious mobilities and moorings they depict. Polat's experimental short film, which is based on a claustrophobic story of exile and confinement, uproot the static notions of home and landscape to underscore the multiplicity of exilic conditions in terms of gender, ethnicity and class. Hence, a massive German castle and its surrounding landscape, popular sites of heritage cinema, transform in the film into a dynamic space of negotiation between imprisonment and forced mobility. Akin's film, on the other hand, encompasses a vast geography across Germany and Turkey, crisscrossing urban and rural spaces alike. Yet the multidimensional mobilities of its characters are triggered by feelings of longing, love, and grief and the desire for homecoming and reconnection, rendering mobility and immobility relational and interdependent. Indeed, despite their stark differences in narrative, style, production and distribution contexts, these films contribute to a shift in the cinematic representation of migrancy from stories of victimization and confinement to stories of multiplicity, heterogeneity, and relational mobility.

## CHAPTER II

### Performative Encounters and Postcolonial (Im)mobilities in French Maghrebi Cinema: *Hidden* (2005) and *Exiles* (2004)

The previous chapter explored two examples of Turkish German cinema—Ayşe Polat’s short film *Countess Sophia Hatun* (1997) and Fatih Akin’s feature film *The Edge of Heaven* (2007)—that subvert the notion of migrant and diasporic cinema by employing diverse genres and styles that are not immediately associated with stories of migrancy. This chapter turns away from Turkish German cinema and labor migration to focus on French Algerian (post)colonial migration and *beur* and *banlieue* cinema in France. Once again, I will juxtapose films with diverse settings: one based in a bourgeois home and the other charting a transnational journey that expands beyond the borders of the “host” country. My two examples are Austrian director Michael Haneke’s *Caché* (*Hidden*, 2005), which won the best director award at the 2005 Cannes Film Festival, and *Exils* (*Exiles*, 2004), by French director of Romani-Algerian ethnicity Tony Gatlif, which won the best director award at Cannes in 2004. *Hidden*—a psychological thriller—revolves around the historical trauma of the October, 17, 1961 massacre of Algerians in France, an event that haunts the life of the bourgeois Parisian family at the center of the plot and shapes the identities and actions of all of the film’s French and Algerian characters. *Exiles* tells the story of a couple, both second-generation French citizens of Algerian origin, who travel from Paris to Algiers, tracing a previous generation’s experience of (post)colonial displacement in order to come to terms with the inherited trauma of forced displacement and contemporary alienation from the dominant French society. Both *Hidden* and *Exiles* invoke contemporary issues around migration, minorities, and borders that are particularly relevant in France, a country with a deeply rooted history of colonialism in North Africa. These films show that the memory and legacy of French colonization of Algeria (1830–1962) and the Algerian War (1954–1962) continue to inflect multicultural French society, and demonstrate the extent to which Algeria remains a vital reference point in metropolitan France.

*Hidden* and *Exiles* differ stylistically, narratively, and also in terms of the backgrounds and artistic concerns of their directors. Tony Gatlif, an exilic director of Algerian Berber and Gypsy Andalusian descent who migrated to France as a teenager during the Algerian War, makes movies about the road and traveling that tend to set characters on a quest across space and time. As Sylvie Blum-Reid points out, “his films are nomadic, travelogue-like and cryptic” (5). Gatlif’s oeuvre can be considered an example of “accented cinema” (Naficy 2001) or “migrant and diasporic cinema in Europe” (Berghahn and Sternberg 2010) for he chooses to tell stories about characters at the margins of dominant society, such as the Romani people. *Exiles* in particular is inscribed with autobiographical traces of the director, who returned to Algeria after forty years in exile of his own to make the film. Similar to Fatih Akin, who, as we saw in chapter one, inscribed his “homecoming” journey to his grandfather’s town into the filmic space of *The Edge of Heaven*, Gatlif merged his filmmaking practice with his personal quest to explore his “roots” and confront his traumatic memories about Algeria (Gatlif fled his native country during the Algerian War). In that sense, his search for stories and locations for his film was layered with a personal journey that informed the aesthetic and thematic preoccupations of *Exiles*—Gatlif’s “personal” journey was also used for the publicity of the film. Nevertheless, like Akin, Gatlif avoids individualized experience by juxtaposing different forms of (forced) mobilities with his

characters' adventurous journey to their imagined homeland. Hence, his characters' soul-searching journey expands to include other (im)mobilities, both historical and contemporary, providing a more diverse and heterogeneous picture of north-south geographical mobility.

In contrast, Michael Haneke is an internationally recognized Austrian director, who was born in Germany during WWII and whose films focus on the crisis and anxiety of the white bourgeois subject. Although both *Exiles* and *Hidden* received recognition in the festival circuits, *Hidden* was much more successful at the box office and has attracted considerable attention from both the media and academia, while *Exiles* is less analyzed. *Hidden* is Haneke's second French-language film set in Paris. The crisis and anxiety of the bourgeois subject pervades Haneke's films in general, but his French films—*Code inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages* (Code Unknown: Incomplete Tales of Several Journeys, 2000) and *Hidden*—incorporate concern with migration and multiculturalism in Western Europe. Haneke's films do not easily fall under the category of "accented cinema" due to their "focus on the lives of white, affluent western Europeans affected by the multiculturalism of their society more so than on the lives of immigrants or minorities" (Lykidis 457). Indeed, Haneke's films "often attempt to rethink Europe in terms of its colonial and marginal others" (Galt 2010: 222), but not from their perspective. In other words, Haneke does not attempt to represent the experiences of and give voice to migrants and minorities in Europe. Rather he aims to investigate the privileged white European subject's anxiety in the face of colonial others or "foreigners." In *Hidden* in particular, Haneke deals with the issue of colonial guilt embodied by the French bourgeoisie and the legacy of historical and geographical entanglements binding Europe to the larger world, entanglements that have their roots in earlier periods of European imperial expansion, both on and off the continent.

This chapter diversifies previous scholarly considerations of *Hidden* and of Haneke as a European auteur by recontextualizing the film in relation to *Exiles*, a cinematic project that decentralizes France/Europe and expands our geographical imagination into non-European territories through the transnational mobilities of characters living on the periphery of Paris. This pairing constructively expands previous discussions of cinema in relation to (post)colonial France. Although neither *Exiles* nor *Hidden* has been extensively discussed in relation to *beur* cinema, putting these films in dialogue with the aesthetics and politics of this movement reveals a compelling set of intersections between places and histories that opens up new ways of thinking about contemporary identities and borders in France and in Europe more generally.

### ***Beur* and *Banlieue* Cinema in France**

*Beur* and *banlieue* cinema are among the many repercussions of colonialism evident in contemporary French society. The migrant workers who were encouraged to come to France from the colonies, and particularly Algeria, during the post-WWII period of economic growth provided a significant labor force for French industry. Yet the colonialist legal structures that defined the colonized as second-class citizens in their own countries likewise placed them on unequal footing as immigrant workers in France. The immigrants and their families were housed in very poor conditions, living in *bidonvilles*, or shanty towns, before being moved to *cités de transit* (integration villages) and finally settling in high-rise, low-quality housing projects called *banlieues* situated on the periphery of French society. When France passed legislation prohibiting labor immigration in 1973, a new phase in the history of immigration began. Within a few years, North Africans (Algerians, Tunisians, and Moroccans) eager to reunite with their

families became the largest migrant group in France. Despite the violence of the Algerian War and decolonization, immigration from former colonies multiplied in the postcolonial period.<sup>47</sup> Yet France has refused to acknowledge a connection between the state of North and West African immigrants and the legacy of colonialism. Since the late 1970s, France has employed harsh immigration laws that fostered institutionalized racism and discrimination.<sup>48</sup> Immigrants have been portrayed as the cause of economic and social problems such as unemployment and crime, and immigration come to be seen as “a threat to national cohesion, a shift expressed in the increasing number of racist attacks on workers and reflected in apocalyptic images of invasion, terrorism, and enemy hordes at the city gates” (Ireland 25). Furthermore, since the 1980s, *banlieues*, where postcolonial minorities have been increasingly concentrated, have become representative of “ethnic alterity, social disadvantage, drugs, and crime” (Hargreaves 2001: 11). Dominant French society sees second- and third-generation French Maghrebis as immigrants who are socio-culturally inassimilable and thus cause a threat to sociopolitical order of the society. The exclusionary policies of the French state and the increasing racism and discrimination against minority populations further pushed postcolonial migrants to the margins of society. Nevertheless, unlike first generation migrants, recent generations have been relatively successful in claiming their rights and undermining asymmetrical power relations in French society. They have been out-spoken about the links between the presence of non-European diasporas and France’s history of colonialism. Such a historical emphasis challenges contemporary immigration discourses that usually depict migrants as “intruders” or “invaders” with no historical relation to their host countries.<sup>49</sup>

Against this backdrop, *beur* and *banlieue* cinema emerged. The term *beur* comes from Parisian slang for Arab, referring in particular to second- and third-generation French Maghrebis. Overlapping with *beur* cinema, *banlieue* cinema (*cinéma des banlieues*) focuses on disenfranchised characters living in the run-down projects (*cités*) at the peripheries of major cities, where they struggle with poverty, unemployment, crime, and discrimination. *Beur* films have received highly limited distribution due to their low-budget aesthetics and non-star or even

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<sup>47</sup> Alec Hargreaves explains that “In 1947, France granted a new status to her largest North African colony, Algeria, which gave the Muslim majority of the population equal freedom of movement alongside settler community. ... Far from bringing an end to population flows between ex-colonies and metropolitan France, decolonization was followed during the 1960s and early 1970s by a sharp rise in immigration from former colonial territories. This was due partly to legal provisions favoring freedom of movement from certain former colonies, notably Algeria; partly to the high levels of unemployment and low standard of living prevailing in those countries; and partly to growing labor shortages in France, where the authorities effectively waived immigration controls” (2001: 9). Furthermore, “The formal termination of labor migration from Third Worlds countries [in 1974] did not bring an end to population inflows from Africa and Asia.” Family reunification in the 1970s increased the number of immigrants living in France (Hargreaves 2001: 10).

<sup>48</sup> For example, the notorious Pasqua Laws of 1986 and 1993, which gave greater powers to police and prefects to carry out expulsions, made criteria for residence permit renewals and family reunification even stricter, limited immigrants’ access to health care and social security benefits (Silverman 1992).

<sup>49</sup> Indeed the majority of immigrants in Europe have ties with Europe’s colonial past. Although they were represented in official discourses as a labor force that was temporarily needed to help foster the economy, their continued presence in Europe is strongly related to the colonial history of their host country. Barbara Hooper and Olivier Kramsch argue that in the post-WWII period, “Europeans have internalized the model of a Europe which has renounced armed warfare and violence and established social democracy and ethical governance in their place: blood for roses. While there is certainly a reality to this analysis, there is also another Europe, one no less real but existing outside Europe’s geopolitical consciousness: namely, a Europe oddly unreflexive about its own imperialisms, past and present, as well as its contemporary less than enlightened attitude towards ‘strangers’” (526).



non-professional actors. But in the last few decades, *beur* cinema has received considerable public attention. Often produced through the support mechanisms of the French film industry, *beur* filmmaking has challenged the notion of homogenous French identity and transformed French national cinema from within. *Beur* films aimed to expose various sociopolitical and cultural obstacles that confront those seeking integration into French society and the systematic discrimination and spatial segregation that characterize France today. Writing in 1999, Peter Bloom defined *beur* cinema as a transnational film movement that has emerged from “a resolutely fractured French identity” (469). Characterizing the movement as an essentially urban phenomenon, Bloom linked the term *beur* to recent political movements and uprisings in the *banlieues* and anchored it to the films that address second-generation Maghrebi immigrants. Indeed, *beur* cinema is tied to histories of North African (de)colonization and the continuous waves of economic and political migration that marked second-generation North Africans as ethnic and cultural others and confined them to a working-class French identity. While many scholars use *beur* and *banlieue* cinema interchangeably or as an integrated term, Carrie Tarr has underscored the differences between the two “permeable and overlapping categories”: while *beur* cinema refers to films made by Maghrebi descent filmmakers, *banlieue* cinema includes films made by directors from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds who attempt to depict life in the *banlieue*. Nevertheless, both genres/categories “concern the place and identity of the marginal and excluded in France” (Tarr 2005: 3).

*Beur* films produced in the 1980s such as Mehdi Charef’s *Le Thé au harem d’Archimède* (Tea in the Harem, 1985), Abdelkrim Bahloul’s *Le Thé à la menthe* (Mint Tea, 1985), and Rachid Bouchareb’s *Bâton Rouge* (1986) focused on the everyday life of second-generation Maghrebi youth in the housing projects, depicting their struggles with racism, discrimination, unemployment, and lack of opportunity. Often filmed in a grainy, documentary style, the *mise-en-scène* of early *beur* films centers on claustrophobic, run-down, graffiti-covered houses, emphasizing the clear divide between the urban center and the *banlieue*, which is usually surrounded by fences and walls that are often patrolled by police. In general terms, the major themes of *beur* films are exile, displacement, delinquency, disintegration of the family, and tension between tradition and a modern life marked with poverty and segregation. These films often depict young male Maghrebi migrants in their transition to adulthood with absent or dysfunctional father figures. Furthermore, their typical setting—the *banlieues* located on the margins of urban centers—results in a double displacement of characters already disadvantaged by their ethnicity and class status. Instead of providing safety and integration, the *banlieues* are depicted as highly charged sites whose residents are afflicted by drugs, crime, violence, and unemployment. With the exception of films such as Malik Chibane’s *Hexagone* (Hexagon, 1994) and *Douce France* (Sweet France, 1995), Zaïda Ghorab-Volta’s *Souviens-toi de moi* (Remember Me, 1996), Rachida Krim’s *Sous les pieds des femmes* (Under Women’s Feet, 1997), and Philippe Faucon’s *Samia* (2000), the emphasis on violence permeates these films and the limited or peripheral roles offered to female characters cast the *banlieue* as a predominantly masculine space. As Carrie Tarr argues, “The women who inhabit [*banlieues*] are generally silenced, relegated to minor or secondary roles and/or constructed through stereotypes” (2005: 111).

The 1995 film *La Haine* (Hate) by Mathieu Kassovitz foregrounded the genre of *banlieue* film by drawing the attention of mainstream audiences to life in the multiethnic *banlieues*. Kassovitz’s highly stylized black-and-white film focuses on a single day in the lives of three young people living in an impoverished housing project in the suburbs of Paris following a

violent riot triggered by the police shooting of a young French Maghrebi teenager. The *black-blanc-beur* trio, Hubert, Vinz, and Saïd, represents the alienated young men in the *banlieue* with limited spatial and social mobility. Their lives in the projects are marked by long periods of waiting, punctuated with drugs, police raids, and disputes among themselves. When they go to the city to collect Saïd's money, they are subjected to physical and verbal abuse by police officers, an encounter that underscores their insecurity and passivity in the center of Paris. One scene deliberately sets up the clash between the urban center and the *banlieue* youth when Vinz, Hubert and Saïd trespass a private viewing in a modern art gallery. Marked as outsiders by their clothing and language, the trio is soon expelled by the owner of the gallery. Indeed, in making *La Haine* Kassovitz attempted to draw attention to the socioeconomic inequalities that exist between the center and the periphery of French society.

While early *keur* films helped to bring attention to the problems of disenfranchised migrant youth and to challenge the negative stereotyping of migrants in the mainstream media, Carrie Tarr argues that they did not constitute a “productive category for a progressive political cinema which would call French identity, as well as *Beur* identity, into question” (1993: 342). Nevertheless, many scholars have detected a recent shift in representative strategies of *keur* cinema such as diversification of themes, spaces, and characters, and an interest in genres other than social realism, making it difficult to categorize films made by French Maghrebi directors merely as “immigrant cinema.”<sup>50</sup> Alison Levine points out that while early *keur* cinema focused on spatial segregation and ethnic discrimination, films produced since the 1990s have started to emphasize the porosity of borders and depicted the *cités* as sites of cultural and artistic production (43). In addition to shedding light on the “problems” of second generation Maghrebis in relation to the dominant French society, cultural and artistic production by *beurs* has also intervened in the politics of memory and commemoration in France by claiming and exploring the immigrant parents' colonial and anti-colonial memory.<sup>51</sup> For example, French Algerian director Yamina Benguigui's *Mémoires D'Immigrés, l'Héritage Maghrébin* (Immigrant Memories, Maghrebi Heritage, 1997) focused on the personal narratives and experiences of first-generation immigrants from Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco—in particular the coastal region and the Atlas mountains of Maghreb. Benguigui's tripartite documentary (the Fathers, the Mothers, and the Children) gave an account of the collective memory of the Maghrebi diaspora in France, juxtaposing the voices of Maghrebi immigrants with those of state officials who devised or implemented immigration policies. Focusing on the life of an Algerian immigrant woman who comes to France to rejoin her husband, Benguigui's 2001 feature film *Inch'Allah dimanche* (Inch'Allah Sunday) explored the French government's 1974 family reunification scheme. Exploring October 17 massacre, Bourlem Guerdjou's *Vivre au paradis* (Living in Paradise, 1999) explored the struggles of immigrant workers living in a shantytown outside of Paris.

Both *Exiles* and *Hidden* share some stylistic and narrative features with *keur* and *banlieue* cinema, such as the blurring of boundaries between public and private, the spatial segregation of racially inscribed bodies, and a legacy of colonial violence and displacement. Nevertheless, both films defy categorization: *Hidden* was made by a white Austrian auteur and

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<sup>50</sup> See Hargreaves 2000 and Tarr 2005.

<sup>51</sup> Carrie Tar claims that “One of the most significant developments in *keur* cinema has been the exploration of the histories of the parents' generation, breaking the silence about the legacy of France's colonization of the Maghreb and working towards the restoration of a collective memory which would give the *beurs* a coherent identity and legitimate their presence in France” (2007: 5).

focuses exclusively on the white (post)colonial guilt embodied by a bourgeois French family, while *Exiles* takes its second-generation migrant characters away from the typical *banlieue* setting on a transnational journey of “home-seeking” or “homecoming” (Naficy 2001) that brings them to Algeria via Spain and Morocco. These films insist that working through colonial legacies and coming to terms with the traumas of colonial violence are imperative in building up a heterogeneous European space and identity that could generate multiple performative encounters on different levels. This suggests that official acknowledgment is very important in the construction of an ethnically heterogeneous and inclusive European space. Nevertheless, the transmission of cultural memories via artistic, cinematic, or literary production appears as highly effective in including multiple voices and disavowing accepted articulations of the victim-perpetrator positions. Ultimately, these cinematic works allow us to engage with the historical and sociopolitical specificity of past events by creating a multidirectional web of connections between different mobilities, between the past and the present, and between seemingly separate histories of violence—by, for example, linking racism in French society today to colonial history. Indeed, as this chapter will demonstrate, both films underscore the particularity of subjectivities and mobilities as well as historical and political contexts.

### Mediated Performative Encounters in *Hidden* (2005)

*The fragments of the past that erupt in the present direct us neither to the conclusions of the official verdicts nor simply to the ineffectual carnival of the unresolved and the inconclusive meanderings of the multiple. Rather, they direct us to a dense constellation of past lives that shadow and query each and every attempt at telling. The fragment, the forgotten voice, the ignored body point to, even if it cannot represent, the disturbance and interrogation deposited in the history that has consigned us to our time and place.*

—Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 26

In this section, focused on Michael Haneke’s *Hidden*, I will introduce three conceptual frameworks that illuminate French Maghrebi cinema: colonial violence, performative encounters, and intergenerational transmission of (colonial) memory. Patricia Lorcin has identified torture (which was used systematically by the French army on both Algerian rebels and French “dissidents,” and inflicted by the Algerians on both the French and rival Algerian groups) and dispossession (cultural uprooting and ensuing alienation which affected both parts, in particular the *harkis*<sup>52</sup> and the French settlers in Algeria) as dominant forms of violence that occurred during the Algerian War (xxiv). Both *Exiles* and *Hidden* deal with particular acts of colonial violence and displacement that occurred in the *métropole* and in the colonized Algeria during and after the conflict. While *Exiles* evokes the forced displacement of French-settlers in Algeria ( *pied noirs*) into France, *Hidden* centers on the October 17, 1961 massacre of Algerians in Paris. Colonial violence is both implicated and challenged by the second framework, which Mireille Rosello has termed “performative encounters” in her recent book *France and the Maghreb: Performative Encounters*. Building upon J. L. Austin’s notion of the performative power of words—a notion that was critiqued and reformulated by Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler—Rosello employs the term performative to refer to the formation of a unique mode of

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<sup>52</sup> Algerian soldiers in the French Army.

communication that bypasses the restrictions of preestablished subject positions. She posits that violent historical backgrounds can foreclose transnational exchanges. In her reading, moments of contact between French and Maghrebi subjects become performative encounters when a predetermined outcome is altered by the appearance of a new idiom of interaction. Thus, according to Rosello, a performative encounter emerges when individuals and peoples who are assumed to be incompatible refuse to be placed in positions that constrict the form and content of their exchanges. Despite the violence of certain historical experiences, these opponents are able to invent a common, heretofore unspoken language. These exchanges produce a new subject position, a new language, and a new type of engagement that, although not necessarily devoid of conflict, does manage to disrupt dominant discourses and scenarios by giving rise to new forms of expression and dialogue. In the following, I will show the ways *Hidden* suggests an expansion of Rosello's notion of performative encounters by moving beyond interactions between subjects to explore intersections of different media such as film, video, and television. Indeed, in *Hidden*, the performative encounters between subjects are highly mediated—they are set in motion by different types of imagery such as drawings, surveillance-like images, and TV footage.

### **Menacing Videotapes and Oppressed Historical Trauma**

In order to understand *Hidden*'s relationship to colonial violence, traumatic memory, and mediated performative encounters, we must untangle the film's complex plot. The narrative focuses on the life of a well-off bourgeois French family: Georges Laurent (played by Daniel Auteuil), a prominent media figure who hosts a literature program on TV; his wife Anne (Juliet Binoche), a book editor; and their teenager son Pierrot (Lester Makedonsky). Their seemingly idyllic life is disrupted by the delivery of a series of anonymous videotapes to their doorstep. These tapes show a static, wide-angle shot of the façade of their luxurious upper-middle class home, indicating that they are being watched. Georges insists that the location of the camera suggested in the videos is impossible; he would certainly have noticed that camera had he passed as close to it as the video footage suggests. Georges and Anne are soon filled with fear and paranoia, for they realize that they are under the surveillance of someone who has access to their personal lives, who is in fact spying on them, but they do not know who is responsible or why it is happening. The police refuse to intervene, since no direct threat has been made on their lives. The content of later videotapes is more specific, showing footage of Georges's childhood home in the country as well as a high-rise apartment in the *banlieue*. The tapes are accompanied by menacing, childish drawings of subjects such as a child spitting blood. It soon becomes apparent that the contents of these drawings allude to specific events from Georges's childhood, events that he has worked hard to keep secret from his wife, friends, and colleagues.

Eventually, a particularly dark secret from Georges's childhood leads his relationships with his wife Anne and his son Pierrot to unravel. Georges admits one day that he has a hunch who the stalker may be, but he refuses to share this knowledge with his wife, for he is not absolutely certain. Then he decides to follow the route to the apartment building in the *banlieue* that is depicted on one of the tapes. When he arrives at the apartment, he encounters someone from his childhood: Majid, a second-generation Algerian whose parents used to work at Georges's family's country estate. This encounter leads to the revelation of the event that took the lives of Majid's parents. Through a fraught conversation between Anne and Georges following Georges and Majid's meeting, we learn that the "terrorizing" surveillance videotapes and drawings are actually tied to the historical trauma of the Paris massacre of October 17, 1961,

when Algerian demonstrators and supporters peacefully marching in protest of a wartime curfew were brutally attacked by the Paris police.

We learn from Georges that two Algerians working at his family's estate disappeared during the October 17 demonstration, leaving behind an orphaned child called Majid. Georges's parents' decision to adopt Majid annoyed the six-year-old Georges, who pushed Majid to cut off a rooster's head and then told his parents that Majid had done it to scare him—a lie that led Majid to be forcefully removed from the family farm and sent to live at an orphanage. Instead of being adopted and given a good education, Majid grew up with few opportunities. Through the videos, Georges is forced to remember this childhood event and face its repercussions in the present in the form of the *banlieue* on the margins of French society, where Majid now resides.

The plot becomes further entangled when a present-day videotape showing Georges violently threatening Majid in his flat is sent to Georges's boss, who warns him about the serious consequences he might have to face if the tape were to become public. Shortly thereafter, Pierrot disappears, and Georges, thinking him kidnapped, has the police arrest Majid and his son. In fact, Pierrot had actually spent the night at a friend's house because he thought his mother was having an affair with her boss. Soon after, Majid asks Georges to visit him. In one of the most graphic scenes in the film, we see Majid suddenly cut his throat as soon as Georges arrives at his house, saying simply, "I wished you to be present." Shocked by the event, Georges tells Anne about the lies he told about Majid as a child. This is followed by an encounter between Georges and Majid's unnamed son at Georges's workplace, in which we see Georges aggressively threatening him for "terrorizing" his family and denying any responsibility for Majid's harsh life and his suicide. The film ends with a flashback or dream sequence in which we see Majid's removal from the country estate, followed by a scene in which Pierrot and Majid's son are having a conversation in front of Pierrot's school that we do not hear.

*Hidden's* plot revolves around the "intrusion" of the specter of the October 17 events forty years later, via anonymous surveillance-like videotapes and childish drawings, into the life of a contemporary Parisian family. Yet Georges's account of this defining conflict is very brief when he is forced to explain it to his wife Anne as the reason behind Majid's so called "hatred" and resentment toward Georges and his privileged family. Georges says:

I suspected it was him. Not at first but after the tape of Mom's house. I wanted to spare you. His parents worked for us. Dad liked them. I guess they were good workers. In October '61, FLN called all Algerians to a demonstration in Paris. October 17, 1961. Enough said. Papon. The police massacre. They drowned about 200 Arabs in the Seine. Including Majid's parents most likely. They never came back. Dad went to Paris to look for them. They said he should be glad to be rid of a couple of jigaboos. . . . My parents decided to adopt the boy. I don't know why. They felt responsible in some way. It annoyed me. I didn't want him at home. He had his own room. I had to share, see. I was six! I told lies about him. . . . He was sent away. He was sick. To a hospital or a children's home, I don't know which. I was glad he was gone. I forgot all about it. It is natural. . . . *It was only an interlude of a few months. . . . Maybe it was a tragedy. I don't know. I don't feel responsible for it. Why should I? It's all absurd.* (my emphasis)

Despite its brevity, Georges's childish explanation illuminates the motivations of his actions as an adult in the film. Interestingly, although he references colonial history and the Algerian War with the statement "October 17, 1961. Enough said. Papon," his awareness of past conflicts

demonstrates a lack of reflection on the plight of postcolonial migrants or the connections between colonial violence and the underprivileged lives of most Maghrebi immigrants in France.

It is significant that the tape that clued Georges into the anonymous videographer's identity showed the road to Georges's childhood home in rural France, where he and Majid would have grown up as brothers had the Laurent family adopted the orphaned boy. After seeing this video, Georges visits his elderly mother, who is still living there. Unsettled by the memories the tapes have triggered, Georges tries to learn whether his mother remembers Majid. The fraught conversation between them is very telling:

Georges: You know whom I dreamt about? Majid.

Mother: Who is Majid? You lost me.

Georges: Hashem's son. The kid you planned to adopt.

Mother: I see.

Georges: Bizarre, no? . . . Do you ever think about him?

Mother: About who?

Georges: Majid!

Mother: No.

Georges: How come you don't think about him ever? It was a big thing for you and dad at the time.

Mother: It was a long time ago and it's not a happy memory, as you know only too well. . . What did you dream?

Georges: Stupid stuff, but it brought him back to mind. I'd forgotten him.

This exchange suggests that Georges's mother, who was an adult during the Algerian War and who even had Algerian workers in the farm, has erased or suppressed the "sad memory" of Majid. She seems untroubled by memories of the violence and displacement that occurred. Georges, meanwhile, is disturbed by "the return of the repressed" and reveals feelings of guilt and shame despite his aggressive denial of responsibility. Indeed, Max Silverman argues that instead of being "an allegory of France," Georges and Anne might be read as "a certain generation and class of French men and women"—a metropolitan, bourgeois liberal generation that inherited colonial violence and trauma without experiencing it at first-hand (2007: 249). In making the six-year-old Georges the cause of Majid's expulsion from the family estate, Haneke's *Hidden* seems to be saying that the true crime may be not Georges's act as a child but rather his inability as an adult to recognize the profound effects of his actions on Majid's life and his refusal to face the past in a responsible way. Yet it is important to note that *Hidden* does not claim that memory is always elusive or that there is no way for us to "objectively" talk about the past, about who had been subjected to violence and displacement and by whom. Rather, it points to the multiplicity of (direct or indirect) agents of history and to the array of complex class, gender, and race relations that should be taken into account in unpacking or excavating traumatic events that haunt the present. The film also offers hope: in addition to portraying the first- and second-generation French and French Maghrebis directly implicated in the Algerian War, *Hidden* includes a third generation, Majid's unnamed son and Pierrot, who have the potential to work through the intergenerational trauma created by this conflict—an issue I will return later in the chapter.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Max Silverman argues that "Pierrot does not seem to share the same reflexes as his parents or grandmother ... The same generation gap seems to characterize the respective responses of Majid and his son. Majid's reaction to a France which continues to treat him like a dangerous terrorist, issues threats and locks him up is to commit suicide.

## State Violence and October 17 Events

Georges's feelings of guilt and shame, which ooze to the surface at certain moments in the film, have been the focus of most scholarly discussions of *Hidden*. His aggressive denials of responsibility for Majid's tragedy are seen as an allegory of France's inability to come to terms with its colonial past and its unwelcoming treatment of its immigrant population.<sup>54</sup> The ways in which Haneke thwarts audience expectations and implicates the audience in the narrative by making them question the ontological and epistemological status of the images they see on the screen are other main issues that have been investigated in detail. The sociopolitical and historical implications regarding French Algerian colonial history, the current uprisings in the *banlieues* of Paris, and the differences between *Hidden*'s reception in French and Anglo-Saxon worlds have also been discussed in scholarly circles. In this section I will discuss the impact of the October 17 massacre on French society, and the ways in which the film historicizes/narrates it.

The events of October 17, 1961 occurred six months before the end of the Algerian War and concerned thirty thousand immigrant Algerian workers and their families, who were peacefully protesting against a curfew imposed on them by the Paris police prefect Maurice Papon. The curfew prohibited Algerian Muslims from circulating freely between 8:30 p.m. and 5:30 a.m. Papon had called the curfew as a response to the *Front de libération nationale*'s (FLN/Front National Liberation) attacks on police officers in previous months, but it was also an attempt to break the nationalist organization's hold on the Algerian immigrant population in the city—some one hundred and fifty thousand people. *La fédération de France du FLN* collected a small weekly contribution from every Algerian laborer in France, and this money was an important source of income for the struggle against France. Because the curfew prevented fundraising in the *cafés*, FLN challenged it by publicizing “its discriminatory nature with a large demonstration” (Cole 118). Many demonstrators considered this event “a rare occasion to demonstrate solidarity with nationalists fighting the French army in Algeria” (Cole 117). The French police violently reacted to the demonstration: more than two hundred Algerians were shot, beaten, tortured, or drowned in the Seine or in canals in central Paris and at the outskirts of the city. More than eleven thousand Algerians were arrested, and some of them were deported and imprisoned in Algerian camps until the end of the war. This tragic event, successfully censored by the French state and the mainstream French media, remained nearly unknown until it drew public attention in the 1980s and especially in the 1990s as a focus of literary and cinematic works as well as through public events such as the controversial trial in 1997-1998, in which Papon was put on trial for his role in the deportation of Jews from Bordeaux to death camps during WWII.<sup>55</sup> Yet, as Anne Donadey notes, “because of the general amnesty applied to

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His son, however, is vigorous and unfazed by Georges's aggression. Majid's son and Pierrot appear to see the world not through the orientalist iconography of their parents' generation but in a more open way” (2007: 249).

<sup>54</sup> Hargreaves writes that “During the 1980s and 1990s, the number of asylum seekers from Africa, the Middle East and Asia rose rapidly. Suspecting that they were attempting to circumvent the ban on labor migration, the authorities refused residence permits to vast majority of them. Many unsuccessful asylum seekers remained in France, swelling the ranks of what became generally known during the 1990s as *sans papiers*. Others were victims of the Pasqua Laws of 1993, which, in attempting to curb family reunification and other modes of access to French residence permits, threw tens of thousands into legal no man's limbo” (2001: 10).

<sup>55</sup> A detailed history of the massacre and the state cover-up has been investigated by Jim House and Neil MacMaster's 2006 book *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory*.

all Algerian war crimes in France, Papon, like hundreds of others, will never have to answer for his participation in the October 17 massacre” (2001: 47).

It is significant that October 17 massacre is not the only event that has been “silenced” or “forgotten” in the French sociopolitical sphere. Until quite recently there has also been a lack of public discourse about the Algerian War of Independence<sup>56</sup> in France. The official silence was broken in June 1999 when the French National Assembly (*Assemblée nationale*) officially recognized that the actions carried out as “security operations and maintenance of order” in 1954-1962 in Algeria actually constituted a war (Donadey 54). Thus the recent explorations of October 17 events have been part of a larger explosion of interest in the Algerian War era in France and elsewhere that has been fueled by a broader fascination with the Vichy regime and the era of Nazi occupation (Rothberg 269). Yet *Hidden* shows that the haunting massacre of Algerians in Paris was not suddenly rediscovered in the late 1990s, but in fact has remained in the collective memory of not only North African immigrants but also French people who witnessed or participated in the event, or knew Algerians who were persecuted. By saying little about the event yet making it central to its narrative, the film demonstrates the irreducibility of the event to any one context, and shows that French and French Maghrebis have been intensely affected, albeit differently, by the massacre.

Many critics and scholars have criticized Haneke for rendering such a historical tragedy as a framework event, mentioned only briefly by the main character. In interviews, Haneke himself undermines the legacy of this event by talking about October 17 as a good “fit” for the issues of collective guilt and ethical responsibility he wanted to explore in *Hidden*; he insists that this movie should not be confined to a specific event in French history.<sup>57</sup> He has explained that he was informed about the massacre by the 1992 documentary *Drowning by Bullets* by Philip Brooks and Alan Hayling (Crowley 268).<sup>58</sup> Brooks and Hayling use video footage, clips, photos, interviews, and the testimony of eyewitnesses to reconstruct events as they occurred that night and reveal the holes in the official history. Haneke, however, focuses on the aftermath of the event and its affective and material repercussions rather than on reproducing the event for the camera. As Patrick Crowley notes, he has explained that he chose to position the massacre as an allegory of the “wider notion of collective guilt,” which, according to him, can be found in the history of any European country. Crowley asserts that *Hidden* in fact contributes to the “forgetting” of the events of October 17 by “folding the events into a signifying structure that is built upon, and entombs, those same events” (269). In his critique of *Hidden*, Paul Gilroy also

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<sup>56</sup> The Algerian War was “the most brutal of all the colonial struggles in which France engaged. A quarter of a million Algerians were killed, two million were herded into detention camps, hundreds of thousands were tortured. Some 25,000 French soldiers were killed, six governments fell over issues related to the war, and then the Fourth Republic itself was overthrown by a military coup triggered by events in Algeria. The war was a moral disaster for France. The use of torture became commonplace, making France the first democratic state to employ its citizens in such a systematic way” (Cohen 228).

<sup>57</sup> See the interview included in the DVD version of *Hidden* and Crowley 2010.

<sup>58</sup> In the interview, Haneke tells us that he learned about the events of October 1961 after watching a documentary about the Algerian War on the Franco-German TV network ARTE. As Asbjørn Grønstad argues, “Making this publicly silenced incident the understated pivot of his film, Haneke attempts in *Caché* to allegorize the collective culpability for the massacre through an exploration of the psychology of guilt as it affects the film’s principal protagonist” (136). Patrick Crowley observes, “within the documentary, the voice over comments that French found it hard to believe in the reports of police killings, because there were no images to substantiate the claims. In the absence of such images and in the face of official denials, many allowed the events to slip away from the concerns of the present” (269).



complains about “the film’s horrible accommodation with many of the things that it appears, at first sight, to be criticizing.” According to Gilroy, Haneke’s treatment of a massive massacre like October 17 is “shallow” and “antipolitical,” as clearly manifested in the “casual citation” of the event. Gilroy contends: “That unmourned and unremembered real event does a lot of narrative work for Haneke. Many people involved in building a habitable multicultural Europe will feel that there are pressing issues of morality and responsibility involved in raising that history only to reduce it to nothing more than a piece of tragic machinery in the fatal antagonism that undoes *Hidden*’s protagonists. The dead deserve better than that passing acknowledgement. That belated recognition contributes to the negative labor involved in building a Europe, which can be reconciled to, and emancipated from, the history of its colonial crimes” (2007: 233-4). Furthermore, Gilroy argues that investigations into Georges’s subjectivity are clichéd and that only when postcolonial migrants like Majid are presented as equally complex characters will we have made real progress in representing contemporary multicultural society.

Gilroy suggests that most European films, made by white liberal directors, fail in working towards a genuine change in the conditions of representation for postcolonial subjects. While his criticisms of *Hidden* are valid given the erasure of colonial history that has occurred in France and Europe in the second half of the twentieth century, I believe that the narrative minimalism of the film serves a purpose, constructively signifying the complexity of the event and of its afterlife rather than rendering it into a “passing acknowledgment.” In *Hidden*, the trace of colonial violence briefly mentioned by Georges provides an entry point into a larger history in which all French are implicated, even if they are ultimately innocent of involvement in the state violence perpetrated during the Algerian War. Ultimately, the narrative openness around this act of colonial violence underscores the pervasiveness of aggression against French Maghrebis and positions it as an extension of colonial hierarchies.

The legacy of such hierarchies is further highlighted by the film’s emphasis on the fault line between Georges’s French/European identity and Majid’s disenfranchised position as a non-European other who is never considered French. In fact, rather than providing insight into the difficulties of life for French Maghrebis, the film represents the struggles faced by white French society in coming to terms with its colonial past. Max Silverman defines the film’s focus on the French collective trauma of the Algerian conflict as a reversal of the gaze of the Western colonizer, exposing “the hidden fears and fantasies still at play today in a postcolonial re-run of the colonial encounter” (2007: 245). Indeed, Georges characterizes the videos as a “campaign of terrorism,” and is convinced that Majid and his son are seeking to take revenge from him for their own “misery.”<sup>59</sup> Although both Majid and his son deny that they are behind the videotapes and drawings, Georges never questions his conviction that they are the culprits. Majid’s and his son’s calm demeanor in the face of his accusations only increases George’s aggression, for he is absolutely sure that they want to terrorize his family. Yet Georges is not the first to believe that immigrants deserve to be severely punished for intruding into a seemingly functional bourgeois society.

*Hidden*’s release in early October 2005 overlapped with widespread uprisings in the *banlieues* triggered by the accidental death of two French Maghrebi teenagers during a police chase. The riots of 2005 have been contextualized in relation to a history of French racial

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<sup>59</sup> Michael O’Riley observes that “The symbolism of this protectionism points to a larger national proprietary attitude, a fear of contamination from the colonial other and a return that recalls the stories of illness George once told about Majid” (93)

discrimination reflected in unemployment and bad housing, a rigid educational system that perpetuated class hierarchies, segregation of the urban space, and police harassment. But the link to the Algerian War should not be overlooked. During the riots, the French government imposed a curfew based on a law that reaches back to the colonial era. The “state of emergency” declared by French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin in November 2005 across over a quarter of the national territory can be traced to the “state of emergency” declared by Papon in 1961, which established the curfew that led to the massacre of October 17. The commonality in state responses to unrest among the immigrant population highlights the enduring logic of colonial rule within postcolonial metropolitan France, and exposes the extent to which French Maghrebis are seen culturally and racially different from mainstream France.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, instead of addressing the underlying causes of unrest—such as institutional and systemic discrimination—the French government has responded with the “militarization” of housing projects and the labeling of the disadvantaged (migrant) youth as potential terrorists or criminals. In this sense, the multiple references to terrorist acts in *Hidden* resonates with the contemporary context in which the film was released. Georges’s denial of responsibility and his ungrounded accusations against Majid and his son recall the French state’s hostility toward its minorities and its inability to accept multicultural “conviviality”—a phenomenon that opens up possibilities for the development of a new cosmopolitan European culture that acknowledges its colonial past and postcolonial present (Gilroy 2005). Yet while the film represents migrants as victims of social, cultural, or physical immobility, confined to the margins of society, it departs significantly from *beur* tradition by emphasizing bourgeois guilt rather than the experience of minorities and migrants.

### “Invasion” of the Bourgeois House: A *Beur* and *Banlieue* Topos

*Hidden*’s clearest connection to early *beur* films lies in its representation of urban space as highly segregated in terms of class, race, and ethnicity, and in its emphasis on the asymmetrical power relations between French Algerians and white French society. As discussed earlier, the spatial poetics of most *beur* films rely on the divisive presence of walls and fences that serve as physical and metaphorical barriers against the integration of ethnic minorities into mainstream French society. Such boundaries are typically combined with claustrophobic interiors, empty spaces surrounding concrete high-rise apartments, and exclusive urban centers. *Hidden* also appropriates many characteristic *beur* themes, such as the legacy of colonial history/memory, generational transmission of traumatic experiences of colonialism and decolonization, silent/absent/passive first-generation parents, the periphery-center dichotomy within the *métropole*, the social position of the second generation French citizens of Maghrebi origin in France, contemporary forms of racism/racialization in French society. Nevertheless, unlike most *beur* films, it does not grapple with these issues from the perspective of immigrant youth and does not provide psychological depth to its French Maghrebi characters.

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<sup>60</sup> Paul Silverstein and Chantal Tetreault assert that “the Interior Ministry’s hard-line policies towards urban crime and more recent ‘war on terror’ have, since the mid-1990s, resulted in the de facto militarization of the housing projects, with national riot police and military gendarmes conducting repeated sweeps for suspected terrorists, closing down basement prayer rooms, detaining and deporting undocumented immigrants, performing millions of ‘random’ identity checks on local youth occupying public spaces, and even arresting residents for congregating in the entryways of their own buildings.”



Figure 1

The spatial segregation that defines the urban space in France manifests itself in *Hidden* in the stark contrasts between the Laurents' bourgeois house and Majid's flat in a high-rise apartment in the *banlieue*. In the opening scene of the film, we see a long, wide establishing shot of the façade of a Parisian house in a nice neighborhood, filmed from across the street at an early morning hour (see fig. 1). As our gaze starts moving through the static shot, accompanied by sounds of a car and a motorcycle passing by and a bird singing, the credits appear on the screen as if being typed on a computer screen. The static shot continues as we see a few people walk by, a car passes by, a bicyclist appears on the corner, and a woman exits the house. Two and a half minutes into the scene, we hear a conversation in French between a man and a woman: "So?" "Nothing." "Where was it?" "In a plastic bag in front of the door." "What is it?" The static shot is held for almost four minutes, allowing us to investigate all of the details in the frame without having any clue about where to focus our gaze. Following the dialogue, the film cuts to a man coming out of the house. He goes across the street and looks at a path named *Rue des Iris* (see fig. 2). He stops, looks around, and tells his wife: "He must have been here." The man seems like he is trying to figure out where the camera was positioned. The woman calls him back into the house and the film returns to the original establishing shot. We hear their voices once again and she tells him the tape lasts more than two hours.



Figure 2



Figure 3

Then we watch the tape being fast-forwarded until the man is seen leaving the house (see fig. 3). The sequence of him approaching the spot where the camera must have been located is paused, rewound, and paused again. "How could I have not seen this guy?" asks the man. The woman responds: "Maybe it was filmed from a car?" Man: "No, it doesn't look like it was shot

through a window.” The camera cuts to the man standing, remote in hand, in front of the screen looking at the paused tape (see fig. 4). Hence, it is revealed that the opening shot was not a real-time recording of the house from the street, but rather a pre-recorded image played on a VCR inside the house seen on the TV screen. We realize that we have been watching the couple view a static shot of their house filmed by an anonymous observer.



Figure 4

Within the first five minutes of his film Haneke troubles viewers' sense of vision and location. Like the characters in the film, we do not understand what we are watching. Are these previously recorded videotapes? Or are we watching *Hidden*'s cinematic "reality"? And whose point of view do we identify with, that of the man and woman (Georges and Anne)<sup>61</sup> or the unknown observer behind the camera? Are we outside observing the Laurents' house with a stalker, or inside watching the videotapes with the characters, who throughout the film insist on finding out the source and meaning of those images that they define as a "terrorist campaign"? Furthermore, Haneke unsettles the seemingly peaceful domestic space, and renders it uncanny primarily through the disembodied gaze and the invisible apparatus that Georges and Anne try to track down in these tapes by closely examining their content on a big television screen. Thus, even though the first two videotapes show nothing other than the exterior of their house and the neighborhood's mundane comings and goings, they serve to instigate fear, paranoia, and "terror" in the family. Furthermore, the opening scene unsettles our sense of inside and outside and underscores the inextricable connections between everyday life and extreme violence, between domestic space and colonial history—dichotomies that will further unravel later in the film.

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<sup>61</sup> Anne and Georges constitute the stereotypical bourgeois couple that appears under the same names in each of Haneke's films.

In the opening shot, the space in which we see Laurents' house is highly fragmented; the frame appears crowded with tall buildings and cars. Exterior walls and the façades of buildings flank the image vertically. At the center is a three-story building with two cars parked in the front. It is protected by a gated fence and high, bush-covered walls that mark the borders between the private space of the occupants' bourgeois family life and the outside world. We also see a row of apartments rising behind the house, creating a sense of claustrophobia despite the wide-angle long shot.<sup>62</sup> As Elizabeth Ezra and Jane Sillars have observed, "the composition of shots of [the exterior of Laurents' house] puts its vertical barred windows center frame; horizontal bars cut across shots; the iron gate clangs" (216). Jennifer Burris further states that, in *Hidden*, Haneke's shots are often "dominated by doors, windows and exterior structural facades. Characters are encased in this box-like environment, recalling both camera lens and television set. The built environment saturates almost every frame, implying that there is no 'outside' to this endless proliferation of boxes within boxes, windows within walls and rooms within other rooms" (157). The immobile gaze of the camera, which is indifferent to anything on its horizon, reinforces the sense of claustrophobia, with the built structure blocking our perspective.



Figure 5

Indeed, it seems that Laurents' house—a highly stylish modern home filled with books—is designed to mark out clear boundaries between inside and outside, between private and public. The interior walls of the house are covered with books and CDs, with a big television screen placed at the center of a wall with floor to ceiling bookshelves (see fig. 5). As many critics have observed, the interior decoration of the house is very similar to the décor of Georges' literary TV

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<sup>62</sup> Burris also observes that "Homes, cars, windows and apartments buildings stack on top of one another. With no glimmer of sky or central perspective to give the appearance of spatial depth, the street appears as flat as a stage set" (157).

show, with fake books surrounding the set (see fig. 6). The imposing rows of books in the house serve as material evidence of the couple’s educated bourgeois status. Nevertheless, as Ezra and Sillars argue, “Lacking in volume, apparently two-dimensional and with their titles obscured, [these books] function more as blocks to the outside world than as prompts for meaningful reflection or exchange, or new ways of looking” (216).<sup>63</sup> The fact that the TV studio and the living room are quite similar suggests that Laurents’ lives are highly mediated—their subjectivities are very much shaped by mediated forms of knowledge and their lives are organized and staged to create an appearance of protected functional family life, free from any kind of interference. Furthermore, the resemblance between the TV studio and the living room challenge the division between the private sphere of home and the public space of media.



Figure 6

Significantly, *Hidden* limits its territory to certain public and private spaces in the metropolitan city of Paris—places that are obviously racialized and segregated. The interior and exterior of the Laurent home presents a sharp contrast to the worn-down flat of a father and son of Algerian origin located in the *banlieue*. Pierrot’s high school consists of the children of wealthy white families. Georges’s family estate in rural France, mainly seen through flashback and dream images, is the site from which the child Majid was forcefully ejected by the Laurents. Hence, both child Majid and adult Majid experience violent displacement from a familiar space that they consider home. Furthermore, we do not see the adult Majid outside the claustrophobic space of the housing projects, which suggests that he has spent his life in such marginalized places.

<sup>63</sup> Beugnet also argues that “The video images thus appear literally ‘embedded’ within the rows of books and films, whose meaning and function they soon call into question ... texts and images have seemingly lost their power to question, but serve instead as a buffer against the intrusion of unedited external reality” (229).

Similar to *beur* cinema, spaces, territories, and borders appear as structuring metaphors within the diegetic space of *Hidden*. Here various domestic spaces serve as sites in which to investigate the socioeconomic conditions of postcolonial migrants. *Hidden*'s immigrant/*beur* characters, Majid and his son, living in a low-rent flat, are depicted solely vis-à-vis a discriminatory center (see fig. 7). Their social encounters with white French subjects are structured by their spatial position within the city—they are located in projects that are seen as places of poverty, violence, and crime. Majid's flat, furnished neither with books nor videos, and lacking any sign of wealth or education, stands in sharp contrast to the Laurents' well-appointed home in central Paris. *Hidden* shows that in France both social hierarchy and discrimination are reinforced by spatial segregation. Furthermore, Majid's flat is represented as the site of his extreme suffering and later suicide, and remains, as Guy Austin has observed, "as invisible to Georges as it is to French society at large, for Majid has been displaced both from his own family (murdered in 1961) and Georges's family (who first welcomed and then rejected him)" and is living on the margins of society (534).



Figure 7

It could be argued that *Hidden* reworks conventions of *beur* and *banlieue* filmmaking to uncover the "hidden" historical traumas and fragments of the past that unexpectedly rise up to impinge upon the present place and time. It indicates national anxieties around the migrant body and the dominant society's attempts to deal with its diverse ethnic and racial urban space, which has roots in colonial past. Nevertheless, it does so not by focusing on the ethnically diverse *banlieue* characters' experiences and emotions but instead, as argued above, by exploring the anxiety of the white bourgeois subject in relation to colonial history and postcolonial immigrants. Majid's gloomy flat in the *banlieue* represents a suburban zone that has been mainly inhabited by postcolonial subjects of France. The film never shows Majid and his son in their daily routines within the apartment or around their neighborhood. The only space the son and his father are



seen as co-habiting with French characters is a police van. When Pierrot goes missing one night, Georges, without any doubt, blames Majid for kidnapping him, and we see two policemen forcefully enter the apartment, violently arresting Majid and his son. Hence, Majid's house, similar to Laurents' house, becomes a battle ground where the past trauma and current fear and paranoia is played out. Yet Majid's unnamed son seems to possess a social mobility denied to his father. While Majid is seen outside only when the police take him into custody, his son confronts Georges at his work place (the television studio) after his father's suicide. Indeed, Majid's son seems to have the ability to question Georges's aggressive reactions and his refusal to take any responsibility. Following Majid's suicide, we see him trying to talk to Georges in the TV studio. In reaction to Georges's continued threats to have him thrown out, he finally responds with a telling question: "Why are you so afraid, sir? Would you have let me come into your apartment?" With this question, Haneke underlines the fraught notion of France as a home for immigrants of Maghrebi origin: Has France been able to integrate its ethnically diverse population? Has it provided a sense of belonging and equal opportunities for its minority groups? Furthermore, Majid's son's question illustrates the ways in which borders operate not only as physical barriers but also as sociopolitical ones, leading many commentators to interpret *Hidden* in relation to "Fortress Europe" and the increasing anti-immigration feelings.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, such sentiments are relevant to a certain extent, but ultimately the film insists that these borders are constantly shifting and being redefined within the context of historical violence.

### **Performative Encounters Mediated Through Images**

As explained above, in her 2005 book, Mireille Rosello explores social encounters that are deemed to be impossible or inconceivable because of the intensity of historical violence and trauma that still afflicts them. For Rosello, the violence of the French and Maghrebi historical context blocks initial encounters between subjects that "we assign to one of the shores of the Mediterranean" (2005: 1).<sup>65</sup> Rosello describes "performative encounters" as "a type of encounter that coincides with the creation of new-subject positions, rather than treating preexisting (preimagined) identities as the reason for, and justification of, the protocol of encounter—whether it is one of violence or trust, respect or hostility" (2005: 1).<sup>66</sup> *Hidden* investigates the

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<sup>64</sup> See Ezra and Sillars 2007 for a discussion of how the film evokes the notion of Fortress Europe. Rosalind Galt also argues that "at a formal level, [Haneke's films] encode exterior and interior, the violent rupture of borders and edges, and the impossibility of inscribing European territory in any secure or centered fashion" (2010: 226).

<sup>65</sup> Rosello draws on British philosopher John L. Austin's definition of "performatives" as developed in his 1962 book *How to Do Things with Words*. Austin argued that in certain circumstances, "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of the action" (6). His classic example is the pronouncement "I do" in the context of a wedding ceremony. Austin's notion of performatives has been criticized and complicated by many such as Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler. Butler questions the nature of performativity and extends the historical and social context in which such utterances need to be examined. She critiques the fact that Austin's idea of performativity assumes a fully sovereign speaker completely in control of his/her speech act: "The illocutionary speech act performs its deed at the moment of the utterance, and yet to the extent that the moment is ritualized, it is never merely a single moment. The moment in ritual is a condensed historicity: it exceeds itself in past and future directions, an effect of prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of utterance" (Butler 1997: 72).

<sup>66</sup> Rosello elaborates on the notion of "performative encounters" in the following way: "When we assume that we can identify the Mediterranean subjects who will be the ordinary heroes of [*France and the Maghreb*], if we already know what to call them (*pieds noirs* or *harkis*, Arab or Berbers, *roumis* or settlers, terrorists or politico-financial mafia), the encounters that we imagine are already overdetermined by our narratives. A preestablished script will prevent the encounter from becoming performative because it will impose the language of encounter, the subject

possibility of performative encounters or new types of interactions between the French and the Algerians that might counter the residue of the country's violent colonial history. Such encounters are moments of fragile and precarious exchange that could shift the tragic paradigm of violence, victimization, and mistrust among Arabs, Berbers, and Europeans. *Hidden* suggest that this form of engagement with the colonial past is essential to move beyond victim-perpetrator schema and to work through colonial and postcolonial traumas that block progress and reconciliation in the present.<sup>67</sup>

The notion of performative encounters helps to envision subject positions and types of engagement with history that extend beyond preestablished ones. *Hidden* investigates the potential for performative encounters not only between historically situated subjects but also between socioeconomically segregated spaces and between past and present, as well as between different types of images, producing a cinematic language that draws on encounters between old and new media. *Hidden*'s performative encounters work to expose the inexorable ties between the colonial era and contemporary postcolonial France, which is mediated through diverse images in the film. Indeed, the different kinds of images that make up the film work to produce unexpected meetings between people and spaces that are usually seen as incompatible. Exceeding characters' desire and agency, images in *Hidden* seek to produce what Rosello defines as "new protocols of cohabitation and coexistence rather than new identities" (2005: 6). Encounters between past and present (the eruption of history in the form of the return of the repressed) and between French and French Algerians are highly mediated. The regular flow of the film is interrupted multiple times by surveillance-type recorded images, television images, flashbacks, and dream sequences, through which the characters' present (or *Hidden*'s cinematic reality) gets entangled with past traumas and current events happening elsewhere. These types of mediated reality disrupt the linear storyline of the film, generating a multilayered image world that seems transparent on the surface with seemingly little manipulation of the image (Haneke uses long takes and wide-angle shots to evoke a sense of transparency), but in fact does not clearly reveal itself to the viewer.

Ultimately, such combinations of different types of imagery are used by Haneke to provoke traumatic memories and lead to new encounters between the film's characters. Georges's first involuntary memory of Majid is triggered by the second video that arrives wrapped in a piece of paper that has a drawing on it of a child vomiting blood. The second tape is very similar to the first one described above. Filmed at night, it shows Georges driving home and entering the house. Like the footage of the opening tape—the static shot of their house from the street—the second video seems fully integrated into *Hidden*'s cinematic reality when it first appears on the screen. This night shot of the Laurents' house cuts to a mid-range close-up of Georges wrapping up a taping of his television show. When he receives an urgent call, he exits the set to take it. Then the film cuts to a close-up of a coffee table, on which we see a drawing of a child vomiting blood next to the remote control. We watch Georges pick it up and examine it for clues to the content of the videotape now playing on their TV.

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positions from which each protagonist meets the other, and therefore the protocol of encounter will force itself upon the subjects. They will be expected to choose camps, to protect or defend themselves, to accuse, to defy" (2005: 1).

<sup>67</sup> As O'Riley argues, *Hidden* shows that "the desire to view and retrace the history of colonial victimization is symptomatic of the postcolonial inability to see outside the recurring paradigm of victimization from colonial history" (20).



Figure 8

As in the first tape, the ontological status of the image shifts from being part of the cinematic reality to video-footage shot by the unseen observer. The second time the night shot appears on the screen, we realize that we are watching the same footage of the house, now on a close-up of a TV screen being viewed by Anne and Georges. Another close-up shows Georges taking the remote to rewind the night scene we saw earlier (see fig. 8). One of the most self-conscious scenes of the film belongs to the second surveillance tape, on which we see the shadow of a big camera on the wall, cast by the lights of Georges's car (see fig. 9). Georges walked by without noticing the camera, and when Georges and Anne try to decode the video by fast-forwarding and rewinding, they seem to be blind to the highly visible shadow of the camera—an obliviousness that foreshadows Georges's blindness to his role in Majid's story as well as to the past atrocities that implicate him and French society at large. As Anne and Georges search tape for clues, a shot of a boy coughing up blood appears on the screen, interposed with the video-footage (see fig. 9). Cut back to the video, we hear Anne asking, "What's wrong? Georges?" and Georges responding, "What? Nothing, nothing. I am tired."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ezra and Sillars suggest that this exchange between Georges and Anne is "one that closes off inquiry and denies the possibility of meaning and one that recurs at key points in the film." Anne's and Georges' lines from the opening scene, "Alors?" (So?) "Rien" (Nothing), are "reversed" in this scene and the same lines are "repeated in Georges' conversation with his mother" (218).



Figure 9



Figure 10

This brief conversation suggests that the image of the young boy wiping blood from his mouth might be a flashback seen by Georges, for he seems to have briefly fallen out of the present moment, struggling to make sense of the “invasion” of a forgotten or involuntary memory. However, at this point in the film we know neither the meaning nor the status of the

image of the boy, nor which historical trauma these images will unearth later in the film. Is this a memory evoked by the drawing that the tape was wrapped in? After briefly considering whether they should report the cassettes to the police, Georges stops the tape and tunes in to the evening news. Anne asks, “Why’d you stop the tape?” Georges: “Why not? What *more* do you want to see?” Georges’s answer is ironic because we will learn that these contentless images, which seem to reveal nothing more than a daily routine, will actually lead to an unsettling encounter with past atrocities and their aftermath, precipitating the suicide of Majid and the disintegration of the Laurent family.

Another layer of mediation takes place as Georges and Anne discuss what they should do about the videotapes. They are sitting on their living-room couch in such a way that places the large television at the center of the frame (see fig. 11). On the TV, we see a newscast featuring the outbreak of the SARS epidemic in China. Anne suggests they should go to the police and admits that she is scared as she watches the medical staff carrying sick bodies on the screen. Hence, even though the news images seem unrelated to the image of the blood-coughing boy, we later learn that for Georges they recall Majid, who was sent to an orphanage for allegedly being sick (for vomiting blood) and for scaring him.<sup>69</sup>



Figure 11

The sequences that precede and follow the footage of the second surveillance videotape stage mediation on multiple levels. First we see the night-footage of the Laurent house; it is not clear whether we are watching a real time recording of the video or watching Anne watch it on the VCR before calling Georges. Then the film cuts to Georges on the set of his TV show followed by a fast-forwarding image of the night-footage playing on the couple’s TV inside their

<sup>69</sup> Six-year-old Georges told lies to his parents that Majid cut off the head of the rooster with an axe in the farmyard, covering himself in the bird’s blood in the process, in order to scare him.

house. The childlike drawing and Georges's hallucinatory flashback of a boy vomiting blood is crosscut with the night-footage. Then news images about a contagious disease in China infiltrate the filmic space. Such a layering of images suggests that these images are in fact interrelated, provoking mediated performative encounters in different forms. The videotapes and drawings trigger involuntary memories in Georges's consciousness, memories that are laden with guilt. In fact it is not even clear whether these images are memories or imagination, for we do not know whether Majid coughed blood or cut the head of a rooster (later in the film, in a nightmare sequence Georges dreams about child Majid cutting a rooster's head and attacking child Georges with an ax). The layering of such diverse images unsettles the present with the intrusion of the past and expands the space of the living room into other parts of the world. The fact that *Hidden* was shot with a high definition (HD) video camera makes it even more difficult to differentiate between the different types of imagery. As Martine Beugnet argues, Haneke's use of HD cameras to shoot the entire film entangles the "virtual and the actual" into "almost simultaneous presents that overlap in an uncanny fashion" (230). Indeed the elimination or blurring of the boundaries between the actual scenes of the film, surveillance tapes, news images, dreams, hallucinations and memories leads to a questioning of every image seen on the screen and generates a myriad of possible meanings they can take up depending on their relation to other images as well as on who is watching or looking. Multiple temporalities and spaces get interwoven in these sequences, for example the image of Georges's immediate past and his childhood memory, the outside and inside of the house, and various geographical locations beyond the borders of France.



Figure 12

The third video arrives at the doorstep of Laurents' house while Anne and Georges are having a dinner party. This videotape is complemented by a drawing of a rooster with red blood gushing from its neck. Upset by the fact that Anne has revealed the videotapes to their friends,

Georges declares that these are boring surveillance images of their house: “Since Anne wanted to share the good news with you I won’t *hide* it. . . . It’s not very entertaining. We receive shots of our house presumably to show us we’re under surveillance,” he contends. Nevertheless, the third videotape features footage recorded from behind the wheel of a car going down a country road, seen through windshield wipers sweeping right to left in the rain. As the car stops, the camera turns left to shoot a courtyard of a country estate where Georges grew up (see fig. 12). As discussed earlier, when Georges visits his mother after receiving this video, she is unwilling to talk about or even to remember Majid. Their conversation cuts to an image of a child cutting the throat of a rooster while another child watches him. Covered with blood, he comes toward the other boy (the camera alternates between the viewpoint of each of them) with the apparent intention of hitting him with the ax. This scene cuts to Georges waking up terrified from the nightmare, sweating and breathing fast.



Figure 13

The fourth video takes us to a low-rent apartment in the *banlieue*, later revealed as Majid’s apartment, which is visited by Georges four times throughout the movie (see fig. 13). By fast-forwarding, rewinding, and pausing the video image, Anne and Georges figure out the street name and locate the train station closest to the apartment. Tracing these clues, Georges finds out that Majid lives there. As film scholar Ipek Celik argues, the videotapes assume different roles throughout the movie: “The surveillance videotapes thus gradually change function, from capturing the protagonist’s present to traveling to his past, from stalking him to forcing him to visit the places shown on the videos. The tapes thus start to foreshadow his movements. The video images simultaneously target the past and the future: they are intended both to provoke memories of Georges’s past actions and to direct his future moves” (71). Indeed, the fourth video takes us with Georges to the interior of a *banlieue* apartment in which he first encounters Majid. When Majid opens the door he recognizes Georges immediately whereas Georges asks: “Who

are you?” Majid kindly invites Georges inside and even attempts to offer him some lunch. The camera follows the characters into the kitchen/living room of the house—a small, rundown space packed with old furniture that is quite different from the Laurents’ spacious home (see fig. 14). Majid invites Georges to join him at the kitchen table, but Georges insists on standing, looking down at Majid in a gesture of power. Through reverse shots, the camera shifts its focus back and forth between the viewpoints of Georges and Majid. Convinced that Majid is behind the videotapes and drawings, Georges starts aggressively threatening him and even states his desire to physically attack him for his unwillingness to accept his crime. As Georges continues to threaten Majid for sending the tapes to terrorize his family and blackmail him, Majid keeps very calm and says, “Why do you talk like we’re strangers? You wouldn’t have recognized me, huh? Outside, you’d have walked right past me.” Then he tells how he randomly saw Georges on his TV program a few years ago: “When I tuned into your show by chance, a few years ago, you sat up close to your guests, face to face. . . . I felt nauseous and I didn’t know why. When your name came up, I began to understand.” Georges wants to keep his meeting with Majid a secret but their meeting and his aggressive attitudes come back to him in the form of another anonymous video, shot with a hidden camera placed inside the room, which is also sent to his boss. The video also shows what happened after Georges closed the door behind (the end of the scene in the first version we saw): Majid, deeply affected by the meeting, cried intensely (see fig. 15).



Figure 14

The fact that Georges casts Majid as a terrorist who has invaded his private space is ironic given that it is he who storms into Majid’s home and even attempts to attack him. Majid, on the other hand, cannot physically enter Georges house. In *Hidden*, the encounters between French and French Maghrebi characters, in particular Georges and Majid, illustrate the persistence of what Mireille Rosello describes as “previously established subjectivities that function as authoritarian scripts” in French society today (2005: 5). For example, on October 17,



1961, the Algerian immigrants who participated in the peaceful demonstration to support FLN were defined as menacing enemies by the French state and therefore violently attacked by the police. Forty years after its occurrence, this event that positioned the Algerian as a threat to the national body is repeated in Georges and Majid's encounter—Georges is aggressive and in denial, while Majid becomes the ultimate victim who nevertheless turns the tables on Georges by forcing him to witness his suicide. In fact the encounter between the characters has the potential to transform into a performative encounter; for example, if Georges were willing to take responsibility for the past and Majid were able to stop seeing himself as the ultimate victim and Georges as the main perpetrator. However, they are unable to break away from the “cycle of victimization” (O’Riley 2010)<sup>70</sup> and develop a protocol of encounter that goes beyond the mutual enemies script. This inability results in more violence, death, and paranoia, and fortifies the entrenched historical narratives that impose destructive subject-positions with devastating results for these characters.



Figure 15

The mutual enemies model is further underscored in the film when one evening Anne comes home late from work to find Georges working at his desk in the living room. The camera frames a wide television screen located in the center of the bookshelves in their living room (see

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<sup>70</sup> Michael O’Riley argues that *Hidden* “demonstrates how France and Algeria remain haunted by the colonial era, victims of the intransigent hold of a colonial past that remains invisible, phantasmic yet closely tied to the body as an index of the history of colonialism” (80). For him, “The film plays on what might be seen of the past and what remains occluded, and how that double nature of colonial history, its existence as a haunting trace to be visually plotted, ultimately creates a form of crippling and ongoing victimization. ... In [*Hidden*] the obsessive quest to view the underlying legacy of the history of colonial-era victimization leads to a generational cycle where the victimizer and the victimized become one and the same, defined by a mutual desire to see the source of their victimization” (81).

fig. 16). While they have a fraught conversation about Anne's lateness in the foreground, the television footage shows a series of war images from Iraq and Afghanistan in the background. This is followed by a view of Palestinians protesting against Israeli attacks over Gaza Strip in the West. As these images continue in the background, in the foreground Anne and Georges become more and more frustrated about their son's disappearance. Their domestic drama vies with the TV images for the viewer's attention. While it may seem that the actions of the film's characters would naturally take precedence, we soon learn that the TV images provide a significant commentary on Georges's violent reactions, foreshadowing the arrest of Majid and his son as well as Majid's suicide.<sup>71</sup> As Burris writes, "This diegetic embedding of televised images of today's so-called terrorists, a paranoia embodied by the nameless figure of the Islamic male, establishes a clear parallel between Georges' anxious projection of guilt onto a guiltless Majid, and the justificatory rhetoric of today's pre-emptive wars" (161).



Figure 16

In the film, Georges uses the word "terrorism" multiple times to explain the underlying reasoning behind the tapes, positioning himself and his family as victims of an Algerian man who, according to Georges, wants to take revenge because he believes that Georges's family mistreated him in the past. When the fifth tape, in which we see Georges threatening Majid, is sent to Georges's boss, Georges explains his own aggression in the following way: "My visit [to Majid's house] was the consequence of the permanent terror that he exercises. My wife and I

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<sup>71</sup> Jefferson Kline also argues that "The combined set of images here, including, first, the rioting Palestinians, next the invasion of Majid's apartment and brutal arrest of the two Algerians, and finally Majid's blood soaked, suicided body, are not 'innocently' produced and they certainly do not belong to a private war between Georges and Majid" (558).

were worried.” When asked what might be driving the perpetrator, Georges responds, “Apparently he’s persuaded that my family and I mistreated him. The last time I saw him I was six. He’s crazy.” The TV scenes about torture and the US “war on terror,” as well as Georges’s insistence on defining Majid as a “terrorist” who is targeting his family, call for a larger interpretative framework that investigates the links between certain histories of imperial violence and various contemporary forms of violence. *Hidden* evokes multiple contexts including the October 17 massacre and the Algerian War, the war on terrorism, and discriminatory and racist immigration policies in France and Europe in general. Patricia Lorcin points out that memories of the Algerian War constitute a significant aspect of the identity of Algerian immigrants and their children and informs their relationship with the French society. Lorcin further argues that the post 9/11 context has intensified the anti-migration discourse in France: “French concerns with internal security and the possible presence of ‘terrorists’ in their midst have exacerbated the tensions between the French and French Maghrebi populations and have increased xenophobic anxiety, a factor that contributed the disillusionment with the incumbent parties” (xxvii). In this frame, *Hidden* suggests that Georges’s labeling of Majid as a “terrorist” and the images of “war on terror” that invade the domestic space without having any effect on the couple are intertwined and interdependent. Thus, in *Hidden*, self-delusion on the part of the bourgeois expands temporally (October 17, 1961) and spatially (Iraq, Palestine), placing the October 17, 1961 events within an international framework.



Figure 17

Yet despite its pessimistic view of the French society, *Hidden* does not refrain from gesturing towards a generational shift in the encounters between French and French Maghrebis: the enigmatic final scene of the movie underscores the possibility of a performative encounter between the next generations. In the final scene of the movie we see Majid’s son and Pierrot having a barely visible conversation in front of Pierrot’s school (see fig. 17). Their interaction

suggests that they might have met before. We do not hear them—thus the script is unknown to us but the scene is pregnant with new subject-positions and new protocols of encounter that overturn the victim-perpetrator model and move beyond the confinements of historical violence without denying or oppressing it. This scene comes after Georges’s final dream sequence, in which we see child Majid forced into a car, severed from his French family (see fig. 18). The story of Majid with his disappeared parents and mistreatment in orphanage (and his adult suicide) calls forth other stories of violence and displacement—the violence of October 17, 1961 and the Algerian War in general, as well as other contemporary forms of state violence that infuse multicultural contemporary France. However, the final dialogue between Pierrot and Majid’s son has the potential to be seen as a utopian fantasy in which the next generation can work together to counteract the trauma that shaped relations between previous generations. By providing an “unscripted” encounter between the younger generations, Haneke underscores the multiplicity of forms of interaction beyond violence and accusation.<sup>72</sup>



Figure 18

*Hidden* raises fundamental questions regarding the way postcolonial France remembers and narrates (or historicizes) the October 17 events and how it reconciles the conflicted history of colonialism and decolonization with its post-colonial/ex-colonized migrants who constitute a significant part of French society today. It does so by presenting performative encounters between French and French Maghrebis that unsettle past contexts and that could change how we think of social encounters burdened with violent historical events and legacies. This journey to

<sup>72</sup> Silverman states, “Majid’s son and Pierrot appear to see the world not through the orientalist iconography of their parents’ generation but in a more open way. Although we do not know what the conversation between the two young men is about in the final scene, one possible interpretation is that the colonial barriers and atavistic reflexes of previous generations may be loosening through dialogue and a new attitude to difference” (2007: 249).

the colonial past is depicted as a forced endeavor; *Hidden* maps colonial violence onto the present-day metropolitan Paris and portrays the October 17 events as the return of the repressed, erupting in everyday life. It shows that denial of responsibility and unwillingness to engage with the past traumas, in particular on the part of the bourgeois French society, inflects contemporary social interrelations. The return of the repressed and the inability to work through trauma results in self-directed violence (suicide of Majid), discrimination, and racism.

The main engine of *Hidden*'s plot is close investigation of visuality. The film intertwines different types of mediated images in the filmic space: the anonymous surveillance-like footage of the videotapes, the menacing drawings that accompany the cassettes, the television news reports from China, Iraq and Palestine, and the flashback and dream images of Georges's childhood. These mediated images affect the encounters and interactions between characters and even infiltrate their consciousness and subjectivity. In that sense, the film suggests that contemporary forms of experience and consciousness are very much shaped by many different kinds of visual media. Indeed, *Hidden* is not only an investigation of Georges's personal guilt and the return of the repressed memory of a childhood event but also an examination of collective memory created, mediated, and shared through images. Hence the film underscores the difficulty of delineating the borders between mediated spaces and times and unmediated ones, for mediation is in fact integral to the construction of subjectivities and collective and individual memories. This also speaks to the decades of silence following the October 17 massacre, which enters Haneke's own consciousness through a documentary he watched on ARTE.

Significantly, the film is set as a psychological thriller: an unknown observer sends menacing videotapes and drawings to Laurents' house. The protagonists become obsessed with finding the identity of the "culprit" or the gaze behind the camera. However, the weight of the traumatic historical event and its consequences overshadow the whodunit aspect of the narrative—the question of who is behind the hidden camera—and renders the search for the true victim and perpetrator irrelevant. Indeed, *Hidden* depicts the extent to which the perpetrator and the victim are collective roles. The seemingly perfect and refined life of a bourgeois French family is shattered by the past atrocities that took place during the Algerian War, even though the characters were very young or not even born in those years. Thus, the film shows that individual and social memory are always already enmeshed with each other and with moving image media, demonstrating that its main characters, along with the rest of the French society, are part of a postcolonial present that is defined by various asymmetrical power relations, racism, and discrimination inherited from the colonial era. Indeed, *Hidden*'s story intertwines wider debates about France's colonial past and the migration/minority politics of the present without casting its French and French Algerian characters into the binary roles of victim and perpetrator or migrant and citizen.

## Retracing the Historical Routes of (Post)Colonial Exile: Tony Gatlif's *Exiles* (2004)

*The complex geopolitical, cultural, and historical space of the Mediterranean concentrates our attention on the question of cultural crossovers, contaminations, creolizations, and uneven historical memories.*

—Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 28

While *Hidden* investigates colonial history through the eruption of repressed personal and cultural memory, in *Exiles* the past is at a further remove. The central characters of the film are in search of the vanishing cultural legacy of their ancestors. Gatlif does not portray the past as a threat to contemporary existence but rather as a state in which to find belonging and identification. Instead of focusing on the metropolitan city, *Exiles* expands the search for memories, home and belonging into non-European geographies by depicting a highly visceral experience of exile inscribed onto the bodies of characters. The protagonists' journey across France, Spain, Morocco, and Algeria is a quest for homeland, a journey of redemption that might render their present lives meaningful. In other words, the film "gets into their skin," in Gatlif's own terms, to evoke an embodied sense of exile. During a press conference in 2004 Cannes Film Festival Gatlif explained that "I don't pretend to have made a film about Algeria, because I don't know it. I made a film about the children of exiles in search of their origins. ... I filmed the skin; I wanted to enter into the skin to see the matter that is the South." Unlike *Hidden*, in which precisely described historical traumas and personal memories force themselves into characters' consciousness, disrupting their lives, *Exiles* explores the ways in which memories of colonial violence are inscribed onto the bodies of next generation, in the absence of explicit historical contextualization.

### On the Road to Algiers

As mentioned above, director Tony Gatlif has a particular connection to the homecoming theme explored in *Exiles*. Of Algerian Berber and Gypsy Andalusian descent, Gatlif (whose real name is Michel Dahmani) was born in Algeria in 1948 and forced to move to France during the Algerian War. He started making films in 1973, and has risen to prominence primarily as a Romani filmmaker, making films about Romanies in France, Spain, Romania, and other parts of the world. He is best known for the films *Les Princes* (The Princes, 1983), *Latcho Drom* (Safe Journey, 1993) and *Gadjo Dilo* (Crazy Stranger, 1999), which form his "Gypsy trilogy." In most of his work he focuses on nomadic, displaced, homeless, or uprooted characters, and his filmmaking practice often involves non-actors and location shooting across national borders. *Crazy Stranger*, for example, takes us to the world of Romanian Gypsy life and the icy roads of Romania. In the film, a white French male traveler, Stéphane, (played by Romain Duris) retraces the footsteps of his father to Eastern Europe, who had recorded the voice of a singer called Nora Luca many years ago. This journey leads to a major transformation for Stéphane, who easily adapts to the lifestyle of the Romani Gypsy community, learning and performing their language (Rom), manners, and customs. Like many exilic filmmakers, Gatlif has performed multiple tasks in his films, such as script writing, casting, directing, producing, and composing/writing the music. With *Exiles* (2004), Gatlif returns to his homeland for the first time after forty-three years of "exile." As he explains in the press kit, "The film didn't originate from a mere idea, but from my yearning to consider my very wounds. It has taken me forty-three years to return to the land

of my childhood – Algeria. Almost 4,500 miles on the road, by train, by car, by boat or just walking.” In that sense, Gatlif’s journey to Algiers can be defined as a homecoming journey. As Hamid Naficy posits, “because the accented filmmakers ... are generally located in the West, any easterly journey in their films tend to be one of return. ... Return occupies a primary place in the minds of the exiles and a disproportionate amount of space in their films, for it is the dream of a glorious homecoming that structures exile” (229). Yet Gatlif’s return to Algiers as part of his filmmaking practice was much more complex than a “glorious homecoming,” for the journey took him not to his childhood Algeria but to a country that has been dramatically changed since he left and that was destroyed by a recent earthquake.

*Exiles* features Zano (Romain Duris), orphaned son of a  *pied noir* (French colonial settlers in Algeria) family, and Naïma (Lubna Azabal), a second-generation Algerian immigrant, who set out from Paris to Algiers to trace a previous generation’s journey of exile. The opening scene shows the characters—both naked—in Zano’s high-rise apartment in Paris. They seem to be strangers to each other. Zano asks Naïma to go to Algeria with him, an invitation that she seems to consider some kind of joke. Even though the reason behind Zano’s desire to travel to Algiers is not apparent at first, it gradually becomes clear that these seemingly adventurous bohemian characters hope to come to know the land their parents once had to flee. Following the brief opening scene in Paris, we see the characters on the road, traveling by train, bus, and boat, or on foot. Our diasporic characters meet various similarly uprooted characters, such as undocumented migrants and refugees who are on their way to an affluent Western European country—traveling in the opposite direction from Zano and Naïma. Thus the road trip to North Africa reverses the infamous south-north migratory route from Algeria and Morocco to France or to other Western European countries. Although the couple’s journey gets interrupted multiple times, they make it to Algiers, where they visit Zano’s family’s home, in which an Algerian family is living now, and participate in a local Sufi ritual. The final scene of the film shows the couple on the road again toward an unknown destination. There is a sense of redemption as the lyrics “Those who have left us always come back to us” are heard on the soundtrack. Indeed, the final scene suggests that by the end of their journey, Zano and Naïma have somewhat reconstructed themselves during the journey from Paris to Algiers, and powerfully reconnected with their families’ pasts.

### **Second-generation Children of *Pieds noirs* and Algerian Migrants in France**

The film is best understood in the context of the historical experiences of exile and displacement against which Zano (born in France into a  *pied noir* family) and Naïma’s (born in France into an Algerian family) adventurous journey is set. During the French colonial period (1830-1962), European settlers came to Algeria from various countries and were granted French citizenship that positioned them at the top of the colonial hierarchy in Algeria. *Pieds-noirs*, who comprised ten percent of the population by 1954, considered themselves and their land to be integral parts of the French nation. The distinction *Algérie française* (French-Algeria) was essential to how those settlers defined themselves in relation to both colonized Algeria and the mainland France, which actually saw *pieds-noirs* as culturally and socially different from the French of France mainly due to their exposure to Arab and Berber cultures. Their claim over Algeria put *pieds-noirs* in direct conflict with the revolutionary group of *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN, National Liberation Front). Following the independence of Algeria in July 1962, over ninety percent of the settler population, believing that their lives would be in danger

under the FLN regime, left Algeria over the course of the summer of 1962.<sup>73</sup> Nearly one million *pieds-noirs* were exiled—mainly to France. The majority experienced the departure from Algeria as a trauma. Many lost family members, belongings, and homes. Intensifying the effects of their forced departure and the ensuing experience of displacement and exile, the reception of the *pieds-noirs* in France was often unwelcoming. Many encountered difficulties in their efforts to integrate into French society. As Andrea Smith writes, arriving during and after the Algerian War, which lasted for eight years, the *pieds-noirs* became targets of rage and frustration: “They were often blamed for the war, for the political turmoil it engendered, and for colonialism in general. . . . Hence, *pied-noir* integration into French society has been difficult and remains incomplete in many ways to this day (333).

In *Exiles*, Zano’s family was part of the 1962 “exodus” of French settlers from an independent Algeria to France. The film represents his family, in particular his grandfather, as anti-colonialist, underscoring the fact that Zano’s family was not part of the extremist nationalist group OAS<sup>74</sup> that killed many Algerians and French who supported an independent Algeria. Nevertheless, as settlers, Zano’s family occupied the highest position in the colonial hierarchy for many generations. *Exiles*, however, does not elaborate on this particular colonial position as an element of history. Rather, the colonial past appears as an invisible structure, still informing contemporary subjectivities in France and Algeria. Stuart Hall suggests that “when we think of or imagine cultural identity, we tend to ‘see’ it in a place, in a setting, as part of an imaginary landscape or ‘scene.’ We *give* it a background; we put it in a frame, in order to make sense of it (1995: 181, original emphasis). Similarly, Zano’s identification with Algeria, his family’s homeland, leads to a geographical exploration beyond the borders of France, rooting part of his evolving identity in a particular place and a particular historical era. Yet the film does not reveal the extent to which he is aware of the power relations and historical violence that were prevalent during French colonialism.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Patricia Lorcin identifies *dispossession* as one of the dominant forms of violence that occurred during the Algerian War (xxiv). Here, dispossession means cultural uprooting and ensuing alienation, which affected both parts, including the Algerian soldiers in the French Army (*harkis*) and the *pieds-noirs*. Both the first-generation *pieds-noirs*, who were repatriated from Algeria to France after more than a century long colonial period, and Algerian migrants, who came to France as workers, soldiers, or as political exiles, saw Algeria as their “homeland” and experienced France as a “foreign” country that did not see them as part of the French society. Lorcin argues that later generations also “have their moorings in colonial Algeria, which for better or for worse, shaped the ways in which memories would be lived or denied” (xxvii).

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<sup>73</sup> As Claire Eldridge explains, “The majority headed for France where they arrived with few worldly possessions, but a long list of grievances. These were compounded by the lack of facilities initially available to assist with their installation, the French having anticipated an exodus of 400,000 over four years, not 1,000,000 in the space of a couple of months, as well as by the reluctance of successive governments to offer compensation for their losses. The *pieds-noirs* also felt themselves and their history to have been misunderstood by their metropolitan cousins who tended to stereotype them all as *colons* who ‘made the natives sweat.’ These factors combined to produce a powerful sentiment of victimhood and a range of perceived injustices to be rectified” (124).

<sup>74</sup> Rothberg points out that “In the late 1961 . . . a group of extreme-right-wing French generals formed a terrorist group, OAS, which killed thousands while fighting to maintain French Algeria. In addition, as part of the continuing practice of torture and detention, the French employed groups of Algerian collaborators, known as *harkis*, who were especially feared for their brutality” (231).



Henri Alleg points out that young generation of French Maghrebis, who are children and grandchildren of *pieds noirs*, are “often nostalgic for an Algeria they know only thanks to their parents’ reminiscences, but that nonetheless forms part of their identity” (xi). Indeed, the driving force behind Zano’s urge to go to Algiers in *Exiles* is such nostalgia for a mythical “homeland” and search for roots. *Exiles* depicts not only a present-time journey from France to Algeria but also a journey to the past, in particular, to Zano’s family’s past as French settlers in Algeria. Whereas Zano sees Algeria as a “lost” homeland, Naïma seems to have no connections to her family’s home country. She represents ethnically Arab French Maghrebis, namely *beurs* and *beurettes* (terms that derive from Parisian slang for Arabs). Mostly from North, West African, or sub-Saharan African background, the ethnic minority youths in France are the children and grandchildren of migrants who came to France “in the last years of the colonial era, were recruited from the old colonies in the 1960s and 1970s when a growing French economy needed cheap unskilled labor, or more recently fled to Europe from the disastrous economic and political conditions that afflict Africa” (Aldrich 142). Young French Maghrebis like Naïma see themselves as French and imagine their future in France, yet they were born into structural power relations, inherited from the colonial era, that confer cultural, political, and economic privilege on white bourgeois society while denying them those privileges.

### **Performative Encounters, Differentiated Mobilities**

*[T]he forms and conditions of movement are not only highly divergent – consider the difference between tourism and exile – but also necessarily exist in relation to similarly divergent configurations of placement, or being ‘at home.’ Who moves, who stays, under what conditions? What is the relationship between those who stay and those who arrive and leave? What forces entrench migration or propel staying ‘at home’?*

—Sara Ahmed et al., *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 1

In both *Hidden* and *Exiles*, forced and voluntary journeys to the past, respectively, are spatially mapped out in the present. While *Hidden* centers on the traces of colonial violence and its after effects on differently positioned subjects living in the socioeconomically and ethnically divided city of Paris, *Exiles* depicts the road to Algiers as the vehicle of a younger generation’s urge to recover and come to terms with their parents’ and grandparents’ colonial past. *Exiles* takes its characters outside of the *métropole*, which appears in the film merely as a nondescript city from which the characters want to escape, and sets them on a journey through the barren and arid landscapes of the Mediterranean and North African region, raising the question of “where are we right now?” in almost each scene until they arrive in Algiers. Throughout the journey, the director never provides the viewer with an architectural landmark or a touristic site that would help locate the place of the characters on the map. The sense of place and of location evoked in the film seems to be highly fluid and shifting, as the mobile characters temporarily inhabit ruins, run-down places, and encounter other uprooted characters.

Similar to *Hidden*, *Exiles* also reflects—and, to a certain extent, reproduces—the historic and contemporary power relations between the “colonizer” and the “colonized.” The movie brings together Zano and Naïma, who are second-generation of French Maghrebi citizens: Zano is a descendent of the colonizer while Naïma of the colonized. Yet the movie does not reduce

their identities to pre-conceived notions of *pied-noir* or Algerian immigrant; their identities are never labeled or overtly articulated by the film.

Furthermore, *Exiles* explores the ways in which Zano and Naïma relate to Algeria and the colonial past rather than depicting how they view and experience contemporary France and French identity. In the film, despite that Zano has grown up in France, he imagines his home in Algeria, where all his family lived for years before being displaced to France after the Algerian independence. His longing for what Salman Rushdie calls an “imaginary homeland” initiates the couple’s road trip. Like Rushdie, Zano finds that “the past is [the] country from which [he has] emigrated” (12). But he cannot even reclaim it in his memory for he has never been to Algeria. He was born away from the “homeland” and thus has developed an imaginative relationship to it. Unlike his parents, he does not have first-hand experiences and memories of Algeria. Nevertheless, Zano seems to be or desiring to be attached to his Algerian “home” more than his house in Paris, as we see him burying his violin and his apartment’s keys inside a wall with cement before leaving for Algeria. He literally freezes his life in Paris as he departs for memories he inherited through his parents’ stories and black-and-white family pictures taken in Algeria. In that sense, the film portrays travel or road trip not only as a form of adventurous journey but also as a search for a real or imagined home. Indeed, in *Exiles*, movement does not undermine attachment and commitment to particular places and people. Yet in Zano’s case this attachment is a troubled one, evoking what Edward Said defined as “a disturbed physical and psychic relationship to space and home” that marks the exilic condition (Allatson and McCormack 10).<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, Gatlif subverts the stereotype of immigrant longing for his/her “lost” homeland: the white French character Zano’s attachment to his family’s past in Algeria is much stronger than Naïma’s (the so-called ethnic “other”) identification with her Arab identity and her “country of origin.” Zano has grown up listening to his parents’ stories of living in Algeria, whereas Naïma’s father has never talked about his homeland nor taught Arabic to his children because he wanted to forget his past. Nevertheless, despite their ethnic differences, both Zano and Naïma are implicated by the previous generation’s experience of being uprooted from Algeria. In transplanting those French characters into the road to Algiers, “the film proposes geographically a look back into the (colonial) ghost of the past” (Blum-Reid 6). Indeed, *Exiles* expands the European space to include the Mediterranean and the North African territories both from a historical and contemporary perspective. In so doing, it shows the ways in which France/Europe can decentralize itself, and, in Ien Ang’s words, can “see its present in its historical particularity and its *limitedness*, so that Europeans can start relating to cultural ‘others’ in new, more modest and dialogic ways” (28, original emphasis).

In *Exiles*, the (forced) movement of *pieds-noirs* and Algerians to France constitutes the historical backdrop against which Zano and Naïma’s road trip is depicted. Their adventurous journey in search for the traces of their families’ colonial past intersects with diverse contemporary mobilities that are quite different (in legal and socioeconomic terms) from their own. They encounter nomadic gypsy families, two Algerian siblings trying to go to Paris to

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<sup>75</sup> As Allatson and McCormack writes, exiled *pieds noirs* and *harkis* “constructed nostalgic memories of the Algerian home or occluded and repressed such memories; at the same time they are yet to obtain a home in France. This disturbed exilic scenario is further complicated by the post-independence Algerian community, France’s largest minority group, which has also maintained a myth of returning for decades.... The children of these immigrants are torn between homeliness in a France that does not fully accept them, and an Algerian homeland that is alien to them” (19-20).

study and work, undocumented migrants working in the fields in Spain, and various other economically propelled migrants mainly from France's former African colonies. By juxtaposing and overlapping these undocumented journeys with Zano and Naïma's journey to Algeria, the film underscores the links and continuities between colonial mobilities and postcolonial ones, and emphasizes the fact that not everyone is free to move or stay put in the same way (see Ahmed et al. 2003). In *Exiles*, Gatlif makes it clear that mobility is set up differently for different people. As cultural geographer Doreen Massey points out, "some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it" (1994: 149). Indeed, the narrative of *Exiles* is structured around performative encounters between travelers from culturally and socioeconomically different backgrounds. In the film, Zano and Naïma's loose and fragmented trajectory leads to an exploration of the tensions and mutual dependencies between different kinds of (im)mobility.

In this framework, *Exiles*, like Fatih Akin's *The Edge of Heaven*, can be viewed as a European road movie, which redefines European identity as relational, complex and fractured.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, with their open-ended and fractured narrative structures road movies raise more questions than they answer. As Jessie Gibbs suggests, "The journey that structures [road] films is often motivated by a quest, although as a rule the experience of the journey itself proves more important, and movement functions as a catalyst for personal development. As the protagonists struggle with the uncertainties of the unfamiliar, they are inclined to self-reflection through developing new relationships with their travelling companions and acquaintances" (1). Walter Salles, director of road movies such as *Central Station* (1998) and *Motorcycle Diaries* (2004), further insists that "In terms of their narrative architecture road movies cannot be circumscribed by the traditional three act structure of so many mainstream films," which brings a closure to the narrative. In that sense, road movies can re-imagine Europe as decentered and fractured, while addressing new regimes of exploitation and racism as entangled with new forms of transnational mobility.

In addition to the road movie genre, the notion of "cinema of transvergence" proves to be helpful in understanding the exilic aesthetics of Gatlif's film. Film scholar Will Higbee proposes that the term "cinema of transvergence" (rather than the national or transnational cinema) might help "us better appreciate how postcolonial and diasporic cinemas engage, function and produce meaning within and across national and transnational positionings" (80).<sup>77</sup> Higbee combines the term transvergence, first used by Marcus Novak in his study of architecture, with Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the rhizome, characterized by complex, multilayered and fractured forms rather than rigid or fixed formulations of identity and culture. In this framework, "Multiplicity (multiple points of entry and multiple points of flight)" emerges as "the key to understanding and applying the concept of rhizome, offering us a way of understanding the complex and shifting matrix of local, national and global positionings that first-world diasporic film-makers work within (and beyond)" (Higbee 87). The multidirectional and fragmented mobilities portrayed in *Exiles* aptly illustrates Higbee's notion of cinema of transvergence that emphasizes historical and geographic specificity as well as transnational mobility.

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<sup>76</sup> See Chapter I of this dissertation for a discussion of the road movie genre.

<sup>77</sup> Higbee argues that "the national on its own is too 'limiting,' and the transnational not specific enough or sufficiently politically engaged" in understanding the work of postcolonial or diasporic filmmakers (85).



Figure 19

After the first two scenes in Paris, which do not show any iconic architectural landmarks that would help locate us in the city, the film moves south across Spain, then Morocco before making its way to Algeria. Even though the Paris scenes are short, it is worth exploring them for they set the rest of the journey against Paris, a city that does not seem to have provided home to our exilic characters. *Exiles* opens with an extreme close-up of the back of a naked man (Zano), drinking beer while standing in a window, looking out across a horizon of non-descript residential buildings, all of it neatly bisected by a busy highway (see fig. 19). As the camera pulls back slowly, framing a medium shot of Zano's naked body, we hear a female voice crying out words and phrases such as "it's an emergency, we need to talk about democracy, we need to talk about those who are absent, those who live without democracy, freedom, it's urgent" to the beat of drums. As the song is taken up by a man's voice in Spanish, the camera shifts its focus to a naked woman (Naïma) eating ice cream in bed. After dropping his glass out the window and hearing it shatter below, the man turns off the stereo and asks the woman—in French—if she would go to Algeria with him. This question provokes laughter from the woman, who responds by asking him what he thinks he could possibly do there.

The opening scene of *Exiles* evokes the feelings of boredom and indifference that dominate the life in the rigidly defined space of the *banlieue*. Yet it also moves continually across linguistic, spatial, and formal boundaries, foreshadowing the intertwining of the couple's road trip with the trajectories of various uprooted characters as they cross national and cultural borders. The opening scene in which we are introduced to the main characters is uncannily interrupted by an extreme long shot of a large group of people marching toward the camera across a desert-like landscape. The film's title, *Exils*, appears in big, red letters over this image (see fig. 20).



Figure 20

This extreme long shot of a road traveled against the grain is repeated in an extended form toward the end of the movie, when Zano and Naïma try to go to the capital city Algiers after “illegally” crossing the border between Morocco and Algeria that has been closed for several years. In fact this is not the only time the couple’s road trip is interrupted in the film: they work in the fields in Spain along with undocumented workers, they take the wrong boat and go to Morocco instead of Algeria, and their bus in Morocco breaks down. After crossing the border on foot to Algeria, they take a very crowded train to Algiers. In the scene, a close-up shot of Naïma falling asleep on Zano’s shoulder is followed by a shot of the train passing through a dark tunnel. As the screen goes black, the camera cuts to a shot of Zano and Naïma walking against hundreds of Algerians followed by a crane shot of the road similar to the one inserted into the opening scene in Paris (see fig. 21). In their Western attire, Zano and Naïma walk against the flow of the marchers. They are going against the current, just as they did when they crossed paths with other uprooted people who are slowly trying to make their way to Western Europe. As Dimitris Eleftheriotis suggests “it is not clear whether these shots represent a dream within or the reality of the diegesis. Yet they juxtapose the adventurous mobility of the protagonists with “movements of mass displacement” whose “scale and direction” questions the “overarching narrative trajectory of personal quest” (130). At the heart of the story, there is a fundamental irony—as they make their pilgrimage to the land of their ancestors, Zano and Naïma look increasingly like fish swimming upstream, against a tide of migrants driven by necessity to make the reverse journey from South to North.



Figure 21

Even though the film reveals little about the personal histories of Zano and Naïma, it becomes clear that they are both able to take off on a whim for an extended journey to Algeria without any serious consequences or repercussions. They are young cosmopolitans living their lives in metropolitan Paris, albeit in the marginalized space of the *banlieue*, and they seem to feel no specific connection to any one place as their definite home. Zano and Naïma's adventurous road trip provides a sharp contrast to the two undocumented Algerian siblings they meet in a small town in southwestern Spain. Like many non-European migrants, the siblings, Leïla and Habib, are traveling in the opposite direction of Zano and Naïma, hoping to get to Paris or Amsterdam in order to find jobs and provide themselves and their family with a better life. In contrast to the cosmopolitan traveler that Zano and Naïma seem to embody, these two siblings represent the "traditional" immigrant, driven to travel not by personal desire but out of economic necessity. What separates and defines these two groups is not only the fact that they are traveling in opposite directions, but also their underlying motivations and the conditions under which they live and travel.

These performative encounters between the siblings and Zano and Naïma subvert traditional notions of colonizer and colonized, host and guest, migrant and native. The siblings invite Zano and Naïma to stay with them in their makeshift rooms in half-destroyed, abandoned houses in the open fields of Spain (see fig. 22). Such *cohabitation* of French and Algerians in the ruins is one of several instances of performative inversion (of roles and trajectories) enacted in the film. The Algerians' willingness to provide shelter to the French characters despite the lack of space expands hospitality beyond the private space of home, into an enlarged, public, and transnational one.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> See Chapter IV of this dissertation for a detailed discussion of hospitality in relation to transnational migration.



Figure 22

Towards the beginning of the film, in one scene in the Spanish ruins, Zano describes to Naïma his family's relationship with Algeria before being displaced to France following the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962). Nearby Habib washes parts of his body (ablution) and starts his *namaz* (an Islamic prayer) inside a cave (see fig. 23). Zano's narration of his family history is interwoven with the Muslim prayer as the two young men's voices fill the space. The camera captures flickering reflections on the shallow pool of water inside the cave in which Habib prays, a visual correspondence to the characters' echoing voices. As Naïma quietly listens to Zano's narration, the camera focuses on a reverberating reflection of their faces encircled by dark water that seems to swallow the light (see fig. 24).



Figure 23



Figure 24

Like Zano's narrative, this image gestures toward the impossibility of fully recovering the past and expresses the elusive nature of personal and historical reminiscence. Zano's brief account of his family's colonial past suggests that he can only ever access the past retrospectively and incompletely, yet it evokes the broader, highly charged history of French colonization in Algeria: "My father would often speak of his father. He was a hero, an anti-colonialist. He was tortured and murdered in the Algiers prison in 1959. In 1962, all the family was repatriated by boat. My father wanted us to visit Algiers. He had never gone back. We took the car and the accident happened. That was all." Cut to a close-up of Zano, who continues without the echo of Habib's voice this time: "Doctors told me that my father and mother were dead. I never touched the violin again. Total block." This reference to the violin recalls a moment that takes place at the beginning of the movie: after the opening scene, in which Zano asks Naïma to go to Algeria, Zano buries his violin and his keys in cement (see fig. 25). It is significant that the act of burying his father's violin, an object that embodies his family's life in Algeria as well as the loss of their "homeland," precedes his journey to Algeria to recover his family's past. It is a gesture of abandonment, both of his life in the *métropole* and of the frozen memories he inherited from his parents. It also indicates a displacement and a lack of belonging in his life in France. In setting out to reclaim his now absent family's Algerian past and create his own experiences and memories of the mythic homeland, he must first freeze (literally, in concrete) his present life.





Figure 25



Figure 26

As Zano and Naïma travel further south, they meet various other uprooted characters, underscoring the diversity of mobilities across the Mediterranean and North Africa. The gypsies whom Zano and Naïma next encounter on the road represent a type of mobility quite different

from the Algerian siblings Leila and Habib, who have left their homeland with a specific purpose and destination. Gypsies, in contrast, are typically identified with a nomadic lifestyle. Thus, they introduce another form of mobility, thereby widening the Parisian couple's perspective on migrants and ways of moving or staying put. Later in the film, Zano and Naïma encounter other mobile characters such as tourists, dancers and musicians in a flamenco bar in Seville (see fig. 26). Interestingly, in the bar scene, a reference to gypsy culture seems to provoke Naïma's willingness to hold on to her Algerian heritage. "I'm Algerian. Algerian from France," she answers without hesitation, articulating every word in Spanish, when a Spanish man at the bar asks if she is a gypsy. Naïma, for the first time, speaks both defensively and confidently of her ethnicity, insisting that she does in fact identify with her background. Not long after this scene, we see Naïma claiming her French citizenship when Spanish police check their IDs. "I'm French, asshole," she insists, speaking in French. This suggests that she is aware of her privileged position and ability to freely move across national borders with her French passport. Indeed, throughout the film, encounters with different kinds of mobilities gradually change the couple's, especially Naïma's self-identification.



Figure 27

In the later sequences in the film, as Zano and Naïma become more experienced as travelers and draw closer to their destination, we find them working with immigrant laborers who man the farms temporarily to earn money for their passage to Europe. After joining them in the orchard, Zano and Naïma follow the workers to their rundown houses, built from remnants of walls (see fig. 27, 28). The change of scene is accompanied by music coming from a migrant's radio. The uplifting yet ominous tune colors the atmosphere: "You got your papers and jumped off the walls, you got your passport and now you're an immigrant..." As the lyrics suggest, these workers in the ruins have risked their lives to cross borders and migrate to Europe in search of better earning and living conditions. Zano and Naïma's facial expressions become serious during

their encounter with these laborers, who are fervent in their yearning for freedom of mobility and opportunities. The couple also witnesses the migrants' faithfulness to their cultural and religious traditions even in the middle of the ruins, for they continue to perform their religious observances in the midst of these difficult conditions.



Figure 28

The sequence in the makeshift homes of these migrants is filled not with the festivity of flamenco dancing found in previous scenes in Seville but rather with a sense of precariousness, fear, and anticipation of an unknown future. The adventurous purpose of Zano and Naïma's road trip seems arbitrary and out-of-place next to the purposeful and dangerous mobilities of the migrants. Border-crossing for the French couple is an ordinary act without legal consequences, whereas for undocumented migrants who leave their homes to escape poverty or war, it constitutes an act of survival. Over the course of the film, additional gaps between the protagonists and the other migrants emerge, displaying different forms of exile and alternative aspects of mobility that emerge during the journey of immigration to the affluent West and the couple's reverse-migration to an imaginary Algerian homeland. In drawing such parallels between Zano and Naïma and the migrant workers, Gatlif highlights the fact that it is the latter who support the invisible infrastructures that maintain Western society. It is their labor power that picks the vegetables, powers construction sites, and staffs the service industry. And it is in their movements and their border-crossings that we witness the enduring legacy of the colonial regime; Gatlif shows us that migration from the global South to the global North is still, by and large, rooted in unequal power relations and an uneven concentration of power.

## Postmemories of Colonial Algeria

In *Exiles*, the second-generation migrants' relationship to a homeland that they have never seen—and to the previous generations' attendant experiences of exile and displacement—evokes the notion postmemory, a term developed by Marianne Hirsch to describe the “relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (2008: 106). Postmemory refers to a condition that afflicts individuals who are haunted by events that they have never experienced. According to Hirsch, postmemory “is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection.” Thus, postmemory describes the experience of those whose lives are overridden by narratives that took place before their birth and whose own delayed narratives are dislocated by “the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events.” Postmemory, Hirsch insists, is not empty or absent but obsessive and relentless and “as full or as empty, certainly as constructed, as memory itself” (1997: 22). Postmemory is “a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through projection, investment, and creation” (Hirsch 1999: 8). In her book *Landscapes of Holocaust Postmemory*, Brett Ashley Kaplan expands Hirsch's notion to denote a kind of “collective, cultural memory that reflects the aftereffects and afterimages of the multinational landscape of Holocaust” (5). Following Kaplan, I use postmemory here as term with which to articulate the lingering aftereffects and afterimages of different forms of exile and displacement that were propelled by French colonization of Algeria and the Algerian War of Independence.

The opening of the film portrays Zano as a man who is troubled by something that is not apparent to the audience. The movie ultimately reveals, albeit in fragments, that Zano is mourning a past that is beyond his actual experience and memory but nonetheless haunts him. Hence, he is in search of his parents and grandparents' past memories in colonial Algeria. He eventually achieves his goal, arriving at his former home in Algiers, which has been kept intact by the Algerian family who occupied the apartment following his family's departure. We learn from Zano that his parents were given only a few hours to leave their apartment, and were therefore unable to take their belongings with them to France. In the film, Zano's past is not only captured by his precise narration but also materialized by photographs and objects of his family that constitute tangible residues of his past. When Zano and Naïma arrive in Algiers, Zano gets very excited and enthusiastic about being in the city where his family lived for years. He runs through the streets and eagerly rushes to their old apartment, hoping to be able to step into the lived spaces of his own past and to touch his family's memories. Two young Algerian women wearing modern dresses show him the way and ask whether he is looking for the “Boulangers,” adding, “they lived where Aïsha lives now.” The young woman tells the two older Algerian women who open the door that “The son of the Boulangers is here to reminiscence.” The two older women, who have been living in the house since Zano's parents left, invite him in with great excitement, showing him the living room in which the piano, pictures, and furniture that belonged to his family remain in the places they held nearly forty years ago when his grandparents departed for France (see fig. 29). Zano, who is shocked to see the room looking exactly the same as in the pictures his parents showed him, looks at each photograph hanging on the wall, telling Naïma that “my grandmother, my father in his mother's arms, they fled from here in a few hours. It was all they had. It's crazy. Nothing's moved. Even the piano is where it

was in the photos.” Thus, the apartment “seems frozen in time” (Blum-Reid 7). Identifying with Zano, whose face we see in close-up, the camera dwells on each picture for a few seconds (framing them in close-up shots). A bell rings each time Zano shifts his gaze to another picture, highlighting the moment at which he takes in each new photograph, registering these moments of capture not only in his psyche but also within the film’s narration and audio-visual space.



Figure 29

When Zano asks the women how they entered the house, one of the Algerian women replies: “When your family left Algiers, my husband broke the door and we came in.” He asks, “Why are the paintings where they were?” and she replies, “They are so pretty.” The two Algerian women serve their guests tea and fruit and bring Zano his family’s photos as if they had been expecting the children of the *pieds noirs* to come back one day and reclaim the belongings the family had left behind in Algiers (see fig. 30). As Zano removes the pictures from a box one by one, a close-up of his face reveals his ambivalence at finding his exiled grandparents’ abandoned home unchanged. When Zano breaks down after seeing the picture of his father holding the violin (see fig. 31), the women console him by hugging him and holding his hand while the camera continues to dwell on the pictures on the wall. It is important to note that these pictures do not work to refresh Zano’s memories of the time they were taken, for Zano was not even born at that time. If anything, they might remind him of similar pictures his parents showed him in France. Nevertheless, they have a great emotional impact on Zano, who has defined and seen himself through the prism of memories he inherited from his family. The stories and photographs that infuse Zano’s memory are of places and people he has never met, yet they are powerful enough to “constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch 1999: 8). The old black-and-white pictures inside the house render the ephemeral past tangible. They are traces, material connections to a lost heritage that signify both the present absence as well as the past existence

of his family. Frozen in time, the house evokes a sense of longing as well as the opposing feelings of mourning and recollection, presence and absence that characterize postmemory.



Figure 30

The power relations between ex-colonizer and ex-colonized become tangible in Zano's visit to his family home. The Algerian women never sit at the table with Zano and they feel obliged to welcome and embrace him. Zano, however, is generationally removed from the history of colonial era and does not appear to be aware of the colonial structures that shaped his family's relationship with Algerians. In the photo album his family appears in Western clothing, enjoying a wealthy and happy life in Algiers. The album also includes headshots of the Algerians who presumably had worked for his parents and grandparents (see fig. 32). Their faces register not only the difficulty of their impoverished lives but also the discomfort they felt in having their photo taken by a *piéd noir*. Collectively, the photographs testify to the long history of French colonization in Algeria, connecting Zano's personal memory with historical memory, his personal loss with massive sufferings of the colonial era. The headshots of the Algerians, whose names we never learn, relate to the collective memory of the Algerian War, a conflict that engendered thousands of exiles like Zano and Naïma, living under very different exilic conditions. They also refer to another moment, the oneiric scene in which we see Zano and Naïma walking in the opposite direction from a massive group of Algerians, who are also defined as "exiles" in the film (the title *Exils* is superimposed on this image in the opening scene as well as appearing over the image of Zano and Naïma in the final frame).



Figure 31



Figure 32

Having seen the apartment, Zano does not claim his family's belongings. Instead, he chooses to leave with only his own fresh memories of Algiers. The film seems to suggest that Zano's sense of nostalgia for a mythical Algiers has faded away as he created his own first-hand experience of his family's lost homeland. Zano's visit to his grandparents' apartment evokes a sense of redemption and belonging that is not defined by ownership of objects, houses, or land. Yet complete recovery of the past and reunification with homeland proves to be impossible, for he will never be able to fully construct the desired past. This impossibility suggests that memory

is in fact “an act in the *present* on the part of a subject who constitutes herself by means of a series of identifications across temporal, spatial, and cultural divides” (Hirsch 1999: 6-7, original emphasis). The title of the film, inscribed with big red letters over the image of Zano and Naïma heading to an unknown destination, suggests that the two will continue the impossible journey of homecoming.

Zano and Naïma have dissimilar relations to Algeria, a fact that has been determined to a certain extent by their respective ethnicity, gender, and class. The film makes clear that Zano’s postmemory is shaped by his parents’ rich stories of their life in Algiers and by family portraits. The fact that their apartment has been kept intact also allows him to have a tangible sense of the home where his family lived for many generations. Gatlif further emphasizes Zano’s personal history by capturing the images and sites of his family’s life in Algeria. Meanwhile, Naïma’s relationship to Algeria, France, and her family is not clearly articulated in the film. Instead, Gatlif focuses on the tenuousness of her identity by exploring the gaps and silences of her memory. We learn from Naïma’s brief conversations with Zano and Leila that her father has kept silent regarding his past in Algeria and that no one taught her Arabic nor exposed her to his family’s cultural and ethnic background. Traumatic memories of the colonial era were transmitted through this silence—unlike Zano, she possesses a narrative of her family’s past only under erasure. While Zano wants to remain faithful to his roots in Algeria and therefore feels compelled to return to Algiers, Naïma insists on her distance from Algerian culture and language when the Maghrebi characters they encounter en route question her about her religious and ethnic identity. Although her name and appearance mark her as Arab, her seeming lack of knowledge about or interest in French Algerian history and her parents’ homeland suggests that Algeria has never been an integral part of her identity. Nevertheless, she was born into a French society that is haunted by the colonial past and has carried old colonial relations over to its view of contemporary postcolonial immigrants. Indeed, the film suggests that Naïma has lived in a state of perpetual exile and precariousness.

Despite the fact that Naïma is in many ways a typical  *beurette*  in France, oppressed by the male members of her family and subjected to male violence, she seems very comfortable with her sexuality and body. In fact, she appears to find liberation in her sexual freedom. However, the film suggests that her intense sexuality might also function as a cover-up for the deep restlessness and suffering she has experienced growing up in France as a second-generation female Maghrebi immigrant. There are multiple scenes in the film in which Naïma is shot through a bottle, the disfigured image of her body confined to a plastic container. When Zano and Naïma board the train after spending the night out in the Spanish flamenco bar, Zano verbally attacks Naïma and accuses her of cheating on him. During the confrontation Naïma is filmed from Zano’s viewpoint, through the bottle that stands between them. Cut to a close-up of her face: we see Naïma crying and frustrated by Zano’s attacks—her reaction suggests that this is not the first time she has experienced male violence. Her distressed face reveals her ambivalence toward her own sexuality, and the image of her body seen through the bottle shows that her sexual freedom is not truly free from the confines of sexist and racist structures. Later in the film, when Zano and Naïma work as fruit pickers in Spain alongside various undocumented migrants, Naïma is again shot through a plastic bottle, this time one hung on the fruit trees to trap flies (see fig. 33). Interestingly, this is the only time Naïma refers to her father by name: “Naïma, daughter of Ahmed Tarhouni, the fly trapper.” Ultimately, the constant emphasis on her body and



sexuality cuts in both ways: it suggests that she is empowered to claim her sexual power yet reduces her to an ethnic and gendered body.



Figure 33

In her analysis of renderings of the postcolonial body in French director Claire Denis's films, Susan Hayward argues that Denis "reveals the multiplicities of the colonial and post-colonial body. More precisely, it is through the colonial/postcolonial body that she explores the transcultural affair that colonialism was and still is" (159). According to Hayward, in her films, Denis proposes a multiple model of postcolonial subjectivity that challenges the objectification of the colonized body "as a single unity and subjectivity whose multiplicities were deliberately dissimulated under [the] Western [Law of the Father] rule" (160). Hayward suggests that such multiplicity faces many problems in expressing itself, as many of the postcolonial characters in Denis's films demonstrate. Hayward's reading of Denis's films resonates with *Exiles*, for Gatlif, too, discloses the physicality or materiality of the postcolonial bodies. In *Exiles*, for example, Gatlif insists on the multiplicity of postcolonial bodies by capturing several uprooted figures from sub-Saharan, Western, and Northern Africa whose bodies bear witness to the varying struggles felt by those affected by (post)colonial power structures. Each belonging to a specific historical and geographic context, these bodies articulate what Stuart Hall defines as the "after-effects" of the colonial (qtd. in Hayward 160).

In this framework, Naïma's body can be read as "the dislocated postcolonial body that can find no sources to restore the erasure of memory (which is the effect of colonialist repression)" (Hayward 160). It seems as though neither France nor Algeria evokes a sense of belonging in her—when they arrive at Algeria, she becomes increasingly distressed as she confesses to Zano that she is a stranger everywhere. Lacking any knowledge of Algerian culture, language, or traditions, Naïma suffers as she finds herself placed in a growing whirl of unfamiliar cultural codes that criticize her lack of appreciation for Algerian traditions.

While Zano reclaims his memories and his family's past in Algiers by visiting their old house, Naïma's homecoming is framed as a bodily response to a loss left undefined in the film. In the penultimate scene, which lasts for more than ten minutes, we see a long night of Sufi dancing meant to heal "wounds and scars on both a physical and spiritual level" (Blum-Reid 7). Before the Sufi ceremony, Naïma is taken to see a woman, who seems to be a spiritual leader of sorts and who tells her that her soul is lost and that she has to find her family and her bearings. Disturbed by these statements, Naïma starts crying and wants to be left alone. This scene is followed by the long final sequence of a Sufi ceremony in which both Naïma and Zano dance. Blum-Reid suggests that "It is through the healing performed by women, Sufi dances, trances, and music, that Naïma goes through a symbolic rebirth and reconnects with the country of her ancestors (7)."<sup>79</sup> As she joins the women's ritual dance, plunging her body into the beat of the Sufi music, Naïma becomes possessed (see fig. 34). Zano supports her as she crouches, shakes, and faints along with the other Algerian women. Ultimately, this final sequence suggests that rather than accepting Algeria as her home, Naïma accepts her own body as her home. Indeed, Naïma seems like she is not emotionally attached to a single territorial space or a specific national or ethnic identity.



Figure 34

*Exiles* explores the ways in which specific forms of colonial violence such as dispossession have been brought to bear on social relations in postcolonial France. The film concerns how the second-generation French Maghrebis relate to Algeria, where previous

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<sup>79</sup> "Sufi ceremony that puts them into a state of trance during which they abandon their bodies to the accelerating beat of the music until they collapse, losing control of their mobility but finally finding relief from the physical urgency that motivates their adventure. The film's narrative concludes with a new awareness of the historical and cultural context that informs their identities. The end of the journey offers a resolution to the anxious soul searching and a ceremonial absorption (and exhaustion) of their physical mobility" (Eleftheriotis 129).

generations had lived before their forced or voluntary migration into France during or after the Algerian War. It exposes the fact that colonial history and Algeria still form a significant aspect of the identity of second and third generation young French Maghrebis. In the film, Gatlif releases its characters from the confines of the *banlieue* and the *métropole* (in which most *beur* films are set) and breaks away from the center-periphery dynamic, making cross-mobility of the second-generation the central trope of the film. Hence, the film does not dwell on the ways its characters relate to French identity; the story separates them from their lives in Paris, employing traveling and mobility to move beyond the discursive ghettos (see Naficy 2001) that emphasize alienation, entrapment, and dislocation. The film follows its protagonists on a journey to Algeria rather than focusing on their experiences of a life of discrimination in the physically and culturally isolated spaces of the French *banlieue*. Investigating the relationship between the children of the diasporic community and their lost homeland, Gatlif's film produces some form of reconciliation on the narrative level by incorporating fragments of the colonial past into present constellations and allowing the characters to work through their past traumas. *Exiles* suggests that contemporary French society needs to come to terms with its Algerian past and reconfigure its relations with today's independent Algeria on an equal platform. Gatlif's use of the road movie genre allows for a spatial and temporal extension that paves the way for an open-ended exploration of the ways that new generations, both in Algeria and in France, who have not experienced colonial violence and decolonization first hand (yet inherited it in different ways), desire to reclaim memories of the lives of their parents and grandparents without reproducing petrified historical relations. Indeed, similar to some of the recent films that explore the second generation's interest in the memories of the colonial French Maghreb, *Exiles* concerns young French Algerian's relation to an unknown "homeland" beyond the borders of France, focusing on cross-border mobility as a quest for an unknown past.

Furthermore, the film depicts mobility and border-crossing not merely as the free mobility of the European subject but as a catalyst for coming to terms with the colonial past and negotiating the incongruence within the heterogeneity of contemporary French/European identities. *Exiles* connects contemporary diverse mobilities to the colonial history, highlighting the importance of the colonial period to contemporary migratory reconstructions. In doing so, it undermines the myth of "invasion" of migrants that prevails in western European politics and media. France appears in this film as expansive, free from spatial delineation of any kind, yet still not inclusive. Furthermore, by foregrounding the concept of exile, "which suggests both geographical displacement and psychological dislocation," the film joins a growing body of postcolonial texts "that seek to give voice to new relationships between place and self which are constructed from the experience of immigration" (Ireland 1).<sup>80</sup>

In conclusion, both *Exiles* and *Hidden* suggest an expansion of Mireille Rosello's notion of performative encounters. These films move beyond interactions between subjects to explore intersections of different media such as film, video, and television (in *Hidden*), as well as diverse spatial configurations resulting from multidirectional mobilities that have great impacts on social relations and on the way we understand and experience history and memory (in *Exiles*). In *Hidden*, the performative encounters between subjects are highly mediated. In other words, they are set in motion by different types of imagery such as drawings, surveillance-like images, and TV footage. In *Exiles*, the trope of journey leads to performative encounters—the intersection of

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<sup>80</sup> Ireland suggests that "Many of the texts written by immigrant authors focus attention on the locational concept of territory and the spatially related notions of home and belonging" (1).

differentiated mobilities during the road trip to Algiers forces the characters to leave their comfort zones. They are made to communicate in different languages and participate in different socialities, for example that of undocumented migrants or Sufis. *Exiles* also concerns an encounter between Algeria and France, a troubled encounter that leads one to think beyond national borders. This performative encounter is inscribed onto the visual space of the film with the use of the road movie genre, which is based on transformative encounters between strangers and between different spatio-temporal registers; for example, the cosmopolitan traveler and the refugee. Both films also raise the issue of generational transmission of traumatic memories. While *Hidden* concerns repressed memories that erupt in the present, the memories at issue in *Exiles* are postmemories. Hence, *Exiles* is not primarily the story of a historical traumatic event. Rather it concerns the delayed effects of traumatic experiences of displacement and exile on the children of diaspora, who did not experience the trauma first-hand but nevertheless inherited it. In that sense, *Exiles* extends the notion of performative encounters to the complex relationships between past and present as well as to the notion of postmemory. Indeed, both *Hidden* and *Exiles* suggest that working through traumatic colonial memories is important in constructing a heterogeneous European space and identity that could generate multiple and diverse performative encounters among different peoples and cultures.

## PART TWO: FRAGMENTED JOURNEYS IN MOVING IMAGE ART

### CHAPTER III

#### Location and Mobility in The Site-specific Video Installation *Küba* (2004)



Figure 1 Lola in Kutluğ Ataman's *Lola + Bilidikid*

Kutluğ Ataman's award winning feature film *Lola + Bilidikid* (Lola and Billy the Kid, 1998) introduces most of its characters in a sequence in which we see a drag cabaret show of a performance group called *Die Gastarbeiterinnen* (female guestworkers) in a dark and smoky bar (see fig. 1, 2).<sup>81</sup> On stage, the performers Scheherazade, Calypso, and Lola, ironically perform the stereotypical role of the victimized female guestworker with a headscarf. In so doing, they subvert the stereotype of the submissive Turkish woman in Germany by reenacting that identity in the form of a stage performance: as hyper-feminine belly dancers, they sing, dance, and interact with the audience very comfortably. The handheld camera places us first on stage with the dancers and then with the audience watching them, which evokes a sense of intimate but also claustrophobic space shared with the characters. As the first film to openly explore queer Turkish

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<sup>81</sup> *Lola and Billy the Kid* won the Teddy Special Jury Award at the Berlin International Film festival and the Best Film Award at New Festival, New York (1999).

German subjects in cinema, *Lola and Billy the Kid* foregrounds the sexual and ethnic diversity of migrants in Germany as well as the multiplicity of the experience of migrancy.<sup>82</sup> Thus the film transgresses essentialist identity politics that assign fixed roles to migrants and natives.



Figure 2 The performance group *Die Gastarbeiterinnen* in *Lola + Bilidikid*

Ataman's own personal and professional trajectory equally defies fixed notions of identity and place. Born in Istanbul in 1961, Ataman studied film in Paris and Los Angeles, and has residences in many cities including Istanbul, Los Angeles, London, Barcelona, and Buenos Aires. As *Lola and Billy the Kid*'s reception in the festival circuit testifies, Ataman has started a successful career as a filmmaker, but following his first video installation *kutlug ataman's semiha b. unplugged* (1997), which was a hit at the Istanbul Biennial of the same year, he has begun to produce works in the domain of contemporary art and since then become one of the best known Turkish artists in the international art world.<sup>83</sup> His works have been presented at prestigious art exhibitions and galleries mainly in the US and Europe (Lebow 58).<sup>84</sup> In that sense,

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<sup>82</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Mennel 2004 and Clark 2006.

<sup>83</sup> Ataman received the Turkish Film Critics Association Best Director, Best Film, and Best Screenplay Awards with his first feature film *Karanlık Sular* (Serpent's Tale, 1993). *İki Genç Kız* (2 Girls, 2005) won the Best Director Award at the Antalya International Film Festival and Istanbul International Film Festival.

<sup>84</sup> Alisa Lebow has documented Ataman's professional trajectory: "His work has been included in some of the best known and arguably most important international exhibitions of the past decade, including *Documenta XI* (2002),

Ataman is part of an increasing number of filmmakers, including Harun Farocki, Atom Egoyan, Peter Greenaway, Isaac Julien, among others, who have begun to produce film and video installations for galleries and museums while continuing to make films for theatrical release. Such cross-pollinations between cinema and art have become widespread as moving image installations gained popularity in contemporary art in the last few decades. Indeed, a growing number of contemporary artists has begun to use the moving image as the basis of their artistic works, producing darkened spaces within the white cube of the museum or gallery (see Leighton 2008 and Newman 2009). The increasing demand for the moving image in artistic venues seems to have encouraged an exploration of the spatial aspects of moving image works, emphasizing multiple screens, alternative forms for projection, and perambulatory spectatorship.<sup>85</sup>

Kutluğ Ataman's cinematic and artistic works are key to my larger project in the sense that they serve as a link between the two sections of my dissertation: *Transnational Mobilities in Cinema* and *Fragmented Journeys in Moving Image Art*. It is worth noting that even though Ataman did not personally experience migration to Germany, his film *Lola and Billy the Kid* has been discussed within the frame of a new wave of Turkish German filmmaking that has flourished since the mid 1990s, as explored in the first chapter of this dissertation.<sup>86</sup> The significant role assigned to *Lola and Billy the Kid* in this context encourages one to formulate new ways to approach migrant and diasporic cinema, moving beyond ethnic or territorial definitions that fail to account for multidimensional mobilities and moorings of today's global age (see Hannam et al. 2006). In fact, *Lola and Billy the Kid* aptly illustrates Ataman's artistic and political concerns that pervade his cinematic and video works: the issue of mobility and marginality, performative and constructed nature of identities, and idiosyncratic senses of places. Ataman's multichannel, sculptural installations expand these issues to include experimentation with different forms of presentation and exhibition as well as incorporation of the viewer and the site as integral parts of the artwork.

In this chapter, I will focus on Ataman's forty-channel video installation *Küba* (2004) in relation to the issues of migration, displacement, and urban marginality as well as embodied spectatorship and site specificity (see fig. 3). In *Küba*, as in *Lola and Billy the Kid*, Ataman underscores both particular individuals and the collective. He subverts essentialist notions of identity politics through embodied spectatorship and the extended duration of the installation, challenging conventional forms of cinematic narrative. Furthermore, he offers countermodels to the stereotypical representation of "others" by incorporating traditional forms of political cinema such as documentary and social-realist filmmaking.

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the *Berlin Biennale* (2001), the forty-eighth *Venice Biennale* (1999), *Manifesta 2* (1998), and many more. In New York City, he is represented by Lehmann-Maupin, a well-placed Chelsea gallery, where he has had nearly one major show every year, each involving multi-channel video projections of his documentary images. He is also represented by high-profile galleries in Chicago, Sydney, and Istanbul" (58).

<sup>85</sup> Since the 1990s, several exhibitions explored the relationship between art and cinema, including "Spellbound: Art and Film" at the Hayward Gallery (1996), "*Cinéma Cinéma*: Contemporary Art and the Cinematic Experience" at Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum (1999), and "Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary after Film" at ZKM Karlsruhe (2002).

<sup>86</sup> See Chapter I of this dissertation for a discussion of the shift in Turkish German cinema from the earlier stereotypical representations of the victimized migrant to a new cinematic language that involves transnational and transcultural encounters and multiple border crossings. Ayşe Polat, Fatih Akın, Aysun Bademsoy, Yüksel Yavuz, Seyhan Derin, Thomas Arslan, among others, belong to this new wave of filmmaking that fosters a hybrid and plural Turkish German cultural identity (Göktürk 2002 and Mennel 2002).



Figure 3 *Küba*, installation view, London

*Küba* needs to be contextualized in relation to Ataman's artistic experiments with the installation format and site specificity. Ataman's single-screen projection *semiha b. unplugged* (see fig. 4), which launched his career as an artist, is an eight-hour video that features an interview with Semiha Berksoy, an octogenarian Turkish opera singer whose life story was enmeshed with modern Turkish history, which the video reconstructs from her own personal perspective. Following his first video work, extended duration and open-ended monologues with no clear beginning or end have become Ataman's signatures in his installations. For example, *semiha b. unplugged*'s 465 minutes of almost uninterrupted monologue deliberately subverts the standards of conventional narrative cinema despite its allusions to documentary. Like most of Ataman's video works, *semiha b. unplugged* offers multivalent expressions of experience and narrative of a self that expand the notion of documentary into fiction through storytelling. And Berksoy's monumental tale, staged within the intimacy of the diva's Istanbul bedroom, allows viewers to create their own versions of the piece based upon fragments they watch in the exhibition site for, in Ataman's words, "it's impossible to watch" the piece in its totality. To explain the extended duration of the piece, Ataman states that *semiha b. unplugged* "is about life, it could be as long as one wishes. I very well remember thinking this: Make it impossible to watch. Because in eight hours, you at least have to pee or you get hungry, it's impossible to



watch it in one go. Like a metaphor for life. You come and go, and continue watching from another bit” (qtd. in Baykal 25).



Figure 4 kutlug ataman's *semiha b. unplugged*, installation view

With his four-screen installation, *Women Who Wear Wigs/ WWWW* (1999) that premiered at the Venice Biennale, Ataman has started using multiple screens in different scales and positions, featuring multiple stories simultaneously in sculptural forms (Baykal 49). In *WWWW*, Ataman uses the wig as a link holding together the stories of four different women: a revolutionary who spent several years in hiding, a journalist who lost her hair following chemotherapy, an activist in the Turkish transvestite and transsexual community, and an unnamed university student who wore a wig to cover her headscarf to be able to circumvent its ban at institutions of higher education. In *WWWW*, Ataman juxtaposes four screens next to each other to allow viewers to be able to experience four different stories simultaneously (see fig. 5). Indeed, in his later work, Ataman has experimented with the spatialization of narratives using the particular spatial characteristics of a chosen site, the physical and psychological involvement of the viewer, as well as the practice of montage in space. For example, in *The 4 Seasons of Veronica Read* (2002), premiered at *documenta 11* at Kassel, Ataman employs four transparent screens suspended from the ceiling placed in such a way that they make up a small, square room-like space in a sculptural form (see fig. 6). The installation features Veronica M. Read, an English woman who has devoted her life to her passion for the flower amaryllis. Composed of four one-hour films, the installation depicts the various stages of the plant, from the bulb to the grown plant. Similar to *WWWW*, the four videos of *The 4 Seasons of Veronica Read* are shown simultaneously, aiming to engulf the viewer.



Figure 5 *Women Who Wear Wigs/ WWWW*, installation view



Figure 6 *The 4 Seasons of Veronica Read*, installation view

While Ataman's earlier works center on eccentric individuals such as an aging opera diva or an English woman who devoted her life to her passion for the flower amaryllis, his more recent works *Küba* (2004) and *Paradise* (2006) are multi-character installations that evoke notions of collective identity and belonging. Ataman's award winning video installation *Küba* (2004), commissioned by London-based arts organization Artangel, is a forty channel video installation based on interviews in a *gecekondu* (shantytown)<sup>87</sup> neighborhood of Istanbul populated primarily by migrants from southeastern Turkey.<sup>88</sup> The installation addresses issues of forced migration and the spatial construction of displacement and confinement in Istanbul's urban space. For his video installation, Ataman spent two years filming interviews with residents of the shantytown of the same name in Istanbul. Most residents of the Küba are Kurdish and have migrated from eastern and southeastern Turkey since the early 1960s. Küba has become a shantytown of nearly three hundred households on the outskirts of Istanbul. The neighborhood "is one of more than a handful of neighborhoods notable for its revolutionary leftist sympathies—note the name, which is, of course, Turkish for Cuba" (Lebow 61). Ataman convinced Küba residents to take part in his work and gained access into their private spaces through the mediation of an ex-Küba resident who spoke of Ataman as a trustworthy person (Horrigan 2004: 3). In this regard, Ataman's site-based practice is not so different from the use of "non-studio locations for film and TV production both of which require the cooperation and material support of various civic agencies and authorities for their execution" (Connolly 112). Ataman promised his subjects not to show the piece in Turkey because many of the stories refer to conflicts in the neighborhood, state violence, criminal activities, and sexual and domestic violence that might cause trouble for the interviewees if they became public knowledge. Thus the subjects presented in *Küba* were not the intended audience of the piece.

In the installation, Ataman incorporates video-based images into a sculptural *mise en scène* and creates a virtual neighborhood that consists of forty talking heads, articulating their own descriptions of alternative community. Ataman presents these interviews on forty secondhand TV monitors that are placed on used tables with forty mismatched armchairs. The installation allows viewers to move among the monitors, piecing together the videos according to their own choices in the exhibition site. Elizabeth Cowie points out that the multiscreen format renders the piece "inherently unstable, unavailable as identically repeatable," as each viewer's experience is personal and unique (127). Indeed, *Küba* calls for an engagement with the extended duration of the work, proposing an active and participatory form of spectatorship that demands constitutive relations from viewers. In so doing, it makes the viewer and the experience of viewing central to the work.

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<sup>87</sup> *Gecekondu* means "built-over-night" and it is a term used to refer to shanties in Turkey in general. It is similar to the French *bidonvilles* or the English squatter or shantytown, although each one has its own particularities depending on the social context.

<sup>88</sup> *Küba* won the prestigious Carnegie Prize in 2004.



Figure 7 *Küba*, installation view, Stuttgart

*Küba* has been presented in various sites, each time producing a new mode of experiencing the work: in museums, in a derelict postal sorting office in London, in a courtroom in Southampton, in a passenger ferry terminal in Sydney, and on a container barge traveling along the Danube River. The spatial articulation and meaning of *Küba* has changed in relation to the architectural, historical, and cultural specificity of each location that housed the virtual neighborhood, and the work has taken on the memories of the sites of its display. For instance, Stuttgart's Central Station where *Küba* was exhibited in old railway cars was a place where many of Germany's "migrant laborers from Turkey first arrived on their long journey" (Halle 46). The Central Station was one of the main places of arrival for guestworkers from the 1960s onwards. In this particular site-specific constellation, Istanbul's *gecekondu* neighborhood *Küba* expanded to encompass the history of guestworkers who migrated to Germany in the 1960s and 1970s—guestworkers whose descendants make up a large number of European citizens today. In the Central Station, the sign *Küba*, showing the way to the old railway cars placed on Track 1A, brought the viewer to an unfamiliar yet very intimate zone of Kurdish stories mainly told in broken Turkish with English subtitles. (Nevertheless, a viewer who does not speak Turkish would not realize that the Turkish is broken.) The installation does not mark its subjects ethnically but most of the stories provide various references to the subjects' Kurdish identity and their experience of migrancy. In the railway cars, viewers could sit on a seat to watch a story unfolding on a TV monitor also placed on a passenger seat; they could enter into a cloistered

compartment in which the movement of other passing trains on nearby tracks was highly felt. Indeed, the installation invited not only art audiences who enter the station to see the work but also travelers and other people who use the space for various purposes. In the Stuttgart exhibition, in particular, the installation underscored the ways in which migrant experiences are conditioned by travel networks, infrastructures, and transport technologies, and produced a palimpsestic spatiotemporality marked by various migratory routes. Hence, it encouraged the viewers to question the issues of class and social mobility indicated by the forms of travel embedded in the site.



Figure 8 Sorting Office, London

In London, *Küba* was presented on the enormous upper floor of a derelict postal sorting office with additional electric heaters due to the cold weather (see fig. 9, 10). The worn-out, wooden floor and broken windows of the postal office provided a stage for the tales of *Küba* residents, further emphasizing their vulnerable condition in urban space. To see the exhibition, the viewer went through seemingly unsafe staircases, following arrows that led to the exhibition

site; “the circuitous journey echoe[d] the journey to the obscure, out-of-the-way, Istanbul slum that is Küba” (Lebow 61). As film scholar Randall Halle points out, each installation of *Küba* “took on a different quality, mirroring differently various aspects of ghettoization/community building” (47).



Figure 9 Sorting Office, London

Thus *Küba*, as a site-oriented artwork navigating various spaces, not only indicates a shift from static notions of time and space toward a coexistence of multiple spaces and histories, but also relates to a notion of site specificity that indicates “a shift in visual art toward the conceptual and performative contexts in which the *idea* of the work is defined” (Kaye 183, original emphasis). Constructing a dialogic relationship between the artwork and its site, *Küba* blurs the boundaries between material and cinematic spaces and calls into question what Nick Kaye defines as “the art object’s material integrity and the very possibility of establishing a work’s

proper location” (183). While remaining integrally linked to its place of “origin,” the shantytown, Ataman’s *Küba* has undergone a process of reconstruction in each installation, persistently rearticulating the relationship between moving images and the site of their display. Indeed each installation of *Küba* has taken into account new factors encountered in each site such as architecture, geography, and the various histories attached to a particular site.<sup>89</sup>



Figure 10 *Küba*, installation view, London

It is worth exploring the notion of site specificity in art to understand Ataman’s mobilization of site as an integral part of his video installation *Küba*. Installation and site specificity—two closely interrelated terms—appear to be emblematic of Ataman’s work in general. The terms site-specific art and installation often entangle with various post-1960s artistic practices “such as fluxus, land art, minimalism, video art, performance, conceptual art, and process, all of which share an interest in issues such as site specificity, participation, institutional critique, temporality, and ephemerality. Installation artworks are participatory sculptural environments in which the viewer’s spatial and temporal experience with the exhibition space and the various objects within it forms part of the work itself” (Mondloch xiii). In a similar vein, performance artist Paul Couillard uses the term “site-responsive” to define

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<sup>89</sup> As Ataman states, “the moment art moves outside of the museum space, then it starts a conversation or even a fight with its surroundings because everything around it, but mostly space and architecture, has an existing language. Therefore, this language, and *Küba*’s language, will inevitably converse or clash in order to make a new discourse. Conversation or clash, I am interested in public art only in this way... it’s theater in the end” (qtd. in Horrigan 2004: 4)

works “specifically designed to respond to the particular features of the location in which it is presented. In site-responsive work, aspects of the location become integral to the overall form and content of a performance, making it impossible to separate the ‘location’ from the ‘work’” (32).

In many ways, these developments were mainly activated by Minimalism and its critical legacy. Site specificity first emerged as a critical term in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Drawing upon and expanding from Minimalism’s exploration of the embodied relationship between the viewer and the site during 1960s, site-specific art set out to investigate multiple relationships between artwork, site/context, exhibition, and the audience.<sup>90</sup> In her “genealogy of site-specificity,” art historian Miwon Kwon identifies three paradigms relating to artists’ engagement with site and debates on site specificity: phenomenological, institutional, and discursive.<sup>91</sup> In the early site-specific work that emerged out of Minimalism, the “art object or event . . . was to be singularly and multiply experienced in the here and now through the bodily presence of each viewing subject, in a sensory immediacy of spatial extension and temporal duration” (Kwon 2002: 11). This experiential understanding of the site proved to be insufficient as Conceptualists began to understand site and spectatorship as socially and institutionally constituted. Artists such as Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, Robert Smithson, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles consequently investigated the institutional frame of the gallery as intersecting with larger cultural and economic forces, producing what Kwon defines as “institutional site specificity.” Furthermore, institutional critique emphasized the social matrix of class, race, gender and sexuality of the viewing subject, rather than positioning the viewer merely as a physical, corporeal body.

In contrast, more recent site-oriented and process-based works have shifted the focus of site specificity from an institutional setting to a larger social, cultural, and discursive realm, revolving around sociopolitical issues such as ecological crisis, homelessness, AIDS, homophobia, racism, and sexism as in various ways as engaged in the works of Krzysztof Wodiczko, Gran Fury, Renee Green, Tom Burr, Mark Dion, Christian Muller, Ursula Biemann, and Andrea Fraser, among others.<sup>92</sup> According to Kwon, the emphasis on the actual site was discarded in the 1980s and 1990s in favor of physical mobility of the artists according to art-market interests. For James Meyer, this new conceptualization of site reflects the new parameters fostered by the global reach of capitalism, instantaneous satellite transmission, the Internet, and unprecedented mobility and migration (32). Meyer charts a shift from the earlier model of “literal site” of the 1960s and 1970s to a more recent form of “functional site,” which

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<sup>90</sup> Minimalist art not only evoked the site of artistic display as a material support for the art object but also incorporated site into the artwork itself. In other words, Minimalism understood the site of display as essential to the art object itself, blurring the boundaries between the work and the site. Thus it transformed the viewers’ experience of the work into an embodied durational engagement; the viewers were encouraged to take their time to fully grasp the work by being implicated in its particular position within the gallery.

<sup>91</sup> Kwon recognizes that these paradigms are not necessarily discrete stages along a linear historical process, but also that they can be present or absent to varying degrees in any single work of art. These are competing and overlapping categories in both their past and present contexts.

<sup>92</sup> Kwon explains, “Dispersed across much broader cultural, social, and discursive fields, and organized intertextually through the nomadic movement of the artist—operating more like an itinerary than a map—the site can now be as various as a billboard, an artistic genre, a disenfranchised community, an institutional framework, a magazine page, a social cause, or a political debate. It can be literal like a street corner or virtual like a theoretical concept” (3).



foregrounds site as a “process, an operation occurring between sites, a mapping of institutional and textual filiations and the bodies that move between them (the artist above all)” (25). Functional site, with its temporal existence, operates through “a chain of meanings and imbricated histories: a place marked and swiftly abandoned” (25). In this framework, site-specific video installations are especially evocative in that as experiential sculptures they stage temporal and spatialized encounters between viewing subjects, sites, and screens.



Figure 11 *Küba*, installation view

In the context of sculptural works with moving images and sound, Catherine Fowler’s notion of “gallery films” helps to articulate the altered relationship of “in-frame” and “out-of-frame” in video installations. Fowler explores “the continuum between the in-frame (the content of the image and issues of film style) and the out-of-frame (the space within which that image is placed to be viewed)” in order to understand “how context might affect both the content of the

images and the viewing experience” (326). As Fowler suggests, the migration of moving images from theaters to galleries has produced new forms of spectatorship that alter the viewing experience and meaning of images by allowing the viewer to “perambulate, choose when to enter or exit, where to stand, sit or walk, and even (with multi-screen work) where to look” (329). To take these arguments a step further, I suggest that an engagement with the specificity (historical, cultural, geographical, or architectural) of the site of display and how it informs the viewer’s experience of images is crucial in understanding embodied spectatorship in context rather than framing it through an abstract notion of spectating or site. The installation *Küba* is able to evoke specificity of time and space through its geographical, social, and personal context as well as through “[its] architectural space, organizing the spectator’s access to mobility and stillness” (Cowie 124). The sites temporarily occupied by *Küba* become its constitutive parts with their architectural and sociohistorical specificity, conjuring up unique forms of engagement with the work (see fig. 11, 12).<sup>93</sup>



Figure 12 *Küba*, installation view, London

The stories told by the residents of *Küba* present their neighborhood as an exclusive island in the city—politically charged environment of displacement, poverty, and alternative community formation. In that sense, the installation belongs to a growing body of site-specific

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<sup>93</sup> Hence, *Küba* attests to Jonathan Crary’s statement that “contemporary installation art involves the creation of unanticipated spaces and environments in which our visual and intellectual habits are challenged and disrupted” (7).

art practices that can help, as Kwon argues, to “provide support for greater visibility of marginalized groups, and initiate the re(dis)covery of ‘minor’ places so far ignored by the dominant culture” (1997: 105). In the installation, the medium close-up images of various people telling their stories in their living rooms produce the sense of place and of location. The staged domestic environment of the installation—the mismatched, secondhand TV monitors and chairs—foreground the so-called “authenticity” of Ataman’s subjects because these secondhand objects seem to possess an indexical relation to the sites and subjects presented in the work. In fact, one might find them in the houses of individuals portrayed in *Küba*. As documentary filmmaker Alisa Lebow observes, “Ataman recreates the atmosphere of a neighborhood, not by faithfully reconstructing its streets and structures, but by inviting us into the residents’ living rooms for a *sohbet*, an informal chat” (60). Kwon argues that site specificity and ethnographic methods in this context can be mobilized to provide “distinction of place and uniqueness of locational identity, highly seductive qualities in the promotion of towns and cities within the competitive restructuring of the global economic hierarchy” (1997: 106). Indeed, in contemporary art, there has been a strongly pronounced interest in ethnographic methods that involve marginal or peripheral places and subjects, an interest that often turns the “other” or the hybrid into assets of cultural economy. In his 1996 essay “The Artist as Ethnographer,” art historian Hal Foster has identified an “ethnographic turn” in contemporary art—a system of artistic production based on investigations of the cultural “other.” Focusing mainly on site-specific art practices, he outlined a variety of problems that arise when art tries to follow the ethnographic methods without any ethnographic training or clear ethical framework. Such quasi-ethnographic practices might reify cultural and ethnic differences, colonizing these marginal spaces and turning them into global commodities.

*Küba* might be considered a quasi-ethnographic artwork, for Ataman has used interviews with sociopolitically and economically disenfranchised subjects as the basis of his installation. Additionally, Lebow sees the extended duration of Ataman’s installation as an obstacle in conveying the politically charged issues raised by these interviews. She argues that “the dehistoricized context of Western exhibition sites” might reduce *Küba*’s stories into “mini-soap opera[s] of the poor and dispossessed” (64). Lebow further suggests that “Without knowledge of the brutal military repression of revolutionary movements in Turkey in the 1970s and 1980s, and the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) rebellions and subsequent military ‘operations’ in the southeast of Turkey in the 1990s that have driven thousands out of their villages, the reasons for the apparent anti-social behavior of the *Küba* residents can be all too readily reduced to a vague uncomprehending impression of Third World poverty and lawlessness” (65). I agree with Lebow’s criticism that the main audience of the work, namely the Western art world, might fail to receive the politically charged content of the interviews. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that in *Küba*, the ethnographic gaze, initially foregrounded by the interview format, and the sculptural component’s impression of “authenticity” is undermined by the extended duration of the interviews. It would be impossible to view *Küba* in its totality because the forty screens show more than thirty hours of interviews. Unlike many ethnographic documentaries or commercial films that tend to present “authentic” or “exotic” Others to the first world audiences, *Küba* constantly reminds us that visual access is not a given. The work demands an embodied durational engagement from viewers who have to take their time to grasp the work, to explore the multidimensional nature of the persons portrayed as well as the work’s relationship to its particular site. In so doing, *Küba* refuses its viewers the satisfaction offered by mainstream news

images of disenfranchised people from a third world city. Furthermore, with its open-ended stories running in loops, *Küba* offers a circular structure in which the linear time loses its meaning. Hence, the structural framing of this video installation prevents viewers from treating the residents of Küba as fully accessible or consumable subjects. In that frame, Ataman's *Küba* subverts the essentialist and homogenizing aspects of identity politics. As Iritt Rogoff insists, *Küba* "is not a body of information about a place, or a demographic, it is not social or cultural history ... If we were to leave *Küba* with some notion that we knew something about Kurdish migrants into Istanbul or about Ghettoized ethnic communities—we would have failed it" (2006: 35).

*Küba*, as most of Ataman's work, alludes to documentary and social-realist filmmaking (which has been prevalent in migrant and diasporic cinema) by depicting real characters in their original locations and filming unscripted and improvised narration of the characters with minimum direction of the filmmaker, whose presence is felt through the sudden and small movements of the handheld camera (see also Baykal 9). *Küba* incorporates some elements of what might be seen as conventional documentary methods such as location shooting and interviews. Sometimes we hear Ataman's voice asking very brief questions from behind the camera but we also see characters addressing him directly by asking a question or even threatening him. In an interview, Bozo, a middle-aged Küba resident, tells Ataman: "Tomorrow I'll say, 'Kutluğ, let's send Hakan [Bozo's son] to school.' You won't send him to school? I will take out a gun and shoot you. You think I wouldn't? I would. Someone is going to make it out of Küba. No one has, but he will." And in the video, we do not hear Ataman's reaction to Bozo's threat. Bill Horrigan defines Ataman's method as an "ethic of self-effacement" (2003: 25) and points out elsewhere: "Ataman is an artist whose medium is people's lives that, for him and for us, take form in the words they produce. As that artist, he accords them respect by submitting to the time it takes to listen to them speak. The contract he extends to his viewers requests that they do no less" (2004: 1). Ataman's handheld camera, like Ataman himself, does not react to its surroundings—it stays focused on the character and never zooms out or provides an establishing shot that would help the viewer locate the person within a larger picture. The camera "never moves significantly but simply nervously wavers a couple of centimeters to and fro within the same limited visual field, emphasizing the feeling of confinement and frustrating immobility" (Gade 8). There is no voice-over narration that addresses the viewer directly or renders the images mere illustrations of what the authoritative commentary describes. Thus Ataman's videos defy notions of objectivity and truth foregrounded by conventional documentary filmmaking that claims to be presenting first-hand experience and reality.

Ataman's approach suggests that the artist is not interested in replicating or reproducing the experience of the everyday as lived in a socioeconomically and culturally marginal site of Istanbul. Rather, he is intrigued by the representation and remaking of place in the act of storytelling and narration. The aesthetic and political efficacy of *Küba* lies in the ways in which it generates countermodels to the dehumanizing representations of the so-called "others" and offers a strong political comment on the nature of documentation and information. It utilizes storytelling and narrative to refer to very concrete personal and social matters and takes the viewer to an unfamiliar zone of ignored or silenced communal memory of poverty and violence. Hence, the composition of the installation emphasizes the contact with disenfranchised subjects that are neither victimized nor idealized by the artist. Furthermore, by foregrounding storytelling, *Küba* defamiliarizes the banal activity of TV viewing—one of the most dominant cultural

experiences, which effects viewing conditions and expectations for today's viewers. In fact the installation demands an engagement with the slowness and introspection of the activity of storytelling and listening.

### **Istanbul: A City of Migration**

Most stories of *Küba*'s residents concern issues of immigration and mobility as well as social and economic marginalization in Istanbul's urban space. They invoke cultural conflicts concerning the rights of ethnic and religious minorities as well as the rifts between the urban population and the new migrants to the big city. Thereby, *Küba* portrays Istanbul as a "heavily trafficked intersection ... instead of a circumscribed territory," and evokes the city as a place "crisscrossed by the movement and multiple migrations of people, sometimes voluntary, but often economically propelled and politically coerced" (Conquergood 145). The representation of Istanbul as a city of migration is not unfamiliar to viewers of Turkish cinema, which has addressed internal (rural to urban) mass migrations, urban decay, and class conflicts since the 1950s.<sup>94</sup> As Ipek Türeli aptly explains: "Migration was formative in the rapid growth of Istanbul in the second half of the twentieth century so much so that contemporary Istanbul can be considered a 'city of migrants' with most of its adult population born elsewhere in Turkey. Although no longer the driving force of the city's population growth, migration remains central to cultural imagination" (144).

The second half of the century witnessed economically driven, massive rural to urban migration in Turkey, followed by concentration of migrants on the outskirts of major cities who built their own houses and villages known as *gecekondu* areas or squatter settlements. These rural to urban migrants expanded the city geographically and created a more polarized class structure. Internal migration movements have changed in the 1990s. Since the mid-1980s, the civil war between Kurdish militants (PKK) and the Turkish army in the southeastern region of Turkey caused displacement of rural people from their regular places of residence. Kurds constituted the majority of internally displaced people whose villages had been burned down or evacuated due to armed conflict (Yıldız 2005). The forced migration has had a profound effect on urban areas, developing various subcultures and changing the urban texture of Istanbul.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, since its establishment, the neighborhood *Küba* "has witnessed two coup d'états and their long lasting effects on the social structure of Turkey, first in 1971 and then in 1980. The drastic and painful socioeconomic changes corresponding to the globalization and neo-liberal restructuring of the country gave rise also to the emergence of new lumpen subcultures and life styles prevalent especially in the lower classes populated in the deprived outskirts of

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<sup>94</sup> Türeli refers to Halit Refiğ's *Gurbet Kuşları* (Birds of Exile, 1964) and Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Uzak* (Distant, 2003) as "the earliest and latest most well-known examples of internal (rural-to-urban) migration films" (144).

<sup>95</sup> As Anna Secor reports, "Istanbul has over 12 million inhabitants, approximately 60 percent of whom were born elsewhere [State Institute of Statistics 1993]. Of the almost one-quarter million rural-urban migrants Istanbul absorbs each year, many are economic and political refugees from the southeast, where the ongoing conflict between the state and the PKK (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*—Kurdistan Workers' Party), a Marxist-Leninist Kurdish separatist movement that gained ground in the late 1980s, has not only intensified economically motivated rural to urban migration, but at times led to the forced migration of whole villages. The Human Rights Association estimates that 2 to 3 million people have been internally displaced as a result of the conflict [Kirisci 1998]. According to a report prepared by a committee of the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 2001, the state's security forces have evacuated almost 3,000 villages and hamlets. The official, undoubtedly low, estimate is that 400,000 were displaced in these operations" (353-4).

Istanbul, which in turn has created their own rescued, impenetrable zones where poverty, unemployment, drug addiction, petty crimes and street fighting is abundant, and each member is considered to be a potential criminal by the authorities” (Baykal 72). In fact, Küba is part of this fast social collapse that has pushed many to the margins of society.

Indeed, the interviews in Ataman’s installation evoke the changing cityscape of Istanbul as a result of forced or voluntary migration. We learn from the individual interviews with Küba residents presented on TV monitors that the city authorities destroyed parts of Küba several times due to the illegal status of households that accommodate the poor, unemployed, criminals, and drug addicts. But each time, the community replaced the demolished houses overnight. In the installation, a Küba resident, Arife, recounts: “When they wrecked houses, we’d get together and built it again in one night. People gave cement, bricks, and other materials. By morning, we’d have it done” (*gecekondu* literally means “built-over-night”). After 1984, when the Turkish government declared a state of emergency in the southeast, thousands of Kurds fled to the cities. In the installation *Küba*, Dilşah talks about the hardness of life for Kurdish people in Istanbul and not knowing much Turkish when she married her uncle’s son. Another resident Fevzi remembers his village in the southeast: “When I was in the village . . . the soldiers were pursuing the PKK [Kurdistan Workers’ Party], the PKK passed through our village. The soldiers came into the village too. With the intention of protecting the animals, the villagers fired a few shots, fearing that there might be a wolf. Then the soldiers start shooting at them, left and right, at the tents and so forth.” Makbule tells about her longing for her land in the southeast, and how she wrote a petition in Kurdish, in her native language, and got arrested for “terrorism.” “I want my language. I want education. I want to read,” she says, articulating her rights in the idioms available to her. Muzaffer complains about not having proper education in the east. He says that the people who come to his coffeehouse speak in broken Turkish: “We have a coffeehouse. Ninety percent of the customers are unemployed Kurds. And we always speak Turkish. Poor and broken Turkish. If we spoke Kurdish we’d be more at ease, we could communicate more . . . We are afraid to speak Kurdish. There are constant raids, constant complaints, constant prohibition.”

The stories in Ataman’s installation suggest that what unites Küba residents is the shared experience of discrimination, poverty, and urban segregation—not their ethnicity, religious beliefs or political views. Ataman states, “Living in Küba—above all else—defines their sense of identity, unique in the sense that it has no political, ethnic, gender, religious or national determination. If you are from Küba then that’s enough . . . Küba is first and foremost a state of mind. This consciousness etched in childhood and constructed through adult life is more important than religion, or origin” (qtd. in Horrigan 2004: 3). The installation evokes the shantytown Küba as an urban myth (no one really knows where it is), an illegal settlement located somewhere on the outskirts of Istanbul. Küba exists not in official records but in the imagination of people who do not occupy the secure place of citizenship. Bahri informs us in the installation: “They named this place Küba. To tell the truth, I don’t know this name. Who named it, why? How? I really don’t know.” Yet Zübeyde provides another explanation: “I don’t know why they call it Küba. There was a film once on television, I remember. Wasn’t there? There was a film. A film about Cuba. A poor place where there were a lot of fights. Because of that film, the young people, they spread that name around and it stuck.” A very young Küba resident Arafat says: “It’s a nice neighborhood. When you are from Küba, you look and act bigger. When you go places, people don’t dare to bother you. ‘I’ll beat you up,’ he says, ‘I’m from Küba. If you mess with me, I have a lot of people behind me.’” The stories of *Küba* propose a

postnational basis of collective identification, one based upon the construction of a culture of non-belonging, exclusion, and resistance to authority within common experiences of displacement, violence, and poverty.

Despite such strong political statements of Küba residents in the installation, in his interviews, Ataman insists that *Küba* is not an overtly political artwork about the Kurdish minority or urban poverty in Turkey. Rather than reconstructing the specific suburban area in Istanbul, Ataman attempts to create an imaginary place that could be anywhere in the world, that could be defined not as a real, territorially bounded geographical location but as a metaphor, as a state of mind. Bill Horrigan suggests, “what matters to Ataman are ‘alien narratives coming into an alien city and mixing with it.’ Village by village, legally and illegally, Turkey is absorbed into the European union” (2004: 4). Hence, for Ataman, *Küba* is about various articulations of a precarious collective identity and resistance to authority that could be found on the edges of any major city. Ataman highlights the creation of a defiant collective identity rather than the historical and sociocultural context of the stories. But this attempt to downplay the specificity of *Küba* becomes difficult when the weight of the individual stories that involve civil war, the state of emergency, or military coups as well as poverty and domestic and sexual violence exert their own pressure on the work.

When we think of the Küba residents in the larger context of European mobilities and the question of the borders of the European Union, we realize that Küba’s story is not new. Ataman brings *Küba*’s stories into an interpretive arrangement with the long tradition of labor migration but also with the current dynamics of undocumented migration and urban segregation (Küba residents might be seen as potential “illegal” migrants by the European Union). The intertwined stories of a mobility that stretches toward Europe include Turkish German labor migration and the increasing anti-immigration sentiments both in Turkey and Europe, and do not only belong to the private lives of a group of shantytown people. The stories of *Küba* and the installation placed in specific sites in Europe question what it means to belong to a European space and who has access to its collective. As a site-specific video installation, *Küba* performs material and symbolic interventions into various public and private spaces, and it locates the metropolitan city as a place where belonging, the right to be in the world, is negotiated.

Even though Ataman’s *Küba* does not examine the sociohistorical and the political background of the neighborhood in relation to the production of illegality in Europe, it taps into the issue of “unwanted” foreigners and “exotic” others that are defined as “invaders” in mainstream discourses on migration. The next two chapters take these issues much further by focusing on two video works that investigate “illegal” migration to Europe and the production of illegality and deportability within and beyond European borders. The video essay *Sudeuropa* (2005-7) by Raphaël Cuomo and Maria Iorio focuses on the island of Lampedusa, which has become an icon of “illegal” migration in the media in recent years. Ursula Biemann’s *Sahara Chronicle* expands *Sudeuropa*’s focus on an island in southern Europe into a larger geography encompassing North, West, and sub-Saharan Africa. Biemann documents complex infrastructures and networks of mobility across various screens, monitors, and projections in the gallery space. In doing so, she attempts to draw parallels between the highly fragmented and diverse routes of migrants and the fractured installation format in the gallery. Unlike Ataman’s emphasis on creating an abstract sense of defiant collective identity in *Küba*, Cuomo-Iorio and Biemann evoke specific sociohistorical and geopolitical contexts in their works. They articulate the political goals underlying their artistic practices; they criticize media’s dehistoricizing and

dehumanizing representation of migrants as “invaders” by providing alternative images of migrancy. Mobilizing art forms such as video essay and multichannel installation, they attempt to underscore the ways in which European socioeconomic and political structures and non-European migratory flows are interdependent and mutually constitutive.



## CHAPTER IV

### Heterotopic Intersections of Tourism and Undocumented Migration in Southern Europe: The Video Essay *Sudeuropa* (2005-7)

*The Mediterranean is becoming a Solid Sea. A territory plowed by predetermined routes, unsurpassable boundaries and subdivided into specialized and strictly regulated bands of water. A solid space crossed at different depths and with different vectors by clearly distinct fluxes of people, goods, information, and money. Those who enter into the Mediterranean today have to acquire an exacerbated identity, a “costume” that will not abandon them until the end of their journey across the water. Clandestine immigrants, cruise-ship tourists, armed forces, fisherman, sailors, submarine and rig engineers cross the Mediterranean waters everyday without communicating and often without even noticing each other; regimented in their own identities and constricted with their prefixed courses.<sup>96</sup>*

—Solid Sea by Multiplicity



Figure 1

<sup>96</sup> Multiplicity’s statement in the catalogue of the curatorial project *Geography and the Politics of Mobility* (70). Based in Milan, Multiplicity is a network of artists, architects, scholars, and filmmakers focusing on issues of territorial transformations, urbanism, and visual culture. *Solid Sea*, presented as a multi-media installation in art spaces, is a multi-disciplinary research project about the recent geopolitical transformations in the Mediterranean.

A static camera pointed out the window of a moving car slowly pans the fence installed around a garbage site on Lampedusa, the Sicilian island marking Europe's southernmost border. The camera's mechanical gaze takes in wooden boats of immigrants from Libya or Tunisia dumped by the coast guards after migrant interceptions (see fig. 1). These abandoned boats of various sizes evoke a sense of rejection and isolation; their crumbling forms constitute a material trace of past sea journeys, emphasizing the tension between hopeless stasis and potential mobility. A voice-over, delivered by a playful and self-reflexive Italian male speaker, explains that the boats at this "hidden" dump are shredded and turned into dust, which is then shipped to a factory in Northern Italy and transformed into furniture—so one might someday find oneself sitting on a chair made from vessels that have carried now detained or deported migrants. As the camera surveys this fenced boat cemetery, the narration shifts to a female voice, quoting a woman who has witnessed the deportation of a group of migrants and refugees: "They put them in groups. They get ready to exit but before leaving the line is cut. . . . They have tied their wrists together two by two. . . . They have tied their wrists as if they were holding hands."



Figure 2

Cut to a static image of another fenced area, at the island's airport. The female voice continues: "Three cargo planes are landing. . . ." Cut to a static shot of a passenger stairway unattached to any plane—again filmed through the fences (see fig. 2). The voice-over: "Another military plane has landed. . . . Policemen stepped off the plane. They have made them come out. They have made them sit, back to the wall. . . . Plainclothes policemen station themselves in front of those having to board the plane [to Libya]. They wear white gloves. They wear black leather gloves."



Figure 3

Cut to a static night shot of the seaport (see fig. 3). The voice-over, alternating between a male voice and a female one, continues: “But where is this plane headed? . . . It is not listed on the departures. It is a private airline. It’s a Croatian airline. Air Adriatic. Air Dubrovnik. It is not going to Rome. It is not going to Milano. Where is it headed? It is not going to Palermo. To Rome. To Milano. To Palermo. Maybe to Libya. To Brindisi. To Crotone. Do you know where is it headed?” Cut to a tracking night shot of an airport runway lit by lights (see fig. 4). The camera, moving along the fence, captures a plane taking off—the harsh sound of its engines invading the almost completely blackened image of the runway. The plane is departing mysteriously, in the darkness, without anyone seeming to know its destination. The sound becomes louder for a moment and then disappears as the plane begins its ascent. In the background, a man begins to sing in Arabic. As the plane climbs, the camera pans the red and yellow lights of the empty airport runway it leaves behind. A loud buzzing noise cuts off the song. Suddenly there is a moment of utter darkness and silence, followed by the sound of footsteps and jingling keys, of the kind a jail guard would carry.



Figure 4

These unsettling images and sounds belong to the closing scenes of the forty-minute documentary video essay *Sudeuropa* (2005-7)<sup>97</sup> by long-time collaborators Raphaël Cuomo and Maria Iorio. By sinking into darkness and denying vision to its audiences, this footage points to the limits of representing a reality that exceeds itself. Moreover, it rejects the very existence of “illegal” migration and denies the possibility for it to be accurately visualized or objectively assessed. The barren Sicilian island of Lampedusa—the southernmost part of Europe, where mobility is heavily controlled—is an ideal setting for such examination of the material effects of border securitization and militarization. Since the late 1990s, this touristic island has become a major crossroad in transnational migratory routes across the Mediterranean. Space, time, and everyday life on the island have been reconfigured by the influx of migrants and refugees—largely from the Middle East, the Balkans, and Africa—who have descended there and along the coastal regions of Sicily and Puglia in the hopes of immigrating to Europe. Recent uprisings and military conflicts in North Africa have increased migration flows across the Mediterranean.<sup>98</sup> The integration process of the European Union, meanwhile, has intensified border controls along the maritime and land borders of Southern European countries. Indeed, during the past decade the Mediterranean has become a *solid space* that is “crisscrossed at different depths and

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<sup>97</sup> *Sudeuropa* (2005-7) was produced with the support of the Jan van Eyck Academie of Maastricht.

<sup>98</sup> The production of Lampedusa’s sense of place changes according to the shifting geopolitical configurations in the region. The geopolitical situation on the island (and in Italy) has changed several times over the past decade. In *Sudeuropa*, Cuomo and Iorio have captured the specificity of the historical moment between 2005 and 2007. The ongoing revolutionary wave of demonstrations in the Arab world has impacted on the sociopolitical configuration of the region in ways that are somewhat unpredictable. The uprisings and on-going conflicts in North Africa have deeply effected the mobility regulation in the region in part due to the fall of the Tunisian and Libyan regimes.

according to different vectors by tourists, immigrants, and refugees holding a different status” (Biemann 2003a: 70). The video’s account of deportation in its final sequence situates air transport within this context, highlighting its status as a marker of differentiated mobility that is controlled by those with access to abundant social and economic resources.

This chapter moves beyond *Sudeuropa*’s closing frames to examine the broad network of relationships between undocumented mobilities and visibility that underlie the video’s account of Lampedusa as a place of migrancy. *Sudeuropa* underscores the interdependency of seemingly unrelated mobilities: undocumented migration, tourism, and journalism. It reveals the significant role of migrant labor in the development and maintenance of tourism by focusing on migrant workers involved in the hospitality industry. Furthermore, the video opens up a space to explore the issue of *hospitality* in relation to the dynamics of *mobility* and *stillness*. By juxtaposing hospitality towards tourists with hostility towards migrants and refugees, it calls for an examination of discourses and practices of hospitality that inform the complex relations between the host and the guest or the native and the migrant in the larger European context.

My analysis of the video will be brought in relation with theories of the essay film, which provide a highly productive and politically revealing understanding of the dynamic between migrancy and visibility. The genre of essay film, which has been recognized as a distinct form of filmmaking since the 1960s and became highly widespread in the 1990s, articulates “the formal and aesthetic with the historical and political” (Alter 2004: 213)—in *Sudeuropa*’s case within the context of changing mobility regime in the Mediterranean. As Nora Alter points out, the essay film “is seen as the ideal genre by filmmakers who want to advance historical knowledge but recognize that this can only be done in a tenuous way” (2007: 52). Essay film has also been described as a genre in-between documentary and fiction, suggesting the fluidity and indeterminacy of its aesthetic and political qualities.<sup>99</sup> *Sudeuropa* calls for a reconsideration of the genre, because it plays with fact and fiction, poses problems without answers, and is profoundly self-reflexive. The video does not have a narrative structure; it is composed of sequences that stress uncertain relations between cuts. Shots of Lampedusa’s detention center and the airport are variously intercut with images of people at work, workers performing their daily routines, and journalists in search of stories and images of “illegal” migrants. The narration offers no single, authoritative voice-over, which “in a traditional documentary would explain such drifting chains, endowing them with narrative significance” (Demos 2005: 82). Rather we have a playful narration, including Maria Iorio’s own voice-over and a male voice-over by “Paolo”/Abdelhamid Boussoffara, a Maghrebi immigrant who works at a local hotel in Lampedusa and prefers to pass himself off as Italian to avoid racism.

Indeed, *Sudeuropa* is situated at the intersection of documentary, essay film, and time-based art, and has the possibility of moving from one category to another without ever being completely contained. Since premiering as part of the curatorial project *Maghreb Connection* (2006–7) in Cairo, it has been presented in a wide range of contexts, from cinema festivals to art exhibitions, as well as in museum and gallery spaces, at universities, and by activist networks. The artists prefer to present the single-channel video with other materials, such as collected documents and photographs, or alongside works by other artists that help to expand and complicate themes the work explores. Yet the video continues to circulate in solo, single-channel presentations due to this format’s easy transportability across diverse spaces.

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<sup>99</sup> For further discussion, see Rascaroli 2009; Arthur 2003; and Alter 2004, 2007.

In recent years, Cuomo and Iorio's projects have focused on the intricate relations between Southern Europe and Northern Africa and the issue of undocumented migration. They produced *Sudeuropa* during a prolonged stay on the island of Lampedusa in the summer of 2006. These Swedish-born Italian artists<sup>100</sup> became interested in Lampedusa because of, in their own words, "a critical concern about public discourse regarding the issue of migration, and how the European media were (and unfortunately are still) presenting it under a rhetoric of mass-invasion and criminality."<sup>101</sup> Migration to Europe became highly restricted following the economic and political unification of the European Union. Many countries, including Italy and Spain, approved the Schengen agreement, which established common immigration policies. In recent years, right-wing politicians and extreme nationalist groups have focused on "illegal" immigration as a campaign issue. Against this backdrop, Lampedusa has become an over-exposed topic in the European and Italian media. Attention on the region intensified in 2002, when the Berlusconi government, in recognition of the important role that labor has played in Italy's economy, naturalized a portion of undocumented migrants while tightening national immigration policies to restrict the status of others.<sup>102</sup>

By and large, the Italian government has sought to render tourism and trade the dominant forms of mobility on the island of Lampedusa while attempting to curb flows of undocumented migrants. The Italian state (and the EU states in general) brands unauthorized migrants "illegal," and insists on "illegality" as a basis of their incarceration and deportation. As *Sudeuropa* shows, undocumented migrants who set sail in makeshift boats in hopes of reaching Europe or European-controlled islands are typically apprehended by the coast guards shortly after their departure from the North African coast (Tunisia, and more recently Libya) and put in detention/transit centers. The video reveals the ways this wave of undocumented migration—and its consequences—is kept separate from the social life of Lampedusa. Cuomo and Iorio present Lampedusa as a European borderland, a space where the North/South configuration wavers and mutates resulting from migratory flows. In a critique of mainstream journalism, which renders migrants invisible as human beings while depicting them as massive, anonymous group of "invaders," and its use of iconic power and sensational reporting, the video questions the re/production of borders—spatial, legal, and symbolic—in the Mediterranean, and exposes the state's various attempts to contain and exclude undocumented migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.<sup>103</sup>

Cuomo and Iorio's video depicts migrant bodies as invisible within and yet central to the processes of global capitalism. Furthermore, it displays the spatial construction of displacement

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<sup>100</sup> Both Maria and Raphaël have Italian citizenship, although they were not born in Italy. Their parents moved to Switzerland as economic immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s. This biographical point made them sensible to the issue of migration in general, but also familiar and unfamiliar, involved with and distant from the Italian context at the same time.

<sup>101</sup> Raphaël Cuomo. Message to the author. 13 August 2011. E-mail.

<sup>102</sup> In August 2002, the Berlusconi government, which included members from the far-right Northern League (which has used an anti-immigration rhetoric as a central election strategy) and the former neo-fascist National Alliance (which has been planning to "deploy a range of enforcement and control mechanism" to prevent migration to Italy), "passed legislation to regulate immigration [known as the 'Bossi-Fini Law'], and in September of the same year adopted a decree to provide for the regularization of undocumented immigrants already in the country" (*Return Migration*).

<sup>103</sup> For a discussion of the conformism of global mass media in contrast to the simultaneous politicization of contemporary art of the last decade and a half see Stefan Jonsson's article "Facts of Aesthetics and Fictions of Journalism: The Logic of Media in the Age of Globalization."

and confinement by combining the images of the island's infamous detention center, the seaport, the airport, and abandoned migrant ships. Thus, in *Sudeuropa*, Lampedusa is evoked as a combination of two conflicting but mutually reinforcing geographical imaginations: The boundless, utopian freedom of movement that tourism (and capitalism) offers and the (im)mobility of (undocumented) migrants whose invisible labor sustains tourism. *Sudeuropa* indicates that migrant illegality<sup>104</sup> is produced and materialized in points of arrival, enclosure, and deportation—places such as the airport and the port, which are simultaneously crisscrossed by tourists, journalists, artists, and goods. The video's emphasis on the uncanny cohabitation of spaces like the airport, where migrant deportations overlap with the arrival and departure of tourists, calls attention to the contradictions inherent in the Italian/European take on migration as well as the unequal access to mobility.

In his article titled "Migration, Law, and the Image: Beyond the Veil of Ignorance," W.J.T. Mitchell argues that in order to examine "images of illegalized immigration," it is necessary to expand the exclusive focus on the images of the migrant body onto "the places, spaces and the landscapes of immigration, the borders, frontiers, crossings, bridges, demilitarized zones, and occupied territories that constitute the material and the visible manifestations of immigration law in both its static and dynamic forms" (19). *Sudeuropa* affirms Mitchell's point in the sense that unlike conventional documentary films and news reports, it does not focus on the bodies of "desperate" migrants or seek to create identification with illegalized people but rather attempts to capture the ways they are rendered "illegal" and considers the locations and actors involved in the process of their illegalization. By capturing details of marooned migrant boats, the detention center, ports, the backstage of tourism, and the journalistic practices on the island, the video visualizes the symptoms of a sociopolitical structure that constructs a violent division of spaces and bodies. Such emplacement of differentiated forms of mobility is epitomized by the touristic spaces of the island, which are physically close to the sites of migrant interceptions and detention but usually remain unaffected by them.

### **Heterotopias of Tourism and Undocumented Migration**

Since the decline of the fishing industry in the 1980s, Lampedusa's economy has come to depend on tourism. During the summer, low-cost Italian airlines with direct flights from several mainland cities as well as ferry service from Sicily enable the touristic flow to the island. The region is especially popular among the Italian middle class and other European travelers. In guidebooks Lampedusa is evoked as an enclave-like resort, offering a paradisiacal experience for tourists. On the website *Tripadvisor*, for example, reviews describe it as a "place of fable" with a "fairy tale sea," an "unforgettable postcard place," and an "island of dreams" (qtd. in Pugliese 664). Vacationers treasure Lampedusa for its white sandy beaches, its clear turquoise waters, and its excellent scuba diving. Yet for other travelers, the island has a different allure. Positioned some 200 km south of Sicily, 110 km north of Tunisia, and 300 km north of Libya, Lampedusa has in the past decade become a highly visible and contested site of undocumented migration to Europe, in particular through sea-crossings from the Tunisian and Libyan coasts.<sup>105</sup> Its proximity

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<sup>104</sup> See De Genova 2002 for a discussion of everyday production of migrant illegality and deportability.

<sup>105</sup> As Salvatore Coluccello and Simon Massey observe, "Although the number of illegal immigrants arriving in Italy by sea is small, about 10–11% of total illegal migration, disproportionately high numbers of resources are dedicated to countering the maritime trade as a result of the symbolic importance of being seen to defend national

to Africa has made it a key site for the implementation of mobility control and border management in the Mediterranean, and a center for enforcement of the increasingly restrictive Italian/European migration policies that seek to curb “illegal” migration to Europe. In April 2011, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi characterized the influx of migrants and refugees from North Africa as a “human tsunami” (see “Berlusconi”). Lampedusa is persistently cited to justify the intensification of border policing. The immigration measures taken on the island are in fact part of a broader change in the security agenda of the EU regarding its southern borders. These changes have become manifest in the daily life of Lampedusans through an increase of high-tech policing technologies, border patrols, and military and police deployments that seek to capture migrants at sea before they arrive on the island.<sup>106</sup> The increasing intensification of border policing in Southern Europe has been pervasive across the arch of the Mediterranean. As observed by BBC journalist Tamsin Smith, “The coastal patrols between Lampedusa and the coast of North Africa now look more like a full-scale military deployment,” accompanied by the abandoned boats that brought migrants to the island. Although Lampedusa is in fact “geographically and culturally connected to” Africa, it has “now been mobilized to thwart and exclude” it (Pugliese 673). Indeed, situated at the fault line between Europe and Africa, Lampedusa is an uneven and multifaceted space of connectivity and barriers.<sup>107</sup>

Lampedusa’s unique cultural and political position is best understood within the context of Italian politics of migration. Since the early 1990s, Italy, which was one of the leading European sites of immigration for almost a century, has increasingly become an important destination and transit space for refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. Following Italy and Spain’s introduction of visa requirements for North African countries in the early 1990s, “illegal” migration across the Mediterranean has become “a persistent phenomenon” (De Haas 2008a: 1317). The increasing intensification of border protection in Italy is linked to the integration of the EU and “its commitment to neoliberal practices and the re-drawing of EU internal and external borders” (Palombo 46). Indeed, the main Italian (and European) response to the phenomenon of undocumented migration has been the criminalization of migrants, “increasing militarization of borders and the establishment of detention centers [in Italy and Libya], reminiscent of concentration camps as a state response to potential immigrants, asylum seekers and others” (Carter and Merrill 248). Significantly, Italy’s 2002 Bossi-Fini Law, “is unique in the EU in that it conflates both immigration and asylum procedures,” and is complemented by Berlusconi government’s recent practices including the so-called “push-back” policy, which are partly supported by the EU.<sup>108</sup> Italian policy on migration also entails deportation of

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borders and to address the acute strains on the infrastructure and economy of Lampedusa where the large majority of migrants arrive” (78).

<sup>106</sup> There are significant differences between the wealthy tourists coming from northern Italy, or northern Europe, and the ordinary local Lampedusans, who are very disappointed with the actions and policies of the Italian government because the latter built the detention camp on the island instead of giving them hospitals, schools, and other basic infrastructure still missing on the island today. Indeed, Lampedusans still live in a condition of significant institutional and social deprivation, which in turn produces an ambiguous dynamic of at once solidarity with and rejection of the migrants arriving on the island. Emanuele Crialesse’s film *Terraferma* (2011), the winner of the Special Jury Prize at the 2011 Venice Film Festival, deals with this issue from the viewpoint of the fishing community in Lampedusa.

<sup>107</sup> I borrow this term from Joseph Pugliese (2009) who defines Lampedusa as a fault line.

<sup>108</sup> For example, “Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation between Italy and Libya,” signed in August 2008 by Berlusconi and Muammar Gaddafi in Benghazi, established the push-back and repatriation procedures: “The Friendship Pact called for ‘intensifying’ cooperation in ‘fighting terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking



undocumented migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers as well as cooperation with transit and origin countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya.<sup>109</sup>

The notorious detention center on the island and mass-expulsions to Libya have also rendered Lampedusa a contested site of migration politics in Europe. In 2000, Italy and Libya made an agreement to collaborate against terrorism and human trafficking. The expansion of this partnership in 2003 and 2004 entailed the training of Libyan guards, the establishment of Libyan detention centers, the readmission and deportation of migrants to Libya, and assistance for the repatriation of “illegal” migrants to Third countries<sup>110</sup> (Andrijasevic 2010: 154-5). As a result, bilateral relations between Italy and Libya improved. In 2004 the EU lifted its arms embargo partly under pressure from Italy, which wanted to provide Tripoli with up-to-date surveillance systems to help prevent illegal immigration. These agreements are followed by large-scale deportations from Lampedusa to Tripoli. In the past decade, many civil society organizations (including Amnesty International, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/UNHCR, and Human Rights Watch/HRW) have criticized these deportations and publicly drawn attention to the island’s overcrowded, unsanitary detention center as well as the large number of migrant and refugee deaths that occur during sea-crossings. Nevertheless the Italian state’s response to these matters has been to increase protection of its borders against “invaders” or “bogus refugees” as well as to construct borderlands across the Mediterranean and North Africa, recruiting Maghreb countries to police undocumented migrants and catch them before they arrive at the EU border.

Recently, Italy’s longtime Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi (who has resigned in November 2011) declared that his solution to the “invasion” would be to stop migration by buying all of the available boats in Tunisia. He also proposed commissioning a TV series set in Lampedusa to boost tourism, and personally purchasing a villa on the island (Kington). Such explicit anti-immigrant discourse is not exclusive to Italy; it has become widespread among right-wing politicians in Europe (including in France and Belgium). What is significant about the situation in Lampedusa is that while tourism is designated as a highly encouraged form of mobility, migrant mobilities from the South are marked as invasion of nation’s borders. With the establishment of tourism as an important sector on the island in the 1980s, fears that the increasing number of migrants and refugees could deter tourists have been widely exploited in populist discourses. Moreover, emotional and sensationalist media coverage of the disembarkment of migrants has intensified attempts to exclude migrants from the social life of the island, encouraging the prevention of their arrival in Lampedusa and promoting their detention or deportation.<sup>111</sup>

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and illegal immigration.’ The two parties agreed to strengthen the border control system for Libyan land borders (50 percent funded by Italy with funding for the other 50 percent to be sought from the EU), and to use Italian companies in this endeavor. ... Italy violates the international legal principle of nonrefoulement when it interdicts boats on the high seas and pushes them back to Libya with no screening whatsoever” (“Pushed Back, Pushed Around” 7).

<sup>109</sup> Despite Berlusconi’s notorious visibility on the media, the Northern League is the main supporter of the detention camps as well as the repatriation strategies.

<sup>110</sup> In the context of the EU, the term “Third country” is used in the Treaties for a country that is not a European Member State. In general terms, it is used to indicate a country other than two specific countries referred to.

<sup>111</sup> As Friese points out, “Media attention leads to an astonishing dialectics of visibility and invisibility. On the one hand, the ‘invisible’ *clandestines* become visible for a broad audience. On the other hand, media visibility promotes and enhances invisibility that is to safeguard the prosperous development of tourism (and to secure the secrecy that surrounds the reception center and its ‘hosts’: citizens need a special permit from the security forces to visit the

Joseph Pugliese invokes Michel Foucault's well-known notion of "heterotopias" to explicate the coexistence of "violently contradictory differences" on the island of Lampedusa (663-4). The island accommodates spaces for luxury vacations as well as places for the detention and isolation of "illegal" migrants and refugees. Thus, Lampedusa is marked by two different, yet contiguous, spatio-temporal experiences: Tourists from the global North visit the island to escape from the demands of their busy lives, whereas migrants and refugees from the global South attempt to arrive in the island for survival—risking death during their long and perilous journeys across the desert and the sea. Indeed, the coexistence of such disparate experiences of the same environment recalls heterotopias, which Foucault defines as heterogeneous spaces that "juxtapose in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (25). Heterotopias are linked to "heterochronies" that suggest a break with the ordinary time. Both touristic time and migrant/refugee time in the detention center stand outside of the temporality of the dominant order: for migrants and asylum seekers, temporality is built through intense waiting, often in legal limbo or suspension. The temporality of tourist spaces, however, refers to a fleeting, transitory sense of time "in the mode of the festival" (Foucault 26), providing a temporal escape from the urban life. The transitory temporality of the touristic heterotopia coexists with the "no-time of indefinite detention that hollows out the daily existence of the refugees imprisoned within the immigration penal colonies" (Pugliese 673). Furthermore, heterotopias are places that are closed and open at the same time; they are limited as to their points of entry, as in the case of a touristic resort, and may be entered compulsorily, as in the case of a detention center.

*Sudeuropa's* exploration of different (im)mobilities that shape spatial and temporal relations in Lampedusa opens up a space in which to investigate intersections between migration and tourism that are rarely discussed together.<sup>112</sup> In fact, Western Europeans have long viewed the Mediterranean as a locus of migration and tourism. In the 1960s and 1970s, the migration of the so-called "guestworkers" from "underdeveloped" Mediterranean countries such as Turkey, Spain, Italy, and Greece to Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland was a significant phenomenon that marked the region as a backward place. Ramona Lenz argues that in addition to "the attractions 'sea, sun and sand' it was exactly this conception of backwardness which—reinterpreted in authentic and traditional Mediterranean lifestyle—made the area attractive for tourist consumption" (3). However, since the early 1990s, "countries—such as Spain, Italy, and Greece, all popular tourist destinations as well— that were previously the source of migrants" have also emerged as "permanent destinations or transit zones" for migrants and refugees from the former Yugoslavia, Africa, and the Middle East (Verstraete 56).

Today the Mediterranean is no longer a region that sends guestworkers but rather one that attracts "illegal" migrants. This new migratory identity is reinforced by media representations of refugees and migrants trying to reach Europe on makeshift boats.<sup>113</sup> Ian Chambers argues that "The largely unilateral European conception of the modern Mediterranean—reduced since the mid-eighteenth century to bucolic ruins of superseded origins, a crumbling and overgrown

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center, a procedure that inhibits contacts between locals and the 'hosted')" (2010: 334).

<sup>112</sup> Ginette Verstraete also argues that tourism is "never explicitly associated with ... the management of flows of so-called illegal immigrants and refugees" (2009: 4).

<sup>113</sup> As Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti point out, "In recent decades, Italy has begun to know what Europe and other parts of the Western world had experienced early, through accepting (though not welcoming) immigrants, often of a different ethnicity and color. Italy, a nation of emigrants, unconsciously mirrors itself in these figures, while ignoring or preferring to forget that some of them come from its own ex-colonies" (392)

antiquity turned into the garden, museum, and tourist playground of northern industrial and postindustrial society—here becomes disquieting. . . . Once a largely disparaged, even ‘underdeveloped,’ version of Europe, the Mediterranean turns out to be a porous region that potentially provides a passage for other understandings of modernity, often arriving uninvited from elsewhere” (2010: 679). Furthermore, despite the fact that migrants from the global South and East constitute an integral part of the labor force in the tourism sector (as well as in various other sectors such as construction and agriculture) in the Mediterranean, they are completely ignored in travel guides and official self-representations of Mediterranean tourism destinations: “In the narratives of tourists they are either ignored or perceived as diminishing the touristic consumption of difference” (Lenz 10). Indeed, the “tourist gaze” (Urry 2002) that produces invisibilities with regard to the Mediterranean is “no longer able to translate the space of migration into the space of tourism and hence segregates the two” (Lenz 15). In contrast to the limited scope of “the tourist gaze,” *Sudeuropa* understands the Mediterranean as a fraught and unstable space constantly being traversed and contested. It explores the overlaps and disjunctures between tourism and migration and unpacks the production of hospitality (and hostility) relative to different “guests” arriving in Lampedusa.

Iorio and Cuomo’s investigation of the relationship between tourism and undocumented migration does not contrast images of well-off white tourists enjoying the beautiful island with scenes of black migrants or refugees who are on the verge of death following their perilous journey. Rather we are presented with images of various workers in the tourist industry. In other words, in the video the laboring bodies of the migrant workers constitute a link between the seemingly separate spheres of tourism and “illegal” migration. *Sudeuropa* combines and interweaves images of the various backstage locations of the hospitality industry on the island. Despite the Italian authorities’ increasing efforts to keep the island free of undocumented migrants and refugees, these images expose the inconvenient fact that migrant labor is in high demand in Lampedusa as well as in various other parts of Italy and Europe. Indeed, *Sudeuropa* raises the issue of the European economy’s dependence on underpaid labor performed mainly by people from the global South. The video thus examines the construction of Lampedusa as both a pretty, touristic place and a site of sociopolitical exclusion. Long tracking shots, like those described at the beginning of this chapter, survey the island’s zones of detention and deportation. The detention center and the airport are framed by barbed-wire fences that underscore the violent spatial divisions produced on the island.

For example, nearly four minutes into the film, we see a close-up image of a black man driving along the arid fenced area where the detention center is located (see fig. 5, 6, 7). The camera is positioned on the front seat, recording the man and capturing images of the road as he drives. We see the fenced yellow buildings of the detention center, set in an area far from the residential and touristic sites of the island. When the camera shifts its focus to the window on the other side of the vehicle, we see a parked police car and, moments later, an abandoned migrant boat. The image becomes shaky and blurry as the car moves faster. The scene ends with a glimpse of a boat on fire. Halfway through the scene, a male voice-over begins to relay the impressions of locals from the island: “But before they arrived at Cala Croce or at Cala Madonna. And we could see men, sometimes women, walking across the island. But today they catch them far off at sea. They lock them up. Here nobody sees them any longer.” Such accounts suggest that migrants once more easily became part of everyday life on the island. Now, the

border control technologies work to catch migrants far off at sea. In this new borderland, migrants are rendered “illegal” even before they step on the Italian/European soil.



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

*Sudeuropa* repeatedly makes visible the faces and the gestures of the workers of tourism industry who arrived in Italy before the Schengen Agreement. The black worker shown in the sequence discussed above, for example, may well be a former detainee who became part of the labor force following his release. His drive along the barbed wire of the detention center establishes a link between migrant labor and detained migrants and refugees. The spaces that workers cross and occupy while running their daily work help to build the videographic space in *Sudeuropa*. The workers allow the camera to access restricted areas and reveal the backstage of the local tourist industry. We see people working early in the morning or late at night in hotels and at the beach. We see people (mostly migrants) driving to their work places, preparing food, cleaning rooms, and placing the beach chairs and umbrellas that shape the tourist experience. Such scenes suggest that even though Europe may evoke, from certain perspectives, a fortress, it is a fortress with an entrance for workers.<sup>114</sup> By visualizing the spaces of migrant labor as well as the spatio-temporal divisions on the island, the video raises questions about the contemporary definitions of European community, and produces forms of visibility that reject the homogenized characterization of the “other” in populist discourses. *Sudeuropa* thus subverts the presumed divisions between “us and them,” highlighting the heterogeneity of the migrant subjectivity.

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<sup>114</sup> As Falk asserts, “Europe’s borders thus perform as filters that weaken the position of the illegalized immigrants, as it is very difficult for [undocumented migrants] (even for migrants with documents) to stand up for their rights” (97).



Figure 8

Indeed, the role of migrant workers in the tourism industry in Lampedusa is a key emphasis of the video. Twelve minutes into the film, the camera captures a close-up of a curtain with background sounds of someone cleaning up. The female voice-over announces: “The colonel’s hand designates a point on the map, above the red line. Lampedusa. The colonel says there are never enough patrol units. Because the sea is vast.” Cut to an image of a woman cleaning the bathroom. The camera is fixed on the sink. We see the hands of the woman with latex gloves cleaning up the sink (see fig. 8). The voiceover continues: “The journalist says these trips from North Africa have intensified. We have to multiply the units by ten that patrol the canal of Sicily as the colonel says.” Cut to a close-up of the woman’s face in profile. The voice-over continues: “European money multiplies the units by ten.” In this sequence, the image of a female worker juxtaposed with the voice-over narration about the intensification of border patrolling underscores the unspoken paradox created by the need for labor and the rise of anti-migration policies and discourses.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>115</sup> In that sense, *Sudeuropa* joins an increasing number of recent films that address the invisible labor of undocumented migrants in Europe who live in precarious conditions. For example, British director Stephan Frears’s 2002 film *Dirty Pretty Things* concerns “illegal” migrants working in London’s underground economy, trying to survive under constant threat of arrest, detention, and deportation

## Essay Film: Drifting Away From Documentary Conventions

*Sudeuropa*'s engagement with the key themes of hospitality, mobility, and stillness is best understood in the context of its relationship to essay film. The aesthetic and political practices of this genre have been consolidated in the work of Chris Marker, Harun Farocki, Jean-Luc Godard, Agnes Varda, and Trinh Minh-Ha, among others. Many contemporary artists have employed and expanded the essay film by experimenting with forms of exhibition and display such as sculptural installations in galleries or museums. Indeed, there has been a significant shift in the viewing context for video works and essay films from the cinematic setting to the art exhibition space—a phenomenon that has been defined by terms such as “moving image art,” “gallery films,” and “time-based art.” Problematizing the conventions of documentary filmmaking, essay films produced in recent decades have frequently been incorporated in time-based installations, fostering a cross-pollination of art and cinema.<sup>116</sup>

The roots of essay film are tied to the development of the essay form in literature, and can be traced from the sixteenth-century philosopher Montaigne to the work of more recent figures such as Adorno and Lukács.<sup>117</sup> Although the audio-visual platform of film and video expands the essay form with image and the sound, there are numerous productive intersections between literary and filmic essays. To begin with, “to essay” means “to attempt, to try,” suggesting that essay drives from an open-ended and multidirectional exploration of a subject, from an attempt to come to terms with a complex issue or a problem. In his essay, “Der Essay als Form” (“The Essay as Form”), first published in 1958, Adorno defines the essay as a genre that is artistic in form rather than following the laws of scientific method for discovering truth. Eschewing absolute concepts and rigid definitions, the essay, according to Adorno, treats science and formal philosophy “in a systematically unsystematic way” (160). Adorno further claims that “In the essay, concepts do not build a continuum of operation, thought does not advance in a single direction, rather the aspects of the argument interweave as in a carpet” (160). Hence, the essay does not unfold in a form of continuity but takes up discontinuity without making any claim of objectivity. Furthermore, the essay is a subjective exploration of a subject matter, and produces insights by means of “the reciprocal interaction of its concepts in the process of intellectual experience” (Adorno 160), avoiding rigid, hierarchical schemes. But this does not mean that essay is far from “truth.” On the contrary, for Adorno, the essay comes closer to truth by incorporating its own negation (untruth) as well as by being non-authoritative.

The characteristics of the essay as defined by Adorno resonate with the elusive genre of essay film, which embraces a highly self-reflexive and non-linear form. The essay film is an in-between genre that blends documentary, fiction, and experimental/avant-garde filmmaking.<sup>118</sup> Taking this a step further, Nora Alter suggests that the essay film is “*not* a genre, as it strives to be beyond formal, conceptual, and social constraint. Like ‘heresy’ in the Adornean literary essay, the essay film disrespects traditional boundaries, is transgressive both structurally and conceptually, it is self-reflective and self-reflexive” (qtd. in Rascaroli 2008: 25). Laura Rascaroli observes that “reflectivity and subjectivity” emerge as the essential features of the essay both in literary and cinematic discussions of the form (2008: 25). Indeed, subjectivity and authorial emphasis mark the essay film: “a quality shared by all film essays is the inscription of a blatant, self-searching authorial presence” (Arthur 59). In the filmic form, however, the authorial

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<sup>116</sup> I explore time-based or moving image art more in depth in Chapter III and Chapter V of this dissertation.

<sup>117</sup> See Alter 2004, 2007 for an exploration of the literary roots of the “essay film.”

<sup>118</sup> See Arthur 2003 for a discussion of the ways essay film is situated at the intersection of different genres.

presence is dispersed across different registers of cinema such as voice-over, sound, text, camera movement, montage, and lighting, etc. (Arthur 59).<sup>119</sup> In the essay film, the emphasis on subjectivity—or the personal—intertwines with an exploration of the sociopolitical and historical in a way that eschews authoritative and comprehensive views of a subject. As with Adorno’s definition of the literary essay, the essay film celebrates subjective experience that is always specific and historically situated rather than promoting linear progress and rational arguments. And “the non-linear and non-logical movement of thought” in the essay “draws on many sources of knowledge” (Biemann 2003b: 9). Hence, the essay film departs from the conventional documentary forms, which entail chronological sequencing and voice-over narration explaining what or how to think about what we see. The essay film incorporates a range of self-reflexive gestures by producing a complex audio-visual space that is “transgressive, digressive, playful, contradictory, and political” (Nora Alter qtd. in Rascaroli 2008: 27).<sup>120</sup>

In keeping with the essay form, *Sudeuropa* uses found-footage to construct a disjunctive relationship between image and text, exploiting the overlaps and discontinuities between the codes and conventions of documentary and fiction. Notably, the video disavows the clarity of photojournalistic examinations of the “horror of the illegal migration.” Even while it seeks to document the architecture of exclusionary enforcement practices and spaces that capture and detain “illegal” bodies, it does not provide detailed contextual information or commentary. T.J. Demos identifies a recent trend in moving image art as “one that is remarkable for advancing political investment by means of subtle aesthetic construction, doing so by joining documentary and fictional modes into uncertain relationship.” Examples of this include the works of Steve McQueen, Anri Sala, Tacita Dean, Walid Raad, and Pierre Huyghe, among others. *Sudeuropa* joins this body of moving image works that “are distinguished by the intertwining of the real and the imaginary, which mobilizes a form of address—aesthetic, affective, visual—beyond the strictly information-based correctives of familiar documentary modes of contestation” (Demos 2009: 10). Indeed, like many experimental documentaries, *Sudeuropa* pushes the boundaries of documentary representation in an effort to provide new perspectives on contemporary migration to Italy and Europe without any assumption of transparency or neutrality, and avoids claiming truthful depictions of authentic subjects and places.

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<sup>119</sup> As Paul Arthur explains, “The manifestation or location of a film’s author’s voice can shift from moment to moment or surface expressively via montage, camera movement, and so on” (59).

<sup>120</sup> Filmmaker and scholar Trinh Minh-Ha’s reflections on documentary help articulate the complex interplay of fact and fiction in essay film: “A documentary aware of its own artifice is one that remains sensitive to the flow between fact and fiction. It does not work to conceal or exclude what is normalized as “non-factual,” for it understands the mutual dependence of realism and ‘artificiality’ in the process of filmmaking. It recognizes the necessity of composing (on) life in living it or making it. Documentary reduced to a mere vehicle of facts may be used to advocate a cause, but it does not constitute one in itself; hence the perpetuation of the bipartite system of division in the content-versus-form rationale ... Meaning can therefore be political only when it does not let itself be easily stabilized, and, when it does not rely on any single source of authority but rather empties it, decentralizes it” (41).



## Intersections of Hospitality and Mobility



Figure 9

*To dare say welcome is perhaps to insinuate that one is at home here, that one knows what it means to be at home, and that at home one receives, invites, or offers hospitality, thus appropriating a space for oneself, a space to welcome the other, or worse, welcoming the other in order to appropriate for oneself a place and then speak the language of hospitality...*

—Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 15-6

*Sudeuropa* opens with a black screen and the sound of waves, similar to what one would experience at a quiet, peaceful beach with one's eyes closed. The video cuts to various aerial shots of the island filmed from a helicopter (see fig. 9). Pictures of cliffs filmed from the sky, beautiful scenery, and vacationers flicker across the screen. These dream-like, blurry images filled with bright colors—reminiscent of commercials for touristic “paradise” islands—are not disturbed by the sound of the rotating blades of the helicopter. Rather we hear a poetic, rhythmic female voice: “Welcome. Live from Lampedusa, says the host.” The beautiful images and the narration work together to create a very inviting atmosphere. After a few sentences, it becomes clear that the female voice-over is describing a television program produced on the island of Lampedusa, and quoting a TV reporter who is on a fishing boat talking to the camera. We realize that the images we see on the screen are televised images. They are taken from a program about

regional folklore broadcast on the Italian network Canale 5 Mediaset.

The female voice continues her description in a playful manner: in the TV program, the reporter (referred to as “the host” in the voice-over narration) and the mayor of Lampedusa talk about the issue of clandestine migration that has dominated the representation of the island in the media. We learn that the host had promised to show a different picture of Lampedusa. The female voice-over quotes him saying: “Lampedusa. An unusual island. An island which I am sure you’ve all heard of at least once for different reasons. The most important being the issue of immigration, clandestine as well since Lampedusa is Europe’s southernmost island. Imagine we are closer to Africa than Italy. Today we will show you a Lampedusa totally different from what the mass media have always shown you.” We learn that the host talks about the environment and the sea. After a commercial break, he continues: “Let’s dwell for a moment on that point which all our friends back home have heard say about Lampedusa. Arrivals, disembarkments of clandestine immigrants here. But I, as I am speaking here, but honestly I have never seen anything. But why?” The female voice now quotes the mayor: “Thanks to the support and the sensitivity of all the institutions both national and regional and thanks to all the law enforcement officers who tackle this phenomenon we succeed in keeping separate, distinctly separate, the reality of clandestine immigration from social life.” The images taken by the helicopter seem to support this claim and emphasize the beauty of the tourist resort. As the narration ends, the aerial views of the island are replaced by the slow motion, blurry images of the physical gestures of the mayor and the reporter (see fig. 10).

We see the images of the mayor and the host after the voice-over narration that refers to them. More precisely, in *Sudeuropa* the images are out of synch with the text/voiceover, evoking a sense of delay, a sense of spatial and temporal displacement. The fragmented, close-up images of the mayor’s and reporter’s bodies and hands diminish our visual access, reducing them to figures who reiterate the dominant conception of undocumented migration in the mass media and mainstream politics: an “invasion” of the European territory by refugees and economic migrants from the South. This representational dislocation—the appropriation of images from a mainstream television program that adopts the view of the dominant political discourse on migration—underscores the ways in which state policies and practices, reproduced by the mass media, have consistently reinforced a culture of exclusion and discrimination toward undocumented migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and depicted migration as a “threat” to security and public order. In this way, *Sudeuropa* exploits the link between surveillance and documentary practices, particularly those used by the state to identify, recognize, and control potential threats. Documentary images (still or moving) operate in this context “as judicial and forensic evidence, and ‘truth’ and ‘objectivity’ live on through their continued institutional and legal validation” (Demos 2006: 77). The playful female voice-over in *Sudeuropa* immediately frustrates the documentary approach the video seemingly takes: the voice-over describes a TV show about the island rather than the images of the wonderful landscape we are seeing on the screen. This creates a productive disjuncture between the images and the narration, exposing the ways the beautiful panorama is in fact inscribed by socioeconomic and political disparities that are normally overlooked by the dominant discourses.



Figure 10

In fact, the bird's-eye images of the paradise-like island shown in the TV program are triple displaced: halfway through *Sudeuropa*, we realize that the images were originally filmed by a military helicopter searching the island's coastline for "foreign" bodies (see fig. 11). They have migrated from television to the domain of contemporary art, thus linking the video's visual space to the surveillance technology utilized by border police to track "illegal" migrants. For a video that ostensibly documents the spatial-temporal registers of undocumented migration and its operations, this ambiguous and disorienting introduction is strategic. On the one hand, it draws in its audience with beautiful Mediterranean scenery that displays the touristic appeal of the island. On the other hand, the allure of these images is disrupted by the issue of "illegal" migration, which evokes a different set of images such as intercepted boat people, border guards with latex gloves, and overcrowded detention centers. In this sense, the video proposes that these seemingly separate domains, namely tourism and (undocumented) migration, are linked in ways that are typically hidden from the public eye. The word "Welcome," uttered by the TV host, is followed by the highly doubtful assertion that he had himself seen absolutely nothing on the island. In other words, for him, the island is perfectly ready to welcome its tourists to a holiday resort unmarked by clandestine migrants. The opening images taken from a helicopter circling around the island present a static vision of a pure, untouched island. This fallacy—like the source of the footage—points to the success of the joint effort between the mainstream media and the Italian state apparatus to render migrants invisible. Here surveillance footage is also integral to the discourses and practices of tourism that work to provide an exclusive and safe place for the global tourist by keeping the "unwanted" bodies out of sight. As Mimi Sheller argues, tourism is facilitated not only through discourses and practices of mobility, but also through "expanding practices of exclusion even as it markets the idea of getting away from it all" (2010: 271). *Sudeuropa* explores this apparently irreconcilable contradiction on the island and socio-spatial and temporal relations that dis/connect refugees and tourists.



Figure 11

And so we return to the opening of the video, with its complex intersections between hospitality and mobility on a heterotopic island. The greeting “welcome,” accompanied by beautiful aerial images of the island, suggests hospitality, openness, and acceptance, and is meant to attract “strangers” to the touristic resort with its luxury hotels and sand beaches. Nevertheless, hospitality here is exclusive and limited in the sense that it functions as a gate opener for the global tourist while calling for the exclusion of clandestine migrants and refugees whose presence could undo the paradise-like image of the holiday resort. *Sudeuropa* here foregrounds hospitality as a contested and ambivalent structure that regulates and negotiates relations with “strangers” via complex problematics of space inscribed by asymmetrical relations of power. In fact, the concept of hospitality relates both to friends and enemies (see Derrida 2000 and Rosello 2001), and simultaneously encompasses generosity and rejection. In regulating social relationships between self and other, inside and outside, public and private, and belonging and exclusion, hospitality intertwines with hostility. Indeed, “hospitality shares its linguistic roots with words like hostility, hostage and enemy” (Lynch et al. 5). The concept of hospitality has come to be widely discussed in the social sciences, specifically in relation to “national discourses around migration and asylum seeking” (Molz and Gibson 8). Many scholars have mobilized the notion of hospitality to examine the often inhospitable and hostile treatment of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers by the authorities (see Ahmed 2000; Rosello 2001; Gibson 2003, 2006), extending the question of hospitality to examinations of the politics of citizenship and human rights (see Benhabib 2004). National discourses of hospitality prioritize the protection of the borders against security threats and unwanted migrants.<sup>121</sup> In this context the “host” nation is

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<sup>121</sup> See Gibson 2003 for a discussion of national discourses around asylum in the context of the UK.

in a “historical position of power and privilege” in terms of deciding “who is or is not welcome to enter the country, but also under what conditions of entry” (Molz and Gibson 9). Drawing on Zygmunt Baumann (1997), Molz and Gibson assert that hospitality further expands from the act of crossing a national border (or not) to the issue of “how to live with strangers day-to-day and permanently” (9).

What is important about these discussions in relation to *Sudeuropa* is the entanglement of hospitality and (im)mobility, for hospitality is produced and enacted through a multifaceted negotiation of movement and stillness. Mobilities are interdependent with “immobilities” and “moorings” and inscribed by asymmetrical power relations. For example, various immobile infrastructures or platforms such as airports, roads, and docks enable mobilities (Hannam et al. 3). Hospitality “may entail enforced immobility as well as voluntary mobility and stillness. Just as hospitality has been a useful metaphor for thinking about mobile social relations and control, so too can it offer a framework for teasing out the significance of geographies of confinement and imprisonment” (Lynch et al. 7-8). In the discourses and practices of hospitality, “moorings” resonate with stillness, slowing down, waiting, resting, refreshing, and settling, which are vital practices because any type of traveler, be it a tourist, refugee, or migrant, needs moments of staying still for various reasons. Nevertheless, asymmetrical power relations shape stillness as much as they shape mobility. Just as not all travelers are mobile under similar conditions, neither do they receive the same kind of hospitality. The hotel rooms and resort suites that accommodate tourists constitute a stark contrast to the detention centers and camps where refugees and asylum seekers are kept by the authorities (Gibson 2003).

### **Witnessing Mobility and Stillness**

The experience of watching *Sudeuropa* is one of witnessing. As discussed above, the video employs documentary techniques and evokes the aesthetics of documentary (cinematography, use of location, sound, voice-over, and archival footage) yet does not claim to be a documentary. Iritt Rogoff has observed a similar shift in contemporary art toward a mode of practice “that informs in a seemingly factual way, but at a slight remove from *reportage*” (2004: 85, emphasis in original). In its self-reflexive, fragmentary structure, *Sudeuropa* articulates a certain tension between stillness and mobility through its camera work, long takes, and static cinematography, as well as the compositional structure of the shots, with their partially blocked access to visuality, and the disjunctive relationship between text and image. The elusive-associative montage/editing strategies generate ambiguity and uncertainty and combine continuity with discontinuity, as the genre of essay film tends to do. In this sense, *Sudeuropa* departs from the epistemological premises of conventional documentary modes of exposure and journalistic reportage. It disrupts the media representation that reduces migrant mobilities to the simple act of crossing the Mediterranean, with the ungrounded claim of representing “the essence of the border in its most compressed and climactic form” (Biemann 2008c). Indeed, the video emphasizes the political dimension of the images of illegalized migration by exposing the ways the spectacle of illegality and deportability is produced. Yet it does so without imposing a hierarchy of discourses or imposing a dominant meaning that is closed and complete.



Figure 12

Cuomo and Iorio repeatedly compose their shots through a fence or a metal gate, partially blocking the field/space before the static camera. Their use of long takes and fixed-frame camerawork allows for the possibility of reflexivity and critical reflection through duration. In fact, the use of extended takes and natural or ambient lighting indicates their sensitivity to the time and space of production. The compositional structure of the static, blocked-frame shots establishes an audience address that suggests a dis-identification with the camera's viewpoint and encourages the viewer to question her position vis-à-vis the subject. The artists do not provide establishing shots that might claim to represent the whole picture or render the stories of undocumented migrants accessible to the viewer. Their compositions position the audience (and the filmmakers themselves) as outsiders/observers, and emphasize the limits of visibility/video-making in understanding, depicting, or imagining the ever-changing and ever-widening phenomenon of undocumented migration. By positioning the viewer as an outsider and partially blocking her view, *Sudeuropa* creates a sense of claustrophobia while implicating the viewer in an economy of voyeurism and surveillance. In doing so, it distances itself from mainstream news images of people from the third world.

For example, ten minutes into the video, *Sudeuropa* juxtaposes the voice-over narration of the violence of detention and deportation with shots of imported and exported goods in containers passing through the island's port. We see people driving vehicles and coordinating the comings and goings of products. A vehicle blocks the vision of the camera (see fig. 12). In the rest of the shot, we see another van with an ad on its back doors. The female voice-over intones: "Groups of men in the quay. Groups of men in rows of two. One behind the other, a plastic bag

in hand. Policemen, blue shirt, black cap, dark blue uniforms, white hygiene masks.” Cut to a shot of a fenced area and a partial image of a container ship behind the fence. Voice-over: “Guns, hard stares, fences, vans from the Misericordia. The boat, which brings goods to the island and transfers the migrants to Porto Empedocle.” Cut to a shot of a fence gate through which we see an empty airport runway (see fig. 13). Voice-over: “Groups of men standing on the runway. Groups of men in rows of two, a plastic bag in hand, board the plane. A plane, a helicopter, policemen in uniform, blue shirt, black cap. . . .”



Figure 13

In this scene, the narrative of the violence of imprisonment and detention is told against a backdrop of goods, ads, and shipping containers in whose movement the viewer witnesses the free and unrestricted flow of goods and commodities. The video depicts the stark disjunctions that inscribe neoliberal globalization: the free flow of commodities is predicated on the restricted or forced movement of the subjects of the global South. The image of the container ship recalls thousands of undocumented migrants and refugees who stow themselves away in shipping containers, vans, trucks, and other modes of transport involved in enabling the global flow of goods and services. These modes of transport become at once clandestine forms of mobility and suffocating containers of trauma and death for thousands of people from the global South attempting to make their way to the countries of the global North. The image of the empty airport runway juxtaposed with the narration of the process of deportation questions the image of airport as a mobile space *par excellence* and shows that, the airspace is neither an apolitical nor an asocial realm but a space with “embodied, emotional and practiced geographies” that is

entangled with “highly visible articulations of power” and “intrusive surveillance” and “explicitly designed to prevent unauthorized passage and mobility” (Adey, Budd and Hubbard 774, 780).

As we watch the activities at the port, the narration further evokes media portrayals of migrant interceptions and deportations. In April 2005, the Italian Minister of the Interior, Giuseppe Pisanu, has characterized the now familiar image of overcrowded cramped boats full of exhausted and dehydrated African bodies as the icon of the threat of border invasion posed by “a million illegal immigrants” waiting on the North African coast to reach Europe (qtd. in Andrijasevic 2009: 156). As a result of such political rhetoric and generally distorted media representations, the size of the immigrant influx has been greatly overestimated in the public imagination. Similarly, the widely circulated images of “boat people” have played a significant role in shaping public opinion and policies around migration. In her analysis of the media representation of illegalized migration, Francesca Falk observes that, either immigration is depicted as an invasion, or an individual refugee is portrayed as an innocent victim, following the tradition of the Christian iconography.<sup>122</sup> Also, in the pictures of “boat people” arriving in Europe, the refugees or undocumented migrants “are often received by persons wearing a mask,” which incites “not only pity but also fear, as the mask hints to the possibility of infection,” reproducing a widely assumed relationship between immigration and infection (Falk 89). The mask and latex gloves worn by people who receive migrants provoke and reveal the fear of invasion of not only the territorial borders but also the boundaries of the body, threatening “the integrity of one’s body and that of Europe” (Falk 90).<sup>123</sup> *Sudeuropa* avoids such mediatized representations, instead deliberately obstructing our view. We are repeatedly reminded that what we are witnessing or observing is a highly complex subject that involves multiple actors, places, and institutions. The video does not seek to portray events from the migrants’ perspective. In fact, *Sudeuropa* can be seen as a witness to its subject without explicitly showing this subject. Revealing or showing in this work is linked to hiding or covering, and the video’s imagery hints at the inaccessibility of the visible. While the film addresses undocumented migration to Lampedusa, and to Europe in general, it never provides its audience with the mediatized images of boat people intercepted at sea, nor does it feature interviews with migrants at the detention center. As discussed earlier, the video ends with a sequence of darkness, acknowledging the limitations of its own representations.

*Sudeuropa* also differs from media reports and documentary film in terms of its relationship to time. If there are moments of identification with the migrant experience, they are decidedly not linear. The tension between mobility and stillness produced by the video’s cinematic techniques, including camerawork, composition and framing, *mise-en-scène*, and montage conjure up the “permanent temporariness” experienced by refugee camp dwellers.<sup>124</sup> In the “legal limbo” inherent to the structure of the detention camp, “persons maybe detained

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<sup>122</sup> In his article on media representation of refugees, Terence Wright also argues that many “standard” images of refugees conform to patterns already established in Christian iconography evoking story lines with which people are familiar.

<sup>123</sup> Scorzin argues that “The iconic images of boat people are not only taken and used to report and to document, but above all to emotionalize, and this in a disconcerting way, insofar as they produce and demonstrate an extreme paradox in the visual documentary — on the one side they are made highly visible in the sense and form of actually being stamped and stereotyped, as strange and exotic foreigners, into certain widespread and long-standing clichés, such as the well-known image of waves and floods of poor, hungry, strange and unskilled dangerous aliens” (102).

<sup>124</sup> See Diken 2004, Bauman 2004, and Agamben 2000 for further discussion of this topic.



indefinitely, in a situation that is de jure ‘temporary’ but de facto ‘permanent’” (Mitchell 19). As many have already argued, detention camps operate simultaneously within and outside the law, for “Illegalization places them outside legal resources such as due process, habeas corpus, and elementary human rights, at the same time that it does so *in the name of the law* or ‘under the color of legality’” (Mitchell 19, original emphasis). The intricate relationship between mobility and stillness is materialized in *Sudeuropa* not only through the collision of disparate (im)mobilities but also through co-articulation of spaces such as transportation infrastructures and detention camps. As Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen suggest, camps “are in general close to central transportation nodes and borders and thus directly involve mobility in their regulatory matrix. . . . Thus, the police can immediately send refugees back, transportation companies are obliged to check if people have visas, and so on” (93). In this context, stillness and movement are entangled in ways that produce differential access to mobilities resources, and thereby differently situated subjectivities, for example that of the global cosmopolitan elite versus the “illegal” migrant. In its relational imbrication of mobility and stillness, *Sudeuropa* continuously reconfigures Lampedusa as a space of migrancy whose borders are drawn and redrawn by changing legal-political factors and the migrants’ increasingly diverse trajectories.<sup>125</sup>

Indeed, the southbound movement of tourists enjoying their beach vacations understands stillness<sup>126</sup> as a form of escape from hectic urban life, whereas the northbound movement of migrants to Europe from various African countries invokes stillness as a space of suspension filled with a sense of uncertainty and precarity. As Alison Mountz suggests, for migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, sites such as airports, tunnels, detention centers and islands “are often associated with waiting, limbo, disruption of life before and after and legal and jurisdictional ambiguity that inhibits access to rights and protections encoded in domestic and international law (381).<sup>127</sup> The precarious trajectories of (undocumented) migrants involve extended periods of movement in which minimum health, safety, and nutrition standards go unmet, followed by indefinite phases of immobility and uncertainty in migratory hubs or transit/detention camps. Stillness in these circumstances is stripped of its touristic undertones of hospitality and leisure. Contrary to the mobility of global citizens, undocumented migrants have little control over their movement or stillness and are deprived of the right to determine either their movement or their emplacement/location. The fraught corporeal mobilities of (undocumented) migrants—from risky journeys across the desert on overcrowded trucks to Mediterranean passages in fragile boats—subvert the European ideal of the free flow of people, services, capital, and goods across borders.<sup>128</sup> As Verstraete argues, “The free mobility for some (citizens, tourists, and business people) could be made possible only through the organized

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<sup>125</sup> Anthropologist Michel Agier articulates the function of detention centers like the one in Lampedusa in the following way: “Camps located right on the borders that serve as sluices to regulate the traffic of different categories of migrants and refugees, whom they are supposed to channel, detain or redirect. They serve as transit points, way stations, detention centers, immigrant camps, waiting areas. These border camps have certain characteristics in common: the immobilization, the waiting and the restriction of daily life to a confined area subject to multiple constraints; the legal vacuum that makes them places where the exception is the rule; the documentation of individuals on forms, index cards, fingerprint files; restricted access to the remote, isolated premises, which are policed by public or private services; acts of violence committed inside the facilities and passed over in silence.”

<sup>126</sup> I use the term stillness here as an umbrella term for resting, sleeping, waiting, stopping, rejuvenating, refreshing, settling or immobility.

<sup>127</sup> For further discussion, see Conlon 2011 and Hyndman and Giles 2011.

<sup>128</sup> See Verstraete 2009 for a detailed discussion of the development of the EU’s imagery of free flows since the 1950s.

exclusion of others forced to move around as migrants, refugees, or illegal aliens” (94). In that sense, borders function differently depending on who is crossing them. For unauthorized migrants and refugees, uncertainty and precariousness pervade the journey, the resting/waiting places (sometimes in the form of incarceration), and the desired destination. The condition of illegality imposed on undocumented migrants puts them at the risk of arrest, detention, and/or deportation, pushing them to the margins of society. Indeed, the stark differences between the highly dangerous movements of migrants and refugees and the free mobility of the cosmopolitan travelers across national borders indicate the complex social stratification that parallels mobility (see Ahmed 2000 and Verstraete 2009). As Cresswell argues, there is a critical distinction between forced mobility, the voluntary mobility, and the right to stillness: “To choose to move or, conversely, stay still, is central to various conceptions of human rights” (2010: 22).

### Other Departures: Disjunctions between Sound and Image



Figure 14

Like many essay films, *Sudeuropa* presents a complex relationship between images and text/voice-over, deploying “the mechanisms by which speech can annotate, undermine, or otherwise change the signification of what we see—and vice versa” (Arthur 60). The discrepancies between the voice-over and the accompanying images mark *Sudeuropa*’s audio-visual space. In the rupture between the audible narration and the visible spaces and subjects, a third space emerges that is activated and shaped by the performative effort and imagination of the viewer. Nora Alter suggests that discrepancies between voice-over/sound and image positions the spectator as “a participant in the construction of meaning,” fostering relationality

and participation in “a medium that in its mass manifestations has been traditionally associated with passivity” (Alter 2007: 48). In *Sudeuropa*, the discontinuous cinematic space created through the technique of montage disrupts the possibility of mapping undocumented migration onto consistent coordinates. The oneiric editing produces an open and ambiguous filmic space that is free from the irrevocability of narrative progression, engaging the audience on an interpretive level and releasing the subject from its dominant representations. The voice-over/text and images diverge to the extent that they become asynchronous and autonomous, contrasting with conventional documentary that seeks to be informative and descriptive.<sup>129</sup>



Figure 15

*Sudeuropa*'s disjunctive weaving of voice-over and imagery has a political stake in that it disrupts the viewer's contemplative passivity and subverts the notion of “illegal migrant” by destabilizing and pluralizing the term across multiple locations and actors. This strategy also reveals the intricate relations among tourism, migration and journalism. Indeed, the disjunctive and conjunctive relationship between images and voice-over constructs a disorienting, multidimensional, and imaginative image of migrancy on the island. Five minutes in, we see a static shot of a TV crew interviewing tourists with a big camera and a microphone (see fig. 14).

<sup>129</sup> “Unlike the documentary which keeps the commentary closely linked to the image, in the essay the sound and image levels may diverge to the point of becoming completely asynchronous... The autonomy of image and sound is characteristic to the essay and highlights the performative moment of bringing them together” (Biemann 2003: 11).

As we watch the crew, the male voice-over recalls anecdotes from the islanders regarding the current invisibility of migrants and refugees on the island. This pairing highlights the role of visual technologies and the media in reinforcing migrant invisibility. The voice-over recounts: “Today, they catch them far off at sea. They lock them up. Here nobody sees them any longer.” We continue watching the TV crew talking to a tourist without any voice-over for a few minutes. Cut to another scene in which we see a kitchen (see fig. 15). The camera is placed such that a wall occupies more than half of the frame. The rest of the frame shows kitchen utensils, suggesting that we are seeing a kitchen in a restaurant or a hotel. The use of such visual barriers precludes access to anything like a full account of the conditions of migrant workers or refugees in Lampedusa. As we watch and listen to the chef at work in the kitchen (we see a glimpse of him), the female voice over says: “The tourists are interviewed on the beaches of Lampedusa. A woman just out of the water says . . .” (cut to a scene where we see three men working on the beach) “‘I thought I’d see clandestine migrants. But there aren’t any here.’ A man shielded from the sun by a parasol says you can’t see them here. You can’t see them anywhere. Everything seems to be perfectly normal.”

Once again, the voice-over is discontinuous with the images we see. In other words, the commentary comes after the images to which it is related, and is instead juxtaposed with other footage. Here, the female voice-over recounts the dialogue from previous frames, quoting tourists as an accompaniment to images of the laborers whose work supports tourism on the island. This reinforces the main message of the interview: tourists passing through Lampedusa, along with the locals themselves, watch the arrivals of migrants and refugees on television without necessarily witnessing the events on site and without having any interaction with migrants intercepted at sea. The male tourist’s words, “everything seems to be perfectly normal,” are juxtaposed with images of workers, which suggests that this normalcy is produced by the high-tech surveillance apparatus that keeps migrants separate from the social life of the island, while the footage points out that this deluded state is in fact sustained by other “invisible” laborers who are presumably migrants as well. Hence, the tension between the words and images produces a multilayered audio-visual field that is at once analytic and poetic. Similarly, the closing scenes of the video described at the opening of this chapter are predicated on the productive tension between words and images. Instead of depicting the violence of deportation directly, *Sudeuropa* captures the violence of deportation in recurring shots of the airport and the detention center, rather than showing the migrants themselves.

By refusing to portray its subjects as victimized objects, hopelessly stuck in the irrevocable reality of their situation, the video forces us to imagine the violent and inhumane treatment deportees receive during transfers to the airport. We are denied a passive viewing experience, and our necessary engagement with the video thus forces awareness of our own position vis-à-vis the violence exerted on illegalized bodies. This dynamic further exposes, by contrast, media production of migrant illegality. Rather than providing sensational images of undocumented migrants, for example during a major interception at sea or in the detention center, *Sudeuropa* presents images of journalists, cameraman, and police officers. Their efforts to regulate migrant bodies and stage them in front of cameras shape the specter of clandestine immigration on the southern borders of Europe. By underscoring the disproportionate prevalence of such actions in the spectacular media coverage of migrant disembarkations, the video highlights the ways refugee experience is (mass) mediated. Further, Cuomo and Iorio’s use of two voice-over narrations—one recounting anecdotes told by the local people, the other

describing the media representation of migrants at moments and sites of disembarking and deportation—challenges the production of illegality and deportability on the island by mobilizing fragments of the various political, media, and advertising discourses that shape public perceptions of migration and tourism.

In conclusion, Cuomo and Iorio's video essay *Sudeuropa* underscores the interdependency of seemingly unrelated mobilities: undocumented migration, tourism, and journalism. It reveals the significant role of migrant labor in the development and maintenance of tourism by focusing on migrant workers involved in the hospitality industry. More precisely, *Sudeuropa* sheds light on the backstage, on the labor and infrastructure that is invisible to tourist experience on the island. The images of migrants working behind the scenes of the hospitality industry confirm the island's (and indeed Europe's) reliance on migrant labor to support its main economy. Furthermore, *Sudeuropa* opens up a space to explore the issue of hospitality in relation to the dynamics of mobility and stillness. By juxtaposing hospitality towards tourists with hostility towards migrants and refugees, it calls for an examination of discourses and practices of hospitality that inform the complex relations between the host and the guest or the native and the migrant. Continuing the emphasis on the relationship between visibility and undocumented mobilities, the following chapter expands *Sudeuropa*'s focus on Lampedusa and southern Europe into a much larger geographic area of trans-Saharan migratory networks. Next, I examine Ursula Biemann's multiscreen installation *Sahara Chronicle* that documents complex social infrastructures of African mobilities in relation to border control technologies developed by the EU. The presentation of these material realities in an expanded installation format involving various screens, monitors and projections in the gallery space parallels the highly fragmented and diverse mobilities captured by Biemann during her fieldtrips to the main routes, gates, and nodes of the migration network in Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, and Libya.

## CHAPTER V

### The Production of Migrant Illegality: Social Infrastructures of Undocumented Mobility in the Multichannel Video Installation *Sahara Chronicle* (2006–9)



Figure 1

In “Desert Truck Terminal for Libya” (13:00 min.), one of several videos that make up Zurich-based artist and curator Ursula Biemann’s multichannel installation *Sahara Chronicle* (2006–9), we see a group of African migrants loading the back of an enormous truck with heavy bags (see fig. 1). The setting is one of the truck terminals in the city of Agadez, in the Republic of Niger, where many migrants from sub-Saharan and Western Africa begin their perilous journey across the Sahara Desert. The city is located on what has long been a transit route for migrants headed north to Libya, Algeria, and/or Europe. It also functions as a transit hub for travelers returning from Libya and Algeria. The video combines images of various people who work for the main transport company in Agadez, including the owner, ticket-sellers, and mechanics. A hand-held camera captures migrants taking their seats atop the overloaded truck bed and heading to the small city of Dirkou.<sup>130</sup> The subtitles explain that each migrant pays 16€

<sup>130</sup> Dirkou is the biggest market in the region due to the development of various activities directly connected to migratory movements (Brachet 2010: 5).

for this leg of the journey, which is three to five days long. The faces of passengers are covered with fabric in a variety of colors as protection from the blazing sun, heat, and desert sand. After observing the station workers and migrants from a distance, the camera situates the viewer on the moving truck, balanced precariously among the passengers (see fig. 2).



Figure 2

Cut to the military post at the city border (see fig. 3). The camera is again on the ground, scanning the faces of the passengers, who have been lined up according to nationality. The subtitle states that the local administration collects a 3€ passage fee from every migrant. This image of military personnel lining up the migrants foreshadows the obstacles and challenges the group will face along the risky journey and afterward, as they endure the harsh climate of the Sahara and encounter militarized borders, heavy control, and surveillance.



Figure 3

*Sahara Chronicle* takes viewers to many places like Agadez, touring key zones of the African migration network in order to present it as a system of information and social organization that operates on a widespread geographical scale. What emerges is a portrait of the multifaceted networks of (im)mobility across the Sahara and Northern Africa. These networks are made tangible by the flexible transport infrastructures operated by local agents as well as by the journeys of the migrants themselves. Like many conduits, the networks change and morph along the way, influenced by the high-tech surveillance technologies and detention camps established and supported by the European Union (EU). Indeed, the videos of *Sahara Chronicle* collectively highlight the interplay between the trans-Saharan migration network and border control technology—both of which demand complex infrastructures. The installation is comprised of an undefined number of short videos (ranging from three to thirteen minutes in length) that combine footage collected during Biemann’s visits to the main routes, gates, and nodes of the migration network in Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, and Libya. Biemann defines *Sahara Chronicle* as an “open anthology of videos” (see Paterson), an incomplete and provisional project that reflects the trans-Saharan migration system as a whole.

*Sahara Chronicle* provides an alternate mode of encounter with images of migrancy that prompts a shift in the perception of migrant experience. The locations featured in *Sahara Chronicle* are part of a larger network of hubs, places, and nodes where migrants stop over, often for indeterminate periods of time. In these sites, multitudes of networks converge and intersect, creating various economic opportunities as well as risks for migrants and local people who



service migrants' transport. Biemann thus offers an investigation on the relationship between visibility and undocumented/illegalized migration to Europe that redefines the Sahara and North Africa as a lively and contested space of migratory networks, military control, and surveillance. Moreover, by foregrounding the transcontinental, multidimensional nature of human mobility across the Euro-African space both *formally* and through the *content* of the videos, Biemann undermines the widely held idea of what Charles Heller defines as "unidirectional, violent migration" (131). This shift is particularly pertinent to the issue of undocumented migration because in recent years migrants' overland and sea journeys have become longer, more complex and fragmented with uncertain destinations.<sup>131</sup>

Focusing on the aesthetic strategies as well as the material realities the installation documents, this chapter will explore the ways *Sahara Chronicle* activates a critically engaged, self-reflexive, and participatory spectatorship that is attuned to the complex social infrastructures and networks produced by diverse mobilities. Biemann's multichannel installation maps out—via moving and still images—the social infrastructures of migrant networks, incorporating various screens, monitors, and wall-projections in order to mirror the ways that communication and transport technologies have advanced the expansion of social networks and opened up new transit spaces for migrants, smugglers, and traders. By distributing the work across several loosely interconnected screens and projections, Biemann alludes to the ever-longer and highly fragmented nature of the migrant journey, with its elusive departure and arrival points. Biemann also splits or doubles images within a single screen or among screens, monitors, and projections, an aesthetic strategy that likewise underscores the fragmentary and uncertain nature of migrant routes across the Sahara and allows viewers to compose and assemble diverse trans-Saharan journeys and navigate various social and geographical realms within the gallery space. Drawing on film scholar Laura Mulvey's theoretical investigation of new forms of spectatorship produced by recent technological developments and Elizabeth Cowie and Kate Mondloch's discussions of time-based art and gallery spectatorship, I will argue that the terms of the installation's display and reception parallel its content. This parallelism creates a productive tension between the virtual space of representation and the actual site of the installation and critically adjusts the spectator's perceptual apparatus. Indeed, the expanded form of Biemann's video installation defamiliarizes the normative representation of migration and challenges the viewer to make sense of the wider apparatuses of migratory infrastructure across the Euro-African space.

As the chapter unfolds, I will take up main themes and issues invoked by the individual videos of the installation, including social infrastructures of migration, invisibility, and digitality. In these discussions, I draw on geographer AbdouMalik Simone's exploration of the "living infrastructures" of Johannesburg and geographer Michael Collyer's analysis of the fragmented migratory journeys across North Africa to contextualize the migratory sites and routes documented by Biemann's videos. I will focus on five videos from the anthology. In order to clearly understand the ways the installation format extends in embodiment and duration the trans-Saharan material realities captured by Biemann, it is imperative to explore first the specific geographical and sociopolitical issues evoked by individual videos. Hence, the chapter will journey through the virtual space of the videos before exploring their collective presentation in an expanded cinematic form in the gallery. Structuring the chapter in this way would enable a better articulation of the installation format's specific aesthetic and political contribution to the visual re/presentation of migrancy.

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<sup>131</sup> See Collyer 2007 for a discussion of fragmentation of migrants' routes.

## **Changing Border Politics: The European Union and Trans-Saharan Migratory Networks**

The shifting infrastructures of mobility documented in Biemann's *Sahara Chronicle* demand a critical look at the evolving mobility regime in the EU, the effects of which have been felt not only on the outer edges of European countries but also beyond their borders. Following the Schengen *acquis*, the EU's member nations opened their national borders to each other, producing a trans-governmental system of governance in Europe. The free movement of people within the EU was enabled by increasing militarization of the collective outer border. In other words, the unlimited mobility within the EU territory, as Ginette Verstraete argues, "is mediated by sophisticated communication and detention technologies, used by the police officers and smuggling networks alike" (2009: 17). Meanwhile, the nations at the EU's outer edges, particularly the Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Spain, have become the main destinations for an immigrant labor force from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. As a result, these countries have been compelled to reinforce the management and control of their porous coastal borders according to the EU's Schengen requirements. The effects of the recent territorial revision of the EU is generally characterized as the creation of a "Fortress Europe," a term that evokes images of an impassable or impenetrable wall (Vassilis and Karakayali 375). However, as *Sahara Chronicle* shows, the borders of Europe are not solely found on the southern European line but also extend to the sub-Saharan region and beyond, and are continually reterritorialized or deterritorialized according to diverse (im)mobilities.

Indeed, the borders of the EU have become highly flexible and shifting, expanding to non-European territories and manifesting themselves in European metropolitan centers, airports, ports, train stations, and camps (see Balibar 2009 and Riga 2005). In recent years, Europe has pressured the Maghreb countries to stem migratory flows from the south. This has brought forward a large-scale geographic reconfiguration of migratory flows that have become highly flexible, proficient at reorganizing and morphing across the Sahara basin. Long, fragmented, and often highly risky overland journeys have in turn become a significant aspect of undocumented migration (Collyer 2007). The EU's expanding borders are also shaped by the maneuvers of multiple state and non-state agencies and actors, including the border patrol, the police, and private organizations like FRONTEX, the EU's border protection agency. The regulation of mobility likewise intertwines with the various mobilities of people on the ground: borders recompose themselves constantly both inside and outside of the EU territory according to the mobility networks that expand spatially, becoming more global and complex.

Etienne Balibar identifies the flexibility and mobility of the European borders as essential to the institutional make-up of the EU, and argues that the border constitutes the very "nondemocratic" element of democracy while border-crossings and policing mutually reconfigure citizenship.<sup>132</sup> For Balibar, the border is integral to the European democracy, but he concludes that it is ultimately a nondemocratic form that is linked to racism against migrants in Europe. Racism against foreigners has also become widespread in non-European territories such as Morocco, Libya, and Mauritania as a result of the pressures from the EU in "combatting illegal migration." For example, in recent years the EU has extensively cooperated with Libya in

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<sup>132</sup> Framing his discussion both in European and global terms, Balibar asserts that "Not by chance, in these two sets of problems, the traditional institution of borders, which I think can be defined in the modern era as a 'sovereign' or nondemocratic condition of democracy itself, mainly works as an instrument of security control, social segregation, and unequal access to the means of existence, and sometimes as an institutional distribution of survival and death: it becomes a cornerstone of institutional violence" (2001: 16).

stopping “illegal” migration. Libya has been assigned the task of controlling undocumented migration not only on the Mediterranean border but also in the borderland between Algeria and Niger. In 2004, the EU forced Libya to establish large deportation campaigns through which the armed forces arrested all persons without papers. Indeed, Balibar’s notion of flexible borders provides a new model for thinking about the relationship between inside and outside, between European and non-European spaces, taking into account the diffused or deterritorialized nature of the European borders. As he has written: “even in Maastricht, you are at the border. The border is not on the borderline, nor can it be equated with the Schengen treaty; it is both more to the interior and also more to the exterior” (Bojadžijev and Saint-Saëns 11). Thinking of borders as a continuously evolving mechanism also helps to refuse the one-way story of migration to a host country that fails to account for multidimensional mobilities and immobilities. Multiple forms and layers of porosity continue to be an integral feature of everyday life in the border regions despite increasing militarization and regulation in recent years.

Another result of the fortification of the EU’s outer borders is the increasing illegalization of non-European migrants and asylum seekers to the EU. The intensification of border controls and the increasing urge to curb migration have pushed a significant part of migration “outside the law” (Monzini 164), and forced migrants to take longer, highly fragmented, dangerous routes that put their lives at risk.<sup>133</sup> Diverse mobilities have been rendered “illegal,” and defined by terms such as irregular, undocumented, clandestine, or bogus. These terms tend to obscure the ways in which mobilities are made illegal by the actions of the states, rather than through any inherent characteristic of the migrants. In other words, the branding of a person as an “illegal” results from a juridico-political process that determines an individual’s status vis-à-vis the state and the political order. As Nicholas de Genova states, “‘Illegality’ (much like citizenship) is a juridical status that entails a social relation to the state; as such, migrant ‘illegality’ is a preeminently political identity” (2002: 422). The categories of legality and illegality overlap and entangle with one another as transnational labor mobilities develop in the global economy, and millions of migrants “float between ‘legality’ and ‘illegality’ almost every day” (Icduygu 143). Indeed, what defines a person as legal or illegal is highly contingent upon specific deployments of immigration law enforcement that have rendered diverse categories of migrants vulnerable to various forms of violence and displacement, including arrest, detention, and deportation.

With the deterritorialization of the EU borders, the production of migrant illegality has become increasingly tangible in the Sahara and North Africa. Far from being an isolated desert area, the Sahara has recently become a dynamic zone of migration and mobility between Sahel and Maghreb due to the development of the trans-Saharan transportation and communication infrastructures. Over the past decade, Saharan transportation networks have been in high demand among sub-Saharan migrants headed to North Africa and/or Europe. Even though the EU has been working to curb these mobilities, it seems, as de Haas argues, “practically impossible to seal off the long Saharan borders and Mediterranean coastlines” because of technological improvements and “the firm establishment of migration routes and migrant networks” (2008a: 1317). The sub-Saharan migrants who cross the desert to reach Libya and/or Europe rely on the paths and transportation facilities operated by local people such as the Tuareg, who have become important agents in this new transit passage. Furthermore, the demand for cheap labor in Libya and Europe continues to attract migrants despite the restrictive measures taken by the state,

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<sup>133</sup> These routes involve highly complex networks of experienced migrants, travel agencies, smugglers, and “corrupt” border patrols (Collyer 2007)

which in fact do not serve to stop migration but rather render trans-Saharan migratory routes increasingly diverse, lengthy, fragmented, and “illegal.”<sup>134</sup>

### Critical Visual Narratives of “Illegal” Migration: The *Sans-Papiers* Movement in France

The unstable categories of legal/illegal immigration are not often explicitly related to the visual realm. This dissertation asserts their inextricable connection. In his article “Migration, Law, and the Image,” W.J.T. Mitchell likewise connects the two realms, arguing that the problem of immigration is structurally and necessarily bound with that of images. According to Mitchell, images “precede” the immigrant in the sense that before the immigrant arrives his or her image arrives first in the form of stereotypes, search templates, tables of classification, and patterns of recognition: “at the moment of first encounter, the immigrant arrives as an image-text, whose documents go before him or her at the moment of crossing the border. This simple gesture of presentation is repeated millions of times everyday throughout the world and might be regarded as the ‘primal scene’ of law and immigration in the face-to-face encounter” (14). Indeed, images strongly shape the ways migrants are perceived in legal, sociopolitical, and economic domains today. Mainstream media has a vital role in the construction of illegality and foreignness as a recognizable object of representation. Hence, while “a contingent legal system” produces the categories of the “illegal” and the “foreigner,” the mainstream media naturalizes these categories by visually and discursively framing migratory movements as an “invasion” of borders or a security threat (Falk 97). Indeed, the production and circulation of images of illegalized migration and the construction of border security systems and infrastructures reinforce each other.

The Pasqua Laws and the *sans-papiers* movement<sup>135</sup> in France are prime examples of the interlocking relationship between the unstable definitions of legal/illegal migration and visibility.<sup>136</sup> Established in the mid-1990s and named after French interior minister Charles Pasqua, the Pasqua Laws were repressive and restrictive measures that altered the status of many immigrants—mainly from North, West, and sub-Saharan Africa; the Middle East; and Eastern Europe—by rendering formerly legal migration flows into France illegal.<sup>137</sup> Essentially, these laws turned “the illegal immigrant into the enemy of the state, the national scapegoat” (Rosello 1999: 2) by creating a migrant category in France called *inexpulsables-irrégularisables* (those who can neither be expelled nor regularized). Those in this category were rendered neither legal nor deportable. This group included rejected asylum seekers from countries to which it is not safe to return, and foreign parents of French children. As the case of Pasqua Laws demonstrates, the production of illegality is historically and geopolitically contingent, and the mechanisms of migration control constantly produce new forms of illegality and hence the conditions of migrant

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<sup>134</sup> De Haas argues that “Dominant discourses obscure the fact that African migration to Europe and Libya is fuelled by a structural demand for cheap migrant labor in informal sectors. This explains why restrictive immigration policies have invariably failed to stop migration and have had various perverse effects. ... Despite lip service being paid to ‘combating illegal migration’ for political and diplomatic reasons, neither European nor African states have much genuine interest in stopping migration” (2008a: 1305).

<sup>135</sup> For sociopolitical and cultural impact of the *sans-papiers* movement in France see Rosello 1998, 2001.

<sup>136</sup> The definitions of illegal/legal constantly change as “people whose residence status is not ‘illegal’ can become illegalized on account of certain (none)behavior and (none)action” (Bischoff et al. 7).

<sup>137</sup> The Pasqua Laws rendered migrants illegal, for example, by denying residency permits to foreign spouses who had been illegally in the country before marrying, and increasing the waiting period for family reunification from one to two years.

deportability.

The shifting boundaries of legal/illegal immigration in France prompted the political mobilization of the so-called *clandestins* (undocumented immigrants), who occupied public places and claimed a socio-legal status as *sans-papiers* (literally without papers) in order to counter “the abstract notions of criminality and invisibility” that the French media had perpetuated with the *les clandestins* label (Fisek 89). In the summer of 1996, approximately 300 illegalized African migrants occupied various public spaces, including the Saint Bernard Church in Paris, for several months. Some of the migrants were refugees and asylum seekers and some were long-term migrants whose residency status was made illegal as a result of legislative changes. Especially during what was called the *affaire des sans-papiers de Saint Bernard*, the so-called illegal migrants had the opportunity to publicly challenge their demonized status in the country. Mireille Rosello argues that despite the spectacular eviction of the *sans papiers* from the church by the police, their collective movement has made a highly symbolic and political intervention into the French public discourse by replacing the criminalizing name *clandestin* (and its xenophobic/racist connotations) (2001: 2) and rejecting the illegalization of their status. She writes that the *sans-papiers* movement opened up “a space of sociological, legal, and philosophical debate in the very heart of the French capital” (2001: 2), forcing French citizens to question the relationship between “the city and the nation, between the refugee and the law, between rights and equity” (2001: 5). As Begüm Özden Fırat demonstrates, the political momentum initiated by the *sans papiers* in the French context was taken up in other European countries by various “national/transnational struggles, organizations, networks and campaigns on issues of migration, freedom of movement, and the right to stay against border policing, racism, deportation and detention camps.” For example, one year after the *affaire*, the political campaign *kein mensch ist illegal/ no one is illegal*, which began in 1997 at *Documenta X* in Kassel, Germany,<sup>138</sup> has spread out transnationally, informing various local struggles about deportation and racism.

Indeed, the *sans papiers* movement opened up alternative semantic fields to those produced by the mainstream media and dominant sociopolitical order and offered different signifying practices. Rosello claims that the *affaire des sans-papiers* was politically efficacious because it radically destabilized the construction of illegality in contemporary France by challenging the conventional representation of undocumented migrants. By proposing new visual narratives, the *affaire des sans papiers* countered stereotypical images of “illegal” migrants by “defamiliariz[ing] some of the best-established conventions about the portrayal of illegal immigration—conventions that are now exposed as cultural stereotypes or at least archetypes based on historically specific assumptions” (Rosello 1998: 139). The representational change manifested itself in “the shift towards individualized portraits and specific stories” of *sans-papiers* (Fisek 110). In addition, the *affaire* claimed that *sans-papiers* were integral to the body of the (white) French nation and could not be separated from its sociopolitical and visual realm.<sup>139</sup> Thus, the *affaire* provides a highly productive sociohistorical context to any discussion

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<sup>138</sup> Fırat further suggests that “The goal of the network is to hide and support illegal migrants, squatting churches, organizing public or semi-public debates about illegal border-crossing and starting actions against deportations.”

<sup>139</sup> The previously common images of *clandestins* equated blackness with illegality. The *affaire* did not alter this story but “complicated the picture by forcing the media to refine the monolithic category of blackness: because all the 300 *sans-papiers* were black Africans, the media felt it necessary to identify them very specifically, taking into account not only their name but also their age, their gender and their country of origin” (Rosello 1998: 140).

on migrancy and illegality because it not only epitomizes the shifting boundaries of (il)legality but also insists on critical visual narratives of migration. Although often overlooked in discussions of immigration, later artistic projects such as *Sahara Chronicle* have significantly contributed to this effort, providing visual counter-narratives of migration that negotiate and account for complex social relations, infrastructures, and geographies.

### **The Social Infrastructures of Mobility Across the Sahara**

Produced over the course of three years, the multichannel installation *Sahara Chronicle* includes footage of border patrols in Oujda, a city at the Morocco/Algeria border through which many immigrants pass; a detention center in Laayoune, a Western Saharan town that serves as a departure point for the Canary Islands; the Mauritanian port city of Nouadhibou, on the border of the Polisario Front, through which many migrants pass en route to Spain; and transit migration infrastructures in Arlit and Agadez (capital of Tuareg) in Niger, major hubs for migrants coming from West Africa on their way to neighboring Libya. Significantly, by turning to such sites Biemann shifts attention away from the language of “invasion” provoked by the cliché images of overcrowded migrant boats, widening the scope to include a vast geography and diverse migrant groups that are invisible in mainstream discourse around migration

*Sahara Chronicle* returns to Agadez with “Desert Truck Terminal for Libya” (13:00 min.). This video highlights the city’s role as an important trading place for the Tuareg people, and records preparations for a highly risky desert crossing. Biemann’s camera observes the activities of people who work for the Sahara Ténéré Transport Company (STT), including the owner, coxers,<sup>140</sup> drivers, mechanics, ticket sellers, and production managers, as well as hostel-owners and water-sellers. Biemann interviews some of these workers, allowing them to explain what their jobs entail. Although we never hear Biemann’s voice, the English subtitles that intermittently appear on the screen provide additional information to what we hear from the coxers and the owner. The owner states that he has been in the transport business since 1986 and explains that he opened his own company after the embargo on Libya was lifted in 2004. We also learn that his trucks transport people from Nigeria, Ghana, Benin, Togo, Ivory Coast, and Cameroon from Agadez to Dirkou—an oasis halfway between Agadez and the Niger-Libyan border. The owner of STT adds that they also pick up rejected migrants on their way back to Agadez, and in return receive gas money from the Libyan military (see fig. 4, 5).

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<sup>140</sup> Coxer—a term that describes the boys who are in charge of finding passengers and taking them to the transport agencies.



Figure 4

Throughout the video, Biemann avoids taking an experiential approach to migration. She does not record migration stories but instead takes a more systemic approach, investigating the operational networks of migratory flows across a vast geography and documenting the ways people organize themselves in relation to local populations as well as among themselves on the road. We learn from a coxer, for instance, that each migrant community has its own hostel. This suggests that the migrants' routes are shaped to a certain extent by their national affiliations. Nevertheless, national divisions are not sustained on the difficult journey, during which the migrants must work together in order to ensure a safe passage. We also observe and hear from people who facilitate the mobility of migrants from one hub or city to another. These interviews suggest that migrant transport provides a major source of income in Agadez. They also suggest the city's importance as a migratory hub in which the travelers can re-group and find partners, transportation, and supplies for the next leg of the journey. This involves a network of local support. As sociologist Mehdi Alioua explains, "If new sub-Saharan migrants continually arrive and circulate in the space of the Maghreb, it is because at each stage they find resource-persons who show them how to fit in, helping them to survive until the next departure" (87).



Figure 5

The migrant mobilities we observe here are improvisational in the sense that the migrants determine their routes and itineraries according to the contacts they establish and the information they get at each stop. As Michael Collyer shows in his article “In-Between Places: Trans-Saharan Transit Migrants in Morocco and the Fragmented Journey to Europe,” migrants cross the continent by stages, and their journeys lead to uncertain destinations with various collaborations en route that are based not on established rules but on the capacity to improvise and change plans according to unexpected circumstances. The migratory hubs that connect diverse transit routes constitute complex, deterritorialized social networks that cut across national borders. These networks/infrastructures are activated collectively by the actions of migrants and local agents who make use of spatial dispersion and the cracks of the border system. They elude, as Mehdi Alioua has asserted, “the instrumentalizing legal frameworks and borders of the nation states they traverse” (85).<sup>141</sup> Contrary to common assumptions, mafia-like organized trafficking does not regularly factor into the movement of immigrants across the Sahara and North Africa. The provisional infrastructure of clandestine migration makes use of existing transport and

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<sup>141</sup> Alioua further explains that “The network is what allows them to make the link between the stages, obtaining information about the spaces they intend to traverse and the ways to enter into contact with the collectives there who might be of help to them. This transnational migration—network: it is a relational structure that orients the migration project and the trajectories that stem from it, by knitting together deterritorialized relations. It is a compass, because the transmigrants who move from one space of regulation to the next indicate to those who follow how to succeed in this crossing, based on their own experience” (85)



telecommunications systems, as well as sociopolitical and economic connections based on ethnic, religious, national or ideological relations. For example, the system is heavily supported by the Tuareg people, who have trans-regional connections and great familiarity with the region.

In fact, such regional social and economic relations form the infrastructure in which migratory bodies produce and activate the surrounding landscape. In this context the notion of infrastructure defines “‘place’ as a heavily trafficked intersection, a port of call and exchange” that is embedded in “the transitive circuits of power and the political economic pressure points that monitor the migrations of people, channel the circulations of meanings, and stratify access to resources” (Conquergood 145). As AbdouMaliq Simone explains, infrastructure is usually understood as a group of connected systems of facilities, services, and supporting structures necessary for a city’s or region’s functioning, including mass transit, highways, bridges, gas, electric, water systems, communication systems, streets, etc. Writing on the inner cities of Johannesburg, Simone extends the notion of infrastructure to people’s socioeconomic activities in the city. He deploys the concept of “people as infrastructure” to investigate “economic [and social] collaboration among residents seemingly marginalized from ... urban life” (407).<sup>142</sup> African cities, Simone explains, “are characterized by incessantly flexible, mobile, and provisional intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used. These intersections, particularly in the last two decades, have depended on the ability of residents to engage complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices. These conjunctions in themselves become an infrastructure—a platform for providing and reproducing life in the city” (407).

Indeed, the concept of people as infrastructure helps contextualize migrants and mobility networks across the Sahara and North Africa because these networks are organized through self-services and self-governing initiatives that are neither planned nor provided by the authorities. Such forms of social infrastructure facilitate “the intersection of socialities so that expanded spaces of economic and cultural operation become available to [people] of limited means” (Simone 407). Like the living infrastructures of Johannesburg, the functioning of trans-Saharan networks and practices depends on unstable, contingent articulations of power and knowledge. These systems consist of heterogeneous activities embedded in improvisational landscapes. One of the videos of *Sahara Chronicle*, “Algerian Transit Route: Interview with Adawa, Arlit, Niger” (10:20 min.) features an interview with Adawa, one of the Tuareg rebels who returned to the capital city Agadez after the rebellion of the early 1990s against their exclusion from the labor force at the uranium mine in Arlit.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Simone’s term extends Henri Lefebvre’s definition of social space as a practice of works—modes of organization at various and interlocking scales that inform social relations. Simone argues that in this frame, “ways of doing and representing things become increasingly ‘conversant’ with one another. They participate in a diversifying series of reciprocal exchanges, so that positions and identities are not fixed or even, at most times, determinable” (411).

<sup>143</sup> Biemann explains that “The Tuareg rebellion in Niger in the mid 1990s, which made another attempt at consolidating their tribes into a nation state, was directly linked to uranium mining in Arlit and the exclusion of the Tuareg from the wealth found on their territory. The revenue from uranium extraction was shared among the French owners and the Nigerien elite in the remote capital who recruited miners from other ethnic groups from the south. The rebellion ended with a peace treaty which promised better social integration” (2008a: 89)



Figure 6

Adawa was the head of the clandestine transportation operations in Arlit on the Algerian migration route when Biemann's video was made (see fig. 6). This video is the only one featuring non-diegetic local music; it opens with a shot of Adawa's face partially captured by a static camera. Adawa is filmed sitting on the ground against a red earthen wall. He wears sunglasses and black robes, "forming a striking image split between tradition and modernization as he relays stories about his people and their difficult geopolitical circumstances" (Demos 2008: 184). Positioned at the center of the frame, he talks directly to Biemann (and to the viewer), whose voice is hardly heard in the video. Adawa's account in French, along with the supplementary text in English scrolling intermittently across the screen, reveals that the Tuaregs' knowledge of the harsh Saharan geography and their multilingual ability have enabled them to establish a semi-clandestine transport business from south to north that sustains them in spite of the lack of other job opportunities. Adawa informs us that he was trained by the Libyan military in the 1980s, was the leader of the Algerian front during the Tuareg rebellion in the 1990s, and worked as an interpreter for the Court of Justice in Arlit. After the peace agreements, Adawa came back to Arlit and was put in charge of the migration network by the Nigerian government. Adawa's position as someone who is in charge of the clandestine Saharan network demonstrates that specialized skills and adaptable knowledge are crucial in the complex networks and infrastructures of mobility.

These skills, along with their trans-regional mobility in the region, have made the Tuaregs important facilitators of the desert passage of sub-Saharan African migrants. Significantly, Adawa's town Arlit occupies a central location where migration and trade routes intersect. The informal or underground socioeconomic infrastructure in such border areas contributes to the blurring of boundaries between legality and illegality that enable migrant transportation networks to thrive. As Ines Kohl has stated, "Those who operate in trade move on illicit routes, and those who smuggle goods, also transport Ishumar [Tuareg] and other migrants through the Sahara" (93). In the video, Adawa explains his key role in this migratory network:

We bring [the migrants] to the Algero-Nigerian or Nigero-Libyan border and we drop them there. From there they have to find other means in Libya or Algeria to proceed to Europe. We have no contact or connection with southern Africa or North Africa with regards to these migrants. We don't ask around in southern Africa to send us people to pass. And North Africa doesn't ask us to send people so that they can make them pass to Europe. No no no. We have no contacts. . . . We'll embark you. Arriving at the border, you are on your own. We don't know you. . . .

Adawa points out that the situation of Tuareg people divided among five states by the colonial borders between Algeria, Libya, Mali, Chad and Niger has marginalized them within these national spaces but also enabled them to function across territorial borders.<sup>144</sup> He states:

What pushed us, the Tuareg community, to run all these risks: death, arrest by various authorities? In some ways we are still in rebellion. . . . If this crazy square of the Tuareg was somewhat under control there would be no passage to the north, nor to the south. There would be no crossing through. But if this society is forgotten, it will seek ways to survive. This is what pushes us to do all this today.

Indeed, Adawa's account sheds light on the ways in which contemporary paths of clandestine migration are intimately linked to the colonial politics of space and postcolonial processes of nation building as well as to the contested state of natural resources in the region. The Tuareg people are prized operators in this area due to their knowledge of the old caravan routes and their ability to reactivate them for contemporary Saharan mobilities. Hence the Tuareg trans-regional social infrastructure (commerce and trade combined during the last two decades with smuggling and migration) signals a kind of agency based on a precarious process of remaking the space that stays largely invisible to dominant discourses. Biemann's video depicts the Tuareg as having an ability to act beyond national authority and state sovereignty. Nevertheless, Adawa also informs us that the authorities of the Niger government have control over the Tuaregs' "clandestine" endeavor, rendering them vulnerable to arrest, prosecution, or punishment and thereby keeping "the rebels in a compromised position over their own semi-legal citizenship" (Thatcher).

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<sup>144</sup> "The central Saharan Tuareg territory itself was split between five countries in a colonial agreement in 1884, which has left this nomadic tribe a minority in their host nations. The French built a uranium mine at Arlit in Niger during the Cold War, largely eschewing the Tuareg for their own, foreign workforce; at the end of the Cold War, uranium from the new markets caused prices, and employment numbers, to plummet" (Thatcher).

## Invisible Infrastructures: Visualizing Countergeographies of Migration



Figure 7

The diverse mobility networks glimpsed in *Sahara Chronicle* are invisible within dominant discourses on “illegal” migration partly because of the media’s exclusive focus on showing images of immigrants who arrive to European coasts—a focus that neglects the socioeconomic, political, or individual reasons behind such mobilities as well as the hardship of migrants’ long and fragmented journeys. Alternative migratory nodes and networks such as the truck terminal in Agadez and the transport network directed by Adawa evoke Saskia Sassen’s notion of “countergeographies” of globalization because “they are deeply implicated with some of the major dynamics and capabilities constitutive of, especially, economic globalization yet are not part of the formal apparatus or of the objectives of this apparatus, such as the formation of global markets. . . . These counter-geographies are dynamic and changing in their locational features. And they encompass a very broad range of activities, including a proliferation of criminal activities (2004: 664). Cross-border circuits such as clandestine migratory networks and infrastructures can be defined as countergeographies precisely because they take place outside the regimes of visibility and official immigration regulations. Much of what takes place in nodes and networks of mobility is fairly invisible. Hence, these networks and locations are part of an

underground system that exceeds the representational spaces opened up through neoliberal globalization.<sup>145</sup>

Biemann's video "Architectures of Mobility—Laayoune, Western Sahara" (3:35 min.) documents invisible infrastructures that sustain those underground circuits and are intended to render migrants invisible to the surveillance systems. The video is composed of a succession of still images with no sound. Significantly, these still images were produced in 2005 not by Biemann's camera but by the Moroccan Gendarmerie Royale in Laayoune, who gave their surveillance photographs of migrants and their makeshift infrastructures to the artist. Biemann explains in her text about *Sahara Chronicle* that the border patrols perform one flight per week in the vast desert areas in border cities like Oujda and Laayoune, taking pictures of migrants to be used as "evidence of infringement and the occasion for judgment and deportation" (2008a: 80).

Produced by the Moroccan state using advanced surveillance technologies, these aerial shots of migrants and the places they are staying are used to track their movements. The pictures show that migrants surround their tents with stones "like the outline of a garden or a place for prayers," build their own boats with materials obtained from local carpenters, and lie down on the sand motionless to avoid being detected by the surveillance apparatus (See fig 7, 8). Biemann presents the images as a photo-journal that provides a dynamic interplay of movement and stillness, emphasizing the dialectic of mobility and immobility of the migratory networks. The moving "static" images produced by reconnaissance flights position the viewer as a witness/participant of migrant interceptions across the Sahara and further create a heightened awareness of the time and space the viewers inhabit in relation to the frozen or fixed time/space of the surveillance images on the screen/monitor. These depictions of the complex workings of power foreground a dialectical understanding of the contradictory albeit co-produced processes of mobilization and immobilization. Furthermore, when placed within the context of larger improvisational infrastructures documented by *Sahara Chronicle*, the function and meaning of these surveillance images change. Rather than standing as frozen images of successful interceptions, they become linked to other nodes and networks such as the truck terminal in Agadez, the Tuareg social infrastructure, the migrants taking the Iron Ore train in Mauritania, as well as to the EU's pressures on the Moroccan government to curb "illegal" migration.<sup>146</sup> As a result of the EU's increasing efforts to "fight against illegal migration," migrants' routes have been transformed, becoming lengthier, more dangerous, and more expansive, and employing riskier means of transport in order to evade border control apparatuses. When viewed in relation to the profound migratory networks and systems of social organization and information, it becomes difficult to imagine these surveillance photographs as documents of intercepted migrants. Indeed, by titling the video "Architectures of Mobility," Biemann emphasizes that the makeshift structures we see are part of a larger system and constitute only one leg of a much longer, highly fragmented journey.

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<sup>145</sup> "Clandestine immigration is a phenomenon which is planned outside the regimes of visibility and outside the supervision of government agencies. Only detected, i.e. failed acts of clandestine migration come into view—they are illegalized" (Andreas 57).

<sup>146</sup> De Haas explains that "In a perceived effort to 'externalize' border controls, EU states have exerted pressure on Maghreb states to clamp down on irregular migration occurring over their territory through increasing border controls, toughening migration law, readmitting irregular sub-Saharan migrants from Europe and deporting them from their own national territories" (2008a: 1306).



Figure 8

In the mainstream news media, such images of migrant surveillance and interception are framed as success stories in which the authorities stop illegal migration. The migratory network's relationship to the complex symbolic discourse supported by a system of interpretive frames, stereotypes, clichés, and icons, is completely repressed. Instead, we see frequent TV and newspaper images of hundreds, sometimes thousands, of migrants, exhausted by a difficult crossing in small and unstable boats barely staying afloat. The collective image of undocumented migration is condensed to the racializing images of such “boat people” from Africa, who are typically depicted as victims or criminals engaged in “illegally” crossing Europe's borders.<sup>147</sup> Such images repress the reasons behind migrations as well as the difficulty of the journey. They do not record migrants dying at sea or working/living without papers in precarious conditions in North Africa or Europe. Instead, as Falk argues, such clichéd images of illegalized migration have become “an icon of threatened borders,” constituting “a visual place of memory,” shaping collective imagination and public discourse (86). Images of interceptions at sea or capsized boats resulting in hundreds or thousands of deaths further reduce the migrants' multifaceted journeys

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<sup>147</sup> As Falk asserts, “It is important to note that the majority of the illegalized immigrants in Europe do not arrive as boat people; they come by land or by air. And in Europe, most of the so-called illegal immigrants have never crossed a border illegally, but rather had their residence permit withdrawn. But, interestingly, the image of ‘boat people’ has come to occupy the center stage in any discussion of migration” (83).

to a series of ill-fated sea-crossings. *Sahara Chronicle* counters such visual and verbal discourses by emphasizing the complexity and heterogeneity of migratory networks and geographies across Africa and Europe, and demonstrates that the physical practice of journeying and border crossing is not an empty act but rather a highly materialized and emotional undertaking that creates a real, tangible space in its own right.



Figure 9

The video “Algero-Moroccan Borderlands” (7:10 min.) reveals the complexity of the countering strategies employed by *Sahara Chronicle*. This video is set in Oujda, a Moroccan border town through which the majority of sub-Saharan immigrants pass. The video combines images of the border brigades who search for undocumented migrants within a vast, barren landscape that is clearly not a natural border but rather a political one. The camera captures a sand storm that hinders the guards’ vision and our own (see fig. 9, 10).<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Demos opens his essay, “Sahara Chronicle: Video’s Migrant Geography,” by a description of this scene and suggests that “As the camera’s perception of the desert is denied, the storm dramatizes the breakdown of the advanced technologies of surveillance and the Moroccan police’s inability to maintain its country’s national integrity. What happens to the concept of a geographical border when the land itself moves? Containment becomes an impossible task, and the contours of the nation as a locus of economic, linguistic, and legal identity begin to blur. In its place a vague terrain emerges that is the space of the migrant” (2008: 117).



Figure 10

This brings forward an interesting interplay of visibility and invisibility; in a sand storm, migrants could cross the border without being seen by the border guards or surveillance technologies. The futility of the border guards' efforts to protect their eyes from the moving sand suggests the contingency of control mechanisms. Likewise, the fact that the camera keeps recording through the sand storm points to the limits of artistic/visual production. The view might have been clearer from above, but Biemann has explained that the royal brigades only routinely make one surveillance flight per week over the desert areas around the border. She continues: "I didn't want to initiate an extra flight for aerial filming that would risk the detection of a group of clandestine migrants hiding in the dunes" (2008a: 80). Yet Biemann also incorporates photographic surveillance and satellite images produced by control systems, creating a possibility or risk of complicity between artistic production and military operations.

In filming through a sand storm and in other respects, Biemann's video-works celebrate both the strengths and limitations of digital technology. Her post-production process includes manipulating and layering image and soundscapes, for example by using split screens and composite images, superimposing text over images, providing explanatory commentary or contextual information, and stop-action and slow-motion functions.





Figure 11

The video “Desert Radio Drone” (5:40 min.), for example, is a computerized audio-visual document generated by Biemann in which, as the subtitle of the video describes, “a carpet of satellite and radio signals-audio and visual-encoded and jammed where migratory and digital geographies overlap” (see fig. 11). In one of her texts about *Sahara Chronicle*, Biemann explains that this simulated video footage refers to a highly advanced surveillance technology used in military actions such as the one used in Iraq or in the Sahara. Biemann reports that Germany has provided the “newest models of unmanned airplanes” to Libya in return for Libya’s active work to curb migration: “These drones glide over the desert borders, transmitting televisual data back to a remote receiver in real time. Other observation machines are equipped with night vision and thermal cameras, extending surveillance into realms invisible to human eye” (2008: 80). As a result of not being able to receive visual intelligence from Libya’s military, Biemann artificially constructed the video from high-resolution satellite images of the desert. The soundtrack comprises layers of recordings from Saharan and Middle Eastern radio stations, mixed with electronic sounds, music fragments, and winds (Biemann 2008a: 81). The satellite images move in a way that evokes the feeling that you are gliding over the land while taking in this strange, manipulated soundtrack. This video underscores the mediated nature of images of (undocumented) human mobility and the pervasiveness of the visualizing apparatus used to hinder “unwanted” migrations by the EU and its collaborators in Africa. (Indeed, the simulated

images refer to the border control technologies established in the Sahara by the EU.) It becomes clear that these borders are constantly shifting according to the trajectories of migrants and the boundaries of the areas controlled by the surveillance apparatus. In other words, borders are formed by the movement of the migrants rather than being determined solely by the physical borders established by nation states or supranational structures.

### **Representing Migrancy in Multichannel Installation Format**

Writing in 1999, Etienne Balibar asserted that in the post-1989 Europe, “the notions of interiority and exteriority, which form the basis of the representation of the border, are undergoing a veritable earthquake. The representations of the border, territory, and sovereignty, and the *very possibility of representing* the border and territory, have become the object of an irreversible historical ‘forcing’” (qtd. in Galt 2010: 226). Drawing on Balibar’s analysis, film scholar Rosalind Galt insists that cinema (and art) needs to find new ways or structures of representation that could account for the recent “radical historical transformation” as defined by Balibar. Referring to the Austrian auteur Michael Haneke’s films (*Hidden*, *Code Unknown*, *Time of the Wolf*), she says, “At a formal level, they encode exterior and interior, the violent rupture of borders and edges, and the impossibility of inscribing European territory in any secure or centered fashion” (2010: 226).<sup>149</sup> Galt’s argument suggests that Haneke’s cinematic contribution to the visual politics of European cinema is highly significant in the sense that his films problematize the notion of a unified European territory and identity not only at the level of content but also at the level of form, yielding politically critical approaches to representing borders and citizenship in Europe that destabilize established structures, definitions, and meanings.

Taking Galt’s argument a step further, I am interested in exploring what happens to migrant stories and representation of (im)mobilities when the moving image is transferred from the screen of the black box to the white cube. In other words, how could moving image installations in the gallery contribute to a critical discourse on migration and mobility as Haneke’s films do on the cinema screen? What alternative forms of display, narrative, spectatorship positioning, and social and political imagination could gallery installations or projections offer? And what discourses do these visual narratives aim to produce?

In 2010, Biemann’s installation *Sahara Chronicle* was presented in the Walter and McBean Galleries of San Francisco Art Institute/ SFAI as part of the exhibition *Geography of Transterritories* curated by SFAI’s Director of Exhibitions and Public Programs Hou Hanru. The exhibition included works by an international group of artists, including San Francisco-based Michael Arcega, Paris-based Claire Fontaine, New York-based Carlos Motta, and Paris-based cooperative Société Réaliste. Entering the exhibition space, the viewer encountered Michael Arcega’s sculptural installation *Concealarium* (2008), which consisted of two stacks of lumber on mobile pallets (see fig. 12). As the viewer walked around the two wooden forms, it was possible to see that each of the rectangular pieces had a door, recalling structures such as a container or a coffin. The left wall of the first floor of the gallery was covered with a poster series contributed by Société Réaliste, titled *Ministere de l’Architecture: Culture State* (2008–9) (see fig. 13). In the gallery space, Biemann’s installation was placed on the balcony, overlooking the main gallery. It was possible to peek into the work from the ground floor—the video “The Desert Truck Terminal” was projected on the wall. The viewer needed to climb the stairs to enter

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<sup>149</sup> See Chapter II of this dissertation for a discussion of Michael Haneke’s film *Hidden*.

the installation. Four monitors with headphones, two side-by-side on the left and two on the right, were placed on the ground with wooden seats that allowed more than one viewer to watch each video.



Figure 12



Figure 13

On the walls adjacent to “Desert Truck Terminal in Agadez,” viewers could read a contextualizing text printed on the wall with large letters. On the opposite wall, another video “Desert Radio Drone, Western Sahara,” was projected (see fig. 14, 15). In the installation, Biemann juxtaposed the documentation of the visceral experience of the migrants’ preparations before the long Saharan journey with the artificial satellite images. The four monitors featured videos such as “Interview with Adawa,” “Fishery in Exclusive Economic Zone,” “Nouadhibou Mauritania,” and “Oujda Frontierland.”



Figure 14

Even though one might have seen the videos of *Sahara Chronicle* before visiting the exhibition, seeing them as part of a multichannel, sculptural installation would offer a completely different experience than watching them on a computer/TV screen. As mentioned previously, in this installation, Biemann presented the videos in a combination of large screens with smaller monitors—a strategy that emphasized diverse modes of narration, allowing the viewer to move between scales. The installation simultaneously presented different hubs and routes of sub-Saharan migration without asserting an overarching linear narrative. Hence, the installation of *Sahara Chronicle* provided an incomplete, multilayered mapping of spaces and subjects that constituted the complex geography it engaged with.

It is worth considering the aesthetic and sociopolitical stakes of representing migration in relation to the formal strategies of video installation art. Video essays and installations produced within the domain of contemporary art typically provide different modes of presentation and display, for example multiple screens/projections, non-linear narration, and perambulatory

spectatorship. The embodied spectatorship through which the viewer pieces together fragments of moving image installation in her traversal of the gallery space allows the viewer to situate herself relative to experiences and networks of migration and mobility in a more self-reflexive way. This is not to say that the gallery spectator has more access to the lives/experiences of migrants or to their complex mobility networks, but the form of the time-based installation in the gallery offers alternate modes of engagement with images of mobility by enabling the spatialization of the moving image and evoking its spatial temporality. In other words, time-based installations integrate sculptural and architectural elements with the moving image and uniquely situate the viewer within the work. As time-based images move from temporal organization, which is sequential (one image after the other), and become spatial or distributed, what is authored and experienced—or even interacted with—surpasses what we refer to in cinema with terms such as *mise-en-scène* or montage. Moreover, moving image installations integrate film/video, performance, and sculpture in increasingly complex and hybrid works.<sup>150</sup>



Figure 15

The co-articulation of film and sculpture in moving image installations creates a productive tension between the materiality of the apparatus (the screen, monitor, and also gallery space, etc.) and the referentiality of the image, compelling the spectator to integrate the

<sup>150</sup> Referring to an older generation of artists such as Joan Jonas, Lynda Benglis, Bruce Nauman, and Vito Acconci, Tanya Leighton points out that for those artists “specific media such as painting, sculpture, and drawing were abandoned in favor of what was deemed higher integrity for art—a new hybridization of forms and an expansion of immaterial ‘supports,’ such as performance, video and installation art” (21).

referential space and time with the actual space and time of the viewing. Hence, the content of the image and its installation in the gallery become closely related to the construction of the work's meaning. These kinds of hybrid works can offer critical ways to approach migration/mobility and its (visual/cinematic) representation by experimenting with the spatial temporality of the moving image. Indeed, such installations transform viewers' time as an experience of duration, asking them to slow down and reflect on the images vis-à-vis their particular embodied experience in the gallery (and in the world) as they explore the distributed aesthetics of the work. The resulting experience calls for a rearticulation of coexisting proximity and distance among different subjects and geographies, including the viewer's own positioning vis-à-vis the materialities depicted on the videos.

In her study of the incursion of time-based (digital, documentary) images into the gallery, Elizabeth Cowie argues that "in its gallery exhibition the digital remains specific: for each place of viewing a time-based installation is not only a context – geographical and social, public or private – but also an architectural space, organizing the spectator's access to mobility and stillness" (124). Hence in the gallery, the specificity of the image is based not only on the in-frame content (or the geopolitical or social registers of the image) but also on the actual time and space of the viewing: "In the gallery the audio-spectator is mobile, perhaps just passing through, physically engaged by and traversing a space that has been designed for her movement in and around it, perhaps staying two minutes or ten minutes. In any event, both the space and the time of spectatorship of time-based works are transformed" (Cowie 125).<sup>151</sup> Kate Mondloch meanwhile defines the doubleness of the gallery spectatorship as a "tension between illusionist/virtual and material/actual spaces" (62), and elaborates on this point by arguing that "In a curious amalgamation of gallery-based spatial experimentation and political aesthetics, this model of spectatorship proposes that viewers be both 'here' (embodied subjects in the material exhibition space) and 'there' (observers looking onto screen spaces) in the here and now" (62).

*Sahara Chronicle* demands an exploration of the ways the virtual space of images and their presentation across screens creates an architecture of critically engaged spectatorship and provides disorienting temporal and physical displacements while underscoring the embodied experience of mobility and spectatorship. By offering an active relationship among the spectator, the screen space, and exhibition space, time-based installations like *Sahara Chronicle* "generate a self-conscious and troubled spectatorship explicitly contingent on the articulated tension between actual and virtual time and spaces" (Mondloch 76). *Sahara Chronicle*, as a moving image installation, unfolds in the actual space and time experienced by the viewer, and thereby has the potential to "confront the viewer through a mode of direct address rather than via a mode of contemplative attention familiar to classical cinema" (Leighton 30). Indeed, *Sahara Chronicle* concerns the liminal area between the two spaces, the virtual and the actual, and foregrounds the interval between them to throw the audience into a space of critical indeterminacy. In doing so, it underscores the materiality of the installation, which prevents the audience's immersion in new forms of technology while avoiding anthropological models of representation that claim to document "authentic" others (the native, the oppressed, the subaltern) and "exotic" spaces in a "truthful" manner.

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<sup>151</sup> Cowie argues that "What distinguishes the video and film installation from other gallery media such as painting and sculpture, but also from film and video projected in a cinema, is the way it demands – and performs – a new positioning of audio-spectatorship, of encountering the sounds and images" (125).

In her recent book *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, Laura Mulvey explores changing forms of (post-cinematic) spectatorship vis-à-vis new film/video viewing platforms such as the DVD player, VCR or computer screen, with a particular focus on the tension between movement and stillness in cinema. She argues that electronic and digital technologies offer new forms of engaging with film and cinematic images, allowing the viewer to freeze or rewind/fast-forward moving images, thereby displacing traditional cinematic representation. She claims that new digital technologies further reveal cinema's basis in still images, and in doing so reposition cinema's tension between stillness and movement within an "aesthetic of delay." Of crucial importance to my analysis of new media spectatorship in the gallery is Mulvey's theorization of "possessive," "fetishistic" spectator versus "pensive" spectator. According to Mulvey, possessive spectator takes pleasure from the ability to stop, control, repeat, and somehow possess stilled film images. Drawing on the work of Raymond Bellour, she develops a theory of an alternative spectatorship: for the pensive spectator the cinema of delay prompts considerations about cinema itself and fascination displaces fetishistic scopophilia as the main form of pleasure. Even though I do not share Mulvey's psychoanalytic approach, I think that her theory of pensive spectator produced by new technologies provides a helpful model for thinking about moving image spectatorship in the gallery. The pensive spectator in Mulvey's analysis is "the one who in stopping the film discovers its *punctum* [Barthes] and reflects upon the spectral qualities of the cinema, its relation to time and death" (Doane 116). Mulvey argues that a delayed cinema enabled by these technologies is resistant to current tendencies to erase the past and to deny the historical, to signal the "end of an era" through a clear-cut delineation of a "before" and "after" (qtd. in Doane 117). Such temporal ambiguity produced by new spectatorship technologies can be expanded to explore the spatial ambiguity particular to gallery spectatorship. Mulvey's discussion of temporality provokes a critical engagement with notions of life and death, the past and the present. I argue that the spatial ambiguity in *Sahara Chronicle* works in a similar way in the sense that it destabilizes the clear-cut distinction between here and there, the space of the (moving) image and the space of the viewer, further questioning territorial distinctions and political borders that separate "us" from "others."

By situating the viewers as an integral part of the work, *Sahara Chronicle* produces the effect/affect that the image space is coextensive with the viewer's own space in the gallery (and in the larger sociopolitical realm). Moving and still images transform the performative space of the art gallery, affecting its nature and reception.<sup>152</sup> In other words, *Sahara Chronicle* underscores the political importance of the spaces and subjects depicted by documentary images while offering critical reflections on the conditions of mediated viewing that go beyond our normalized consumption of the media image, thereby producing a pensive spectator of migration and mobility. What is most unique about the perambulatory performance of this work, however, is that the installation actively mirrors the diverse (im)mobilities captured by its images. The viewer's spatial experience of *Sahara Chronicle* gains a specific meaning that goes beyond the formal function of incorporating the gallery space and the viewer's body into the work. In other words, it exceeds an abstract concept of active spectatorship by enabling the spectator to capture the complexity and multiplicity of recent migratory forms and networks in her physical,

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<sup>152</sup> See Bruno 2007 for a detailed discussion of this point.

durational experience of the work.<sup>153</sup> Providing fractured and shifting views across several screens, Biemann's installation intertwines the spatial navigation and virtual navigation of the viewer to foreground migratory routes/subjectivities. Indeed, the materiality of migrant conditions becomes coextensive (but not continuous) with the materiality of the gallery space. The multilayered map produced by the work takes shape precisely in the space among various contingencies of images/screens of the multiscreen installation, the gallery, and the viewer. And the migratory networks evoked by the work signify not an enclosed representational space but rather a world with multiple entries and exits that demands heterogeneous forms of representation, knowledge, and literacy (see fig. 16).



Figure 16

### **Biemann's Artistic Approach in Context**

In her analysis of Biemann's video essay *Remote Sensing* (2001), which tracks the mobilities of women within the global sex industry, film scholar Barbara Mennel observes that although Biemann addresses ways to “create a discourse critical of globalization as it emerges in Europe,” she cannot completely escape “the hierarchical inscription of the western speaking subject and its privilege.” Mennel notes the privileging of narrative, in particular the expository voice of the artist with her perfect, nearly unaccented English, over the image (2010: 342). Mennel elaborates: “Biemann's own critical use of the apparatus of long distance tracking and

<sup>153</sup> Biemann suggests that presenting the videos across multiple monitors and projections evokes “a multi-perspective audiovisual environment that can be inhabited by viewers, in much the same way that migration space is inhabited by the actors depicted” (2008a: 80).



remote sensing undermines the possibility of long distance affiliation or empathy. Biemann's reproduction of categories of remote sensing and surveillance—namely routes and markers of identification, such as name, ID number, height and weight—keeps women locked into the status of commodity. . . . The women are not accorded any space to articulate desires, subjectivity, interiority, emotion or relation beyond what takes on a function within the sex industry, reproducing the lack of humanity that we are to assume the video intends to criticize" (2010: 345). I think that Mennel's critique of *Remote Sensing* is relevant to *Sahara Chronicle* because the migrants or smugglers we see in this project are, like the women in *Remote Sensing*, "locked into" their functions in the network, and their humanity is registered in their power/agency to traverse regions and cross borders in highly organized ways rather than in their personal stories or emotions. In fact, Biemann prioritizes structure over the lived experience. But does this mean that Biemann becomes a possessive spectator (to use Laura Mulvey's term) of her own footage, further positioning the viewer as a possessive spectator in the gallery? Does *Sahara Chronicle* fetishize the movement of people? Or does the work constitute an attempt to find a new mode of representation adequate to the conditions of globalization?

The answer to these questions lies in a consideration of Biemann's broader video-based artistic practice, which is rooted in extensive fieldwork, academic research, interviews, and collaboration across disciplines. In recent years she has produced various video essays and done curatorial projects on migration, mobility, technology, labor, and gender. In most of her projects, Biemann has collaborated with other artists, curators, cultural theorists, geographers, anthropologists, activists, and architects from diverse geographic regions. With a specific focus on border zones and transnational spaces such as free trade zones, resorts for sex tourists, and refugee camps, her artistic and curatorial projects have examined the effects of globalization on both macro and micro levels. Her video essays and installations include, among others, *Performing the Border* (1999), an examination of the exploitation of industrial and sexual female labor in the desert city of Ciudad Juarez on the border between Mexico and the U.S.; *Europlex* (2001), a work that concerns the circular movement of people and the informal economic activities that take place on the Moroccan-Spanish border; *Black Sea Files* (2005), a film that explores a specific transnational infrastructure—the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline—and its political and social effects on the Southern Caucasus and Turkey; and *X-Mission* (2008), a study of interconnected Palestinian refugee camps dispersed throughout the Middle East.

Such works testify to Biemann's commitment to exploring critical forms of re/presentation that push the conventions of documentary filmmaking, narrative cinema, and journalistic reportage. Indeed, experimenting with alternate modes of representation has been central to her artistic explorations. Biemann's films join several recent artworks that have explored the subject of migration and border zones. Several artists such as Harun Farocki, Isaac Julien, Anwar Kanwar, Angela Melitopoulos, Želimir Žilnik, Chantal Akerman, Steve McQueen, Emily Jacir, Zineb Sedira, Esra Ersen, Adrian Paci, and Anri Sala have investigated the critical use of moving images in exposing power relations imbued with multiple histories and heterogeneous subjects and spaces. Generally speaking, these artists have focused on borders and borderlands as a way to investigate changing mobility regimes, and experimented with new mediated forms of representing migrancy and mobility.

Biemann's artistic methods can be defined as quasi-ethnographic in the sense that she conducts in-depth research on the geopolitics of the places she will visit and makes contact with the local people, intellectuals, and experts before leaving for the trip. However, Biemann

differentiates her practice from that of anthropologists and journalists. She has said, “I don’t spend that much time in the field—not in the same way as an anthropologist or a journalist who has to cover a story and interview in-depth before showing up at a news channel. For two weeks in the field I spend one year at the editing computer. I think I can make very subjective choices, I can tell my own stories about what I find interesting in an area. My main strategy is to organize knowledge, organizing very complex circumstances” (Paterson). Hence, for Biemann, what makes her practice *artistic* is the liberty of making subjective choices and having substantial post-production time and resources to work with the material she has gathered during her fieldwork. Notably, Biemann writes extensively about her own works, both to “elaborate on their sociopolitical contexts” and to reflect on her motivations and aesthetic strategies on a “meta” level (Biemann 2008b: 13).

It is important to note that Biemann’s goal in *Sahara Chronicle* is not to create empathy for or identification with the migrants but rather to illustrate a complex network operating across a vast territory. She thus seeks to underscore the fact that “subjectivities *cannot* be understood in isolation from systematically organized totalities” (Charlesworth 2).<sup>154</sup> She investigates the larger social, geopolitical and economic roots of migration, not simply its anthropological effects. She also examines the financial mechanisms (the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, for instance) that have turned African countries into indebted states, with enclaves of protected natural resources controlled by multinational corporations. Her portrayal of the Tuaregs’ disenfranchisement in relation to the French control of uranium mining on their traditional lands in Niger, or her exposure of the ways European demands for fishing licenses off the coast of Mauritania have formed a system that damages local industry testifies to her commitment to investigating geopolitical and economic systems. In fact, her goal in *Sahara Chronicle* is not to create sympathy with “victims,” but to allow her subjects to articulate a demand for political recognition and economic justice, a demand to enter into a relationship with Europe, rather than being neglected or rejected.

In “Desert Truck Terminal for Libya,” the video freezes at certain moments and is overlaid with text explaining the role the person on the screen plays in the migratory network (see fig. 17). For example: “Adamou: Chief coxer for Ghanaian transit passengers en route to Libya” or “Ali: Local agent running Ghanaian ghetto in Agadez for transit passengers.” In other words, the video reduces the people in these frozen images to their function within a complex system. By providing a still shot of their faces (almost all people captured in the video are men or boys) that stays on the screen for a few seconds, Biemann evokes forms of identification (such as the mug shot or government identification photo) and surveillance techniques that are widely used as control mechanisms in the border control practices the video seems to be criticizing. Such visual identification via frozen image and explanatory text refers to Laura Mulvey’s notion of possessive spectator—in this case inscribed into the video image rather than performed by the actual spectator on a DVD player or computer screen. Through such references, *Sahara Chronicle*, like many works in Biemann’s oeuvre, displays the contradictions inherent in the artistic use of digital technologies and media, which not only enable transnational communication and trans-border mobilities but also support intensive surveillance and control systems on a global scale. Ironically, new technologies of communication used to support global

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<sup>154</sup> Charlesworth argues that “This format in Biemann’s work is deployed to address recent economic transformations in the geographies of global capital, exploring issues such as migration, the ‘feminization’ of labor, the transit of commodities, inter-communal conflict, and the implications of neoliberal policies.”

economic processes render certain social relations hyper-visible while leaving others such as undocumented workers in the shadows. The production of *Sahara Chronicle* parallels this paradoxical effect because the work's own production relies precisely on the mobility (and visibility) denied to most of its subjects, underscoring the unevenness of access to mobility depicted by Biemann's videos.<sup>155</sup>

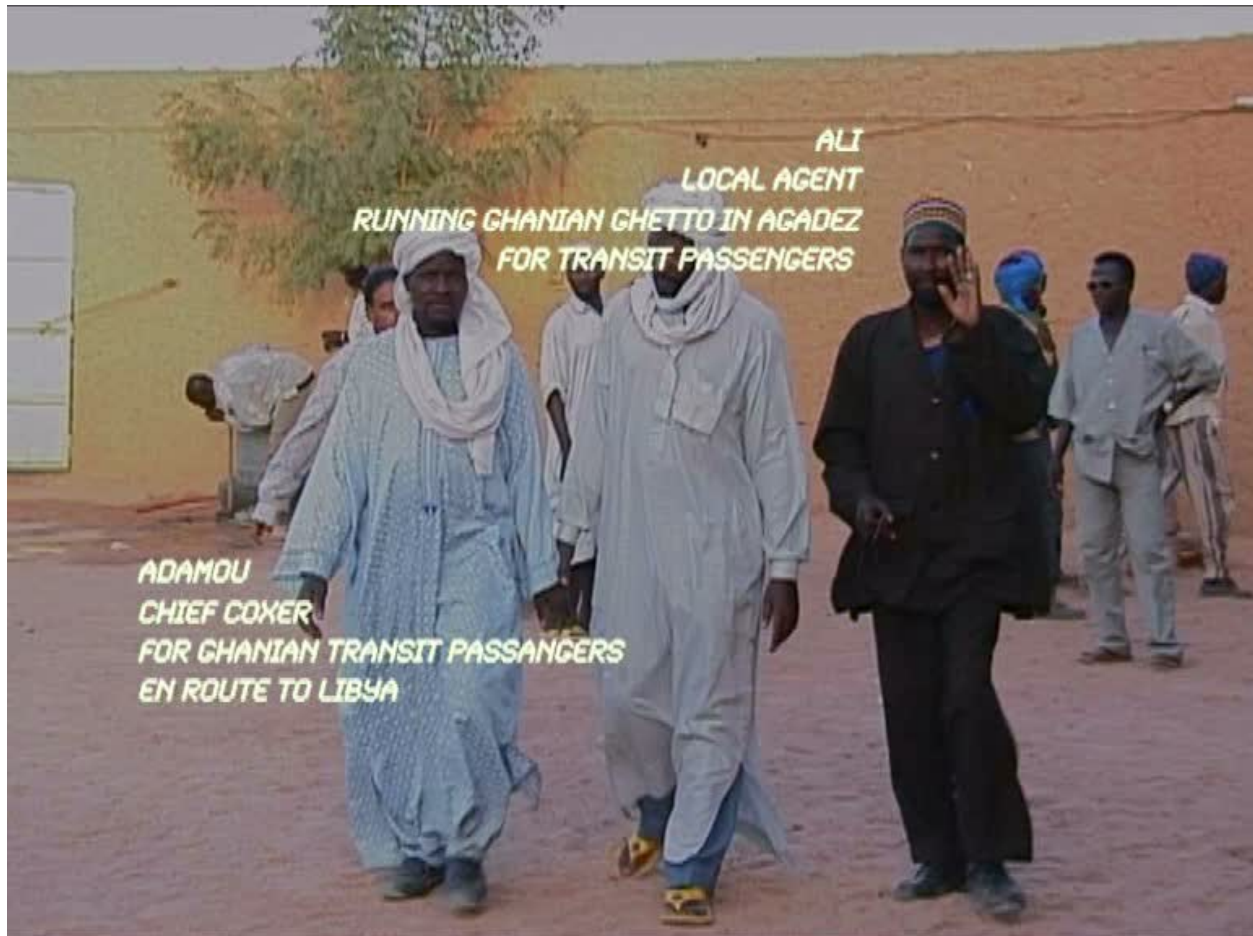


Figure 17

Ultimately, Biemann cannot escape the fact that visualizing undocumented mobilities poses both representational and ethical challenges for “outsiders” who make films or artworks on these matters. Migrant workers are constantly made visible as stereotypes through processes of racialization by the mainstream media and political discourses, while their individual trajectories and desires are hidden from the public consciousness and collective representations, further preventing any solidarity among undocumented migrants. With the context of second generation Maghrebi immigrants living in France in mind, William Brown points out that “*Beur* filmmakers in France have been legitimated thanks to a postcolonial movement that took years to come to fruition, and yet it is hard to conceive of how trafficked people might arrive in the same position, since they are systematically kept invisible and illegal not only from legal residents but, perhaps

<sup>155</sup> Biemann's work has appeared in either installation or screening mode in a variety of places such as festivals, art exhibitions, activist conferences, networks and educational settings.

more importantly from each other by a system that needs to keep them invisible and illegal” (19).<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, since undocumented people are trapped in the condition of illegality and deportability, their visibility might put them at the risk of detention or deportation, which makes it very difficult for undocumented migrants to find the means to represent themselves. As a result, this issue has been visualized by “observers of this phenomenon, rather than by those who live through it themselves” (Brown et al. 8). Furthermore, the subjects of these films and artworks are not the audiences for these works. And while they are immobilized or kept in legal limbo, the films/artworks about them are mobile and travel across borders, raising the specter of commodification of the immigrant experience. As Christine Bischoff warns, “Images can bring the violence inherent in illegalization out into the open and thereby shed a critical light on governmental policies of labor mobility. But showing what is hidden may sometimes lead to new forms of oppression” (8). While Biemann is sensitive to the ethical issues inherent in making visible those who necessarily strive to be invisible, she nevertheless recognizes the process of bringing invisible subjects, spaces, and geopolitical developments to light as a significant function of contemporary art. She states that her main goal is not to produce compelling images but to intervene in the existing discourses and practices of image making (Paterson). In this sense, Biemann’s project works to unravel the frames that dehumanize undocumented migrants and cast them as invaders.

By attending to trans-Saharan mobility networks and infrastructures and highlighting the restrictive migration politics of the EU, *Sahara Chronicle* produces a countergeography of Europe. The multichannel installation format projects and disperses the work onto various screens, surfaces, and monitors, offering the viewer a fractured yet embodied gallery experience that reflects the length, complexity, and fragmentation of the migratory journey. In that sense, the aesthetic or formal concerns of the work both reflect and are informed by its political concerns. Indeed, *Sahara Chronicle*, like other films and videos explored in this dissertation, critically investigates the relationship between migrancy and visibility, exploring aesthetic questions and issues in relation to the political ones evoked by the work’s particular sociohistorical context.

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<sup>156</sup> See Chapter II of this dissertation for a detailed discussion of *beur* cinema.

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