

## European Identity in Cinema in the Era of Mass Migration

The history of the idea of ‘Europe’<sup>1</sup> can be described in terms of a constant oscillation between two poles, one instrumental or pragmatic (the Europe of norms), the other affective (the Europe of values and feelings) and, on the other hand, in terms of a continuous, unresolved conflict between the belief in some ineffable European ‘spirit’ or ‘ethos’ and the outright rejection of any sort of ‘European identity’. To illuminate the ambiguity pervading attempts to define European identity one need only juxtapose the traditional characteristics of Europeanness deriving from the continent’s *founding philosophical and religious traditions*, including Christianity, Roman law and the Enlightenment—here ‘Europeanness’ is defined in relation to the concepts of the polis, citizenship, democracy and participation, rationalism, universality and cosmopolitanism—with the immense contradictions underlying the concept of Europeanness defined in relation to *political and economic circumstances*. While in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the two world wars and the processes of decolonization associated ‘Europeanness’ with “turmoil, self-destruction and decline as a world power,” European integration processes since the 1960s have promoted an association of ‘Europeanness’ with “a shared [cultural] identity between nations” (4). With the start of the debt crisis in the Euro-zone, however, the pendulum has swung from a celebration of a shared European culture/identity to an economically based notion of ‘European’ that essentially denies Europeanness to those without euros. As Mariana Liz and Michael Wintle have observed enthusiasm for Europe has waxed and waned in more or less direct proportion to the waning and reemergence of nationalist feelings on one hand, and to changes in the capitalist economy on the other hand. Thus, while in the 1950s enthusiasm for Europe was primarily aligned with anti-nationalist feelings emerging from the devastating effects of WW2, the break up of the Soviet Bloc and the conflict in the Balkans in the 1990s led to a resurgence of nationalism and to a profound questioning of European integration (Liz, *Euro-Visions* 12).<sup>2</sup>

A recurring theme in all critical writings on Europe and European identity is the idea that to be European is to doubt that there is something like a ‘European identity’. Reminding us that European literature and philosophy is permeated by an attitude

characterized by doubt, criticism and relativism in relation to self, (Christ'l De Landtsheer, Craig Carroll and Ralph Hekscher 164), Paul Gifford describes European identity in terms of “a highly developed critical reflexivity, marked by relativism, representationalism and constructivism, motivated by some form of attachment to a decentred, pointillistic...form of sense-making; a set of attitudes often expressed as a horror of ‘closure’ or a mistrust of ‘depth’ and of organic roots” (21).<sup>3</sup> In other words, for Gifford the critique of the concept of ‘identity’ is constitutive of ‘European identity’.

Along similar lines, in “The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy” (1983) Cornelius Castoriadis goes beyond the familiar claim that locates the origins of ‘Europe’ in the Greco-Roman tradition and posits Greece, and implicitly Europe, as the origin of thought or philosophy as such, the latter being nothing else but the constant self-questioning of the very legitimacy of thought.<sup>4</sup> Castoriadis conceives of the Greek Polis and the creation of democracy as embodying a particularly European way of being in the world which he describes as *skepticism*: “[Although] describing and analyzing Greece is equivalent to describing and analyzing any other randomly chosen culture, thinking and reflecting about Greece is not and cannot be. For in this latter case, we are reflecting and thinking about the social and historical conditions of thought itself—at least, thought as we know and practice it” (268-269).<sup>5</sup> The essence of European thought, that is, of democracy—Castoriadis treats the two as equivalent—is the rejection of any ultimate foundation for anything, including knowledge, inasmuch as since Plato “it has been known that every demonstration presupposes something which is not demonstrable” (271). While Castoriadis identifies Greece as the germ of European identity, Michael Herzfield offers a less utopian perspective on the Greco-Roman roots of Europe when he reminds us of the core-periphery tensions in the definition of ‘European identity’ embodied precisely by Greece, which is, at one and the same time, “the European’s spiritual cradle and...the Orientalized ‘bad child’ of the EU,” “the idealized central source and the contested border of Europe itself” (Herzfield 147).

French philosopher Remi Braque takes an even more radical stance on the core-periphery tension by describing European identity as literally ‘ex-centric’, lacking a core or a unique origin: “Europe’s self-image has always pointed to something else that existed before it [e.g. the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Greco-Roman tradition etc.]” (qtd

in Peter Wagner 361).) Max Beloff<sup>6</sup> goes even further, defining Europe in terms of “its sense of its own history” (18), a kind of ‘meta-definition’ in which Europe figures as *an archive of the world*, a self-reflexive consciousness of its own (and the world’s) past.<sup>7</sup> Complementing such views of ‘Europe’ and ‘European identity’ as essentially *ex-centric*, are reflections on exile and nostalgia as supposedly, quintessentially European experiences. According to John Durham Peters, for instance, “Exile is, perhaps, the central story told in European civilization: the human existence as exile from God, the garden of Eden, the homeland, the womb, or even oneself” (Peters 17).<sup>8</sup>

The traditions repeatedly drawn upon to define Europe are the ‘Greco-Roman’ on one hand and the ‘Judeo-Christian’ on the other. Anthony Padgen underscores the (supposedly) seamless continuity between the two traditions, between “the world—the orbis terrarium...coextensive with the Roman empire, itself an extension in space of the city of Rome” and “the orbis Christianus, or Christendom (43), and the Christian basis of Europe’s Enlightenment legacy, arguing that the Enlightenment idea of modern pluralism, however secularized, “depends, as does any idea of the unity of European culture, upon a continuing Christian tradition” (Padgen 12). In *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (1957), Denys Hay also emphasizes the importance of the *religious* matrix of Europe’s historic identity,<sup>9</sup> arguing that in the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance the most significant factor was the transformation from a virtual identification of Europe with an earlier Christendom to the replacement of Christendom with a secular idea of Europe. However, the assumed hegemonic narrative of Europe’s secularism and its alleged separation between the secular and the religious has recently been contested. For example, according to Meyda Yegenoglu the idea of “the return of the religious,” where “the religious” has been exclusively identified with Islam, should be considered along with the “return of Christianity,” which is perhaps less visible since it is usually displaced onto the issue of cultural differences (5).<sup>10</sup> Even if we live in a secular Europe “it is nonetheless a Christian **secular** Europe” (Wheatley 89), as evidenced by former vice-president of the European Parliament Mario Mauro’s claim that “Europe will be Christian or it will not be at all” (qtd in O’Brien 177). Not only does this type of discourse fail to acknowledge the constitutive role of Islam in the construction of European identity but, even more perniciously, it presents the need to ‘protect’

Christianity from the messianic nature of ‘new Islamic terrorism’ as a need to protect liberal values *i.e.* here *secular liberal values are intentionally conflated with Christianity*.<sup>11</sup> Although contemporary European cinema claims to be secular it is still suffused with Christian iconography and symbolism, invoking Christianity not through narrative but through what Paul Schrader has termed a “transcendental style” and through recurring questions of guilt, responsibility and forgiveness (e.g. the films of Michael Haneke and Bruno Dumont) (Wheatley 91).

Just as we don’t live in a secular Europe, we don’t live in a **post-colonial** Europe. As Nicholas de Genova observes, the question of European identity is deeply imbricated in “a global (postcolonial) politics of race that redraws the proverbial color line and refortifies European-ness as a racial formation of whiteness” (21). It is telling that one of critical responses to the refugee crisis was to invoke an analogy with the African American civil rights struggle (Black Lives Matter) by insisting that Migrant Lives Matter.<sup>12</sup> According to Isolina Ballesteros, ‘immigration’ is just the most recent term for ‘race’, and Europeans citizens’ attitudes toward immigrants represent a new form of racism, a “benign, cultural or differentialist neo-racism”—often disguised as a war against terror and crime and exemplified by anti-Semitism, Arabphobia, or the systematic confusion of ‘Arabness’ and ‘Islamicism”—which has displaced the older, more overt form of biological racism (11). Some scholars have called for a redefinition of the very concept of ‘race’ as a way of addressing this problem. Stuart Hall proposes extending the meaning of the term ‘race’ beyond skin color to highlight the solidarity between ethnic groups with shared experiences of social marginalization and oppression.

The sweeping territorial recalibration following the establishment of the EU has led many scholars to declare the emergence of a **post-national** European identity. According to Appadurai, we have entered a post-national age marked by identities that are provisional, fluid, incoherent and ephemeral. Similarly, in *Tracking Europe: Mobility, Diaspora, and the Politics of Location* (2010) Ginette Verstraette argues that the notion of “imagined mobility” has become more essential to the notion of European identity than Benedict Anderson’s influential idea of “imagined community,” which is still territorial in nature.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, Mabel Berezin denies that the nation state has lost any of its authority, reminding us that modern citizenship still embeds identity and legal

rights in the territorial nation-state regardless of the supposed dissolution of borders under globalization.

It would be a truism to say that one of the most important effects of globalization has been the mass migration that has accompanied it. There are presently more than a billion migrants worldwide, “making the contemporary age of migration the largest and most global in history” (Nail 179).<sup>14</sup> And yet, migration both within and from outside Europe is not a new phenomenon. According to Boswell and Geddes, the 2015 crisis appears far less dramatic than what the media makes it out to be if we recall the “flows of refugees seeking asylum from religious persecution from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards,” the mass migration from Europe to the New World in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the postwar years, when several million refugees fled the Holocaust, fascism and communism and 30 million people were displaced by WW2 (21).<sup>15</sup> The degree to which the migrant crisis represents a significant challenge to core Enlightenment values, including liberty, justice, citizenship and hospitality, can be gauged by considering the ongoing debates around national identity and nationalism, the failure of multiculturalism, European integration, borders and bordering, the Other, and cosmopolitanism as a potential way of rethinking European identity.

Although on one hand, Europe’s new ‘Other’—the migrant/refugee—has “replaced the ‘classical Others’ of Europe, the Jews and the Roma, who, as the two oldest minorities in Europe, were viewed as ‘the other within’, associated with the East” (4),<sup>16</sup> on the other hand the migrant has been transformed from a *peripheral figure* into a *utopian figure*, which, by undermining ‘from the bottom upwards’ the nation-state, is believed to transform the very idea of citizenship and identity” (43).<sup>17</sup> The figure of the migrant has been variously appointed as a model for post-national citizenship, transnational European identity, postmodern subjectivity, ‘the nomadic excess’ or the gap between ethics and justice, and as the ultimate model of deconstruction. Challenging the usual opposition between rootless mobility and rooted belonging, Francesco Cattani advocates the Roma<sup>18</sup> community—the ‘ultimate’ migrant community in Europe—as a model for the modern transnational European identity (59).<sup>19</sup> For feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti, too, the migrant embodies the nomadic identity she champions, “a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for

fixity. This figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity” (qtd in Aurora E. Rodono 188). The migrant has also been discussed as a figure metaphorically representing our universal, *existential* condition of exile, the metaphysical sense of homelessness we call ‘the modern condition’ (18).<sup>20</sup> Zygmunt Bauman provides a much-needed corrective to such celebratory accounts by reminding us that nomadism, as one of the products of the uneven nature of globalization, has actually deepened the polarization between “extraterritorial elites and the ever more ‘localized’ rest” (2).

Scholars are increasingly drawing attention to the eminently iconic nature of migration. According to Steffen Kohn, “images have become an integral part of the political regulation of migration: they help to produce the categories of legality vs illegality, they foster stereotypes and mobilize political convictions” (4). The media has been particularly influential in shaping the public perception of migrants by promoting various migrant-related myths, including the illegality myth [the term ‘illegal immigration’ or “clandestine immigration” criminalizes migrants, the majority of whom enter the EU legally, on a tourist or time-limited work visa, and overstay], the cost myth, and the criminality myth. Throughout the 2015 refugee crisis EU media regularly conflated different forms of mobilities, categorizing and naming migrants in accordance with European countries’ different histories of migration and integration policies (“immigrant, ethnic migrant, third-country national, foreigner, non-national, non-Western, to alien, asylum-seeker, refugee, ethnic minority from non-Western countries, third country immigrant, foreign-born, of foreign origin and others” (124).<sup>21</sup> This heightened attention to migration-related terminology, to sorting and ranking different types of mobilities, suggests that the refugee crisis is not only a geopolitical crisis but also an epistemic one. ‘Europe’ is increasingly seen as a discursive entity whose borders are symbolic or epistemic rather than only geopolitical.

The figure of the migrant has also been the driving force behind debates of ‘hospitality’ in discussions of European identity defined in ethical terms. While for Kant hospitality was not a question of moral responsibility but one of rights and thus of legal and juridical regulation (9)<sup>22</sup> Levinas and Derrida extend the notion of unconditional hospitality from the field of rights to that of ethics, challenging the problematic expulsion

of 'ethics' from the political realm. At the same time, the problem of the political/practical application of the notion of 'unconditional hospitality' is dramatized in the growing skepticism toward humanitarianism or what some have called 'humanitarian ideology'. According to Elizabeth Dunn, humanitarianism has become one of the new ordering principles of the international system since the end of the Cold War, dividing society into donors and receivers. Far from being a sentiment, humanitarianism has become "an ideology, a system of categorization, a massive industry, a set of bureaucratic practices" (9) and, for many, a way of life. 'Humanitarian ideology' refers not only to the discourse of pity produced by humanitarian aid agencies but also to these agencies' hidden agenda, which, far from protecting displaced people, consists of "protecting donor countries from the displaced" (207).

The debates around what constitutes the proper basis for a genuine ethics have been accompanied, in the field of cinema studies, by discussions about what constitutes a genuinely ethical cinema as opposed to what some have disparagingly called 'a cinema of duty.' Ipek Celik has drawn attention to the emergence of a global moral economy of humanitarianism, which positions refugees, migrants and minorities in Europe either as victims (calling for humanitarian intervention) or as criminals (justifying the securitization of Europe). Similarly, in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001) Graham Huggan warns against the perversion of ethics into a marketing strategy as cultural and ethnic otherness becomes part of a 'booming alterity industry, making marginality a valuable intellectual commodity" (qtd in Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg 32).

The 'ethical turn' in European cinema studies has been accompanied by a simultaneous turn to self-loathing and self-flagellation, a masochistic attitude already mercilessly dissected by Pascal Bruckner in his 1986 book *The Tears of the White Man: Compassion as Contempt*. For Bruckner 'white man's guilt', which forces the white man endlessly to atone for his 'sins', is just an inverse form of the very Eurocentrism he is supposedly atoning for inasmuch as his infinite guilt (his assumption of responsibility for *everything*) is just another way of restoring his power. Indeed, one of the most fascinating aspects of recent scholarship on European cinema has been the transformation of the negative rhetoric of self-loathing and self-flagellation, of Euro-skepticism and

Europhobia, into something praiseworthy. Anne Jackel observes that so far the majority of winners of the European Parliament LUX prize have verged on an anti-European European cinema” (68). Similarly, the editors of *The Europeanness of European Cinema* (2015) propose that inasmuch as European cinema no longer defines itself in opposition to its traditional big ‘Other’, Hollywood, “Europe itself may at times be the principal other in European cinema,” so that “negative perceptions of Europe – even Europhobia – [are] central to the Europeanness of European cinema” (11). Two recent examples of such an attempt to rethink European cinema and European identity without falling back onto identity politics include Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli’s *Mythopetic Cinema: On the Ruins of European Identity* (2017)<sup>23</sup> and Thomas Elsaesser’s *European Cinema and Continental Philosophy: Film as Thought Experiment* (2018), both of which make the case for *self-critique or self-interrogation* (which Ravetto-Biagioli calls “mythopoetics” and Elsaesser calls “film as thought experiment”) as essential to both European identity and European cinema.

While ‘anti-Europeanism’/self-critique seems to have turned into European cinema’s big selling point, some scholars have questioned the sincerity of such a Europhobic stance. The editors of *The Europeanness of European Cinema: Identity, Meaning and Globalization* (2015) remind us that too often Europe’s “self-deprecation is...a strategy signaling knowingness and therefore a kind of perverse superiority” (11). It is precisely such ‘strategic’ self-deprecation that drives Thomas Elsaesser’s contribution to the same volume, in which he argues that European cinema has been demoted to just another part of ‘world cinema’ only to rethink this ‘demotion’ as a golden opportunity for European cinema rather than a sign of its impending fade into oblivion<sup>24</sup> for, insofar as European films now exist at the margins, Elsaesser believes, they are free from the burden of having to reflect specific values, or of having to represent the nation.

I would argue, however, that European cinema is by no means ‘free of having to reflect certain values’; on the contrary, it is expected to bear witness to a continually unfolding European refugee crisis couched in ethical and humanitarian terms. Like the Holocaust, to which it has been compared on numerous occasions, the refugee crisis has become crucial to redefining European identity along ethical/humanitarian lines.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the translation of European into humanitarian values happens already on the level

of film financing<sup>26</sup>: as Anne Jackel points out, the Council of Europe’s program Euroimages supports films promoting humanitarian, universalist values *as* European and thus fulfills the mandate of the Council of Europe—a human rights organization—to “strengthen human rights, racial tolerance and multicultural acceptance” (Jackel 62).<sup>27</sup> Indeed, one of Elsaesser’s primary examples—Michael Haneke—has become central to debates around the ethics of the image, demonstrating the increasing *expectation* of European cinema to engage with questions of political ethics and thus with the question of ‘the Other.’

In European cinema the preoccupation with screening ‘the Other’ is, of course, not new. It can be traced back to German Expressionism and its endless repertoire of figures like the robot, the Golem, the somnambulist, the vampire and the homunculus, disguised representations of “the threatening presence of the Jew, the Gypsy, and the Bolshevik as symbols of the menacing East” (Loshitzky 8). The last couple of decades, however, have seen the substitution of the Muslim threat for the older myth of the Eastern threat<sup>28</sup> (79). *La Haine* (Mathieu Kassovitz, 1995), directed by a French Jew, is probably the most referenced cinematic milestone reflecting the substitution of the new Others—postcolonial Arabs, South Asian Muslims and African blacks—for the ‘Jew’ as the classical other of old Europe.<sup>29</sup>

Recently, however, Laurent Berlant has proposed to expand the study of migrant cinema beyond the traditional preoccupation with the figure of the ‘Other’ by approaching European cinema as an embodiment of ‘post-Fordist affect’ i.e. the affective language of anxiety, contingency, and precarity. According to Berlant, under neoliberalism the affective life of migrants and non-migrants is not that different inasmuch as they both practice what she calls ‘cruel optimism’, a perverse new affective strategy of adjustment emerging in the 1990s as an expression of the sense of unbelonging the precariat shares with migrants in response to the attrition of social fantasies of upward mobility, job security, meritocracy, political and social equality (Berlant’s primary examples include films by the Dardenne brothers, e.g. *Rosetta* and *The Promise*, and Laurent Cantet’s *Time Out* and *Human Resources*). Berlant argues that, “in the economic lifeworld of these films, citizens without capital and migrants with fake papers are in proximate, interdependent boats structurally and affectively” (171-172).

Taking my cue from Berlant, I would like to suggest, through an analysis of recent films about migrants/refugees, two things. 1) That in contemporary European cinema it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate stories about migration from stories exploring life under the conditions of neoliberalism in general—thus the majority of films I have analyzed suggest continuities between the plight of migrants/refugees and the plight of disenfranchised Europeans. 2) The fact that recent films frame migration and the refugee crisis as a primarily a 1) socioeconomic, 2) racial, or 3) ethical issue, suggests the continued relevance of Europe’s core Enlightenment legacy embodied in the values of liberty, equality, hospitality, fraternity etc. and, further, and at the same time points to migration as an “ever-deferred confrontation with the European Question as a problem of race and postcoloniality” (Nicolas de Genova).

In *Import/Export* (Ulrich Seidl, 2007) Olga, a nurse from the Ukraine, searches for a better life in the West, while Paulie, an unemployed security guard from Austria, heads East for the same reason. By cutting back and forth between their stories, the film invites us to see them as mirror images of each other. As the title of the film suggests, in the twenty-first century political identities and conflicts that used to be fundamental to Europe’s idea of itself have been leveled out by the logic of advanced capitalism, the logic governing the lives of Easterners and Westerners alike: the political opposition East/West has been supplanted by the economic logic of supply and demand, i.e. *Import/Export*.<sup>30</sup> The film underscores the continuities between East and West both in terms of human interactions, presented on both sides as equally regimented and detached, and in terms of the public sphere of work. By following Olga’s and Paulie’s frustrated attempts to make ends meet the film provides an indirect commentary on the nature and value of ‘work’ under the conditions of advanced capitalism, cataloguing the kinds of low-paying, temporary, meaningless jobs that make up the lay of the land in the twenty first century: from an anonymous sex worker and cleaning woman to a mall security guard and purveyor of cheap video games.

In Fernando León de Aranoa’s *Princesas* (2005) the middle-class Caye, working the streets of Madrid meets Zulema, part of a new breed of Dominican prostitutes in Madrid. We observe Zulema and the other Dominican prostitutes through the eyes of the Spanish working girls, who gather at one of their friends’ hair salon to gossip, share

secrets of the trade, and observe with resentment the Dominicans ‘stealing their jobs.’ Aranoa draws attention to the economic foundations of racism—as one of the Spanish girls points out, “It’s not racism. The problem is the law of the market”—underscoring the transnational reciprocity and female solidarity between the Spanish working girls, on the fringes of Spanish society, and Dominican illegal immigrants, both occupying the same socio-economic strata.

In Aranoa’s next film, *Amador* (2010), poor Bolivian illegal immigrant Marcela lives on the outskirts of Madrid with her boyfriend, Nelson, eking out a precarious living by stealing and re-selling flowers. When the refrigerator where they store the flowers breaks down, Marcela, anxious about their financial situation, accepts a job taking care of a rich woman’s bedridden father, Amador. When Amador dies suddenly Marcela, afraid of losing her income, decides to make it look as though he is still alive. One of the subplots traces the evolving friendship between Marcela and Puri, Amador’s middle-aged Andalusian neighbor and prostitute. The film positions illegal immigrants, like Marcela, and people living on the periphery of Spanish society, like the aging Andalusian prostitute Puri as equally victims of precarity, suggesting a possible solidarity between them.

Ken Loach’s *It’s a Free World* also underscores migrants’ and non-migrants’ analogous experience of neoliberalism’s structural violence and precarity. The film focuses on Angie, a young woman who, frustrated after being fired from her job as a recruiter, decides to set up a recruitment agency of her own, running it from home together with her friend and roommate. At first they hire only immigrants with working papers but as the story unfolds Angie becomes increasingly willing to do whatever it takes to succeed in her business venture, even if it involves hiring illegal immigrants. As time goes by her relationship with the illegals she hires gets increasingly strained and she drops all pretenses to be ‘helping’ them find a job, treating them instead as cheap labor, and disposing of them matter-of-factly. When one employer that Angie has been providing with illegal workers refuses to pay them, the workers blame Angie and kidnap her son. Later they release him but demand the rest of the money they are owed from Angie, or she will never see her son again. Abandoning her scruples Angie flies to the Ukraine to recruit more illegal workers, offering to obtain forged papers for them.

Although the viewer is supposed to be appalled at Angie's moral degradation, Loach also invites us to see things from Angie's point of view. Angie's father, an old Union man, disapproves of his daughter's business but when she dismisses his criticisms as nationalist, anti-immigrant talk he points out the hypocrisy of her stance: she claims to be helping illegal immigrants but she is paying them far less than the minimum wage. Angie reminds him how out of step with the times he is: he has had one stable job all his life, whereas she lives in a world of precarious labor, a lawless world in which the only law is the survival of the fittest. Ultimately, even as the film traces Angie's transformation from a victim of the neoliberal order to a 'winner' exploiting and profiting herself from that order, her survival is revealed to be predicated on crossing over to the other side of the law: to the extent that the free flow of capital remains indifferent to limits like national borders, passports, and labor laws, Angie becomes an illegal herself, as illegal as those she continues to exploit.

Daniele Luchetti's *Our Life (La Nostra Vita)* (2010) follows Claudio, a young construction worker living happily with his pregnant wife, two children and a third on the way, on the outskirts of Rome. When his wife dies during childbirth Claudio dedicates himself to making money to make up for his sons' loss by making their lives as materially comfortable as possible. He negotiates a deal with his boss to give him his own construction site to supervise, in exchange for which Claudio promises not to report the death of an illegal Romanian worker that his boss is covering up. After spending quickly the money he borrows from his drug-dealing neighbor, Claudio runs into problems, including his site workers (mostly illegal immigrants) quitting, after he is unable to pay them, and stealing most of his equipment. Meanwhile, ridden by guilt, Claudio also has to deal with the dead Romanian's ex-lover and son who come looking for him. Eventually Claudio borrows more money from his brother and sister, hires more expensive workers—part-time Italian workers whom he hires on condition that he pay them cash—and manages to finish the construction work and repay his debts. Recalling Ken Loach's *It's a Free World*, Luchetti's film depicts the Italian working class, embodied by Claudio, as sharing the same precarious existence as that of immigrants, legal or illegal. As Natasha Senjanovic points out in her review of the film, in *Our Life* "there are no more ideals, only the frenetic, vicious cycle that is 'arrangiarsi.' The word has no direct

equivalent in English but signifies something between getting by and hustling.”<sup>31</sup> Arguably, the title of the film—‘our life’—reflects precisely this sense of a life shared by people that until recently used to see each other as occupying different spaces, Europeans and ‘Europeans without euros’.<sup>32</sup>

In *It's a Free World* the illegal Eastern European migrants are not positioned as completely ‘Other’ to the First World British citizen (Angie). By contrast, in *Mediterranea* and *Shun Li and the Poet*, which feature non-European migrants—African and Chinese—the migrant is framed as wholly Other on account of their race. *Mediterranea* tells the story of Ayiva, a man from Burkina Faso who makes the difficult journey from his country, through Algeria and Libya, to Southern Italy, where he is forced to live in a squatted property with other African illegal migrants while working as an orange picker and sending money back to his sister and daughter for their future journey to Italy. From the moment the migrants arrive in Rosarno it is made clear that they are not welcome as some of the locals drive their scooters menacingly around them, break their parties looking for prostitutes, and stare them down threateningly at the dance club. Ayiva is introduced to Pio, a charismatic Romani boy of lower class origins running his own black market from his parents’ house, where he buys and sells stolen goods to both illegal migrants and locals. The film emphasizes Ayiva’s and Pio’s shared socio-economic disenfranchisement, drawing a connection between migrants and non-migrants (specifically Italians living in a small Southern town far from the industrial, prosperous North). The gradually escalating tension between locals and migrants finally erupts in a series of violent outbursts as the migrants are forcefully evicted from their squat house and the house burned. The hostilities escalate into a riot and the initially reluctant Ayiva joins the protesters as they march through the streets yelling “Stop shooting blacks!” (rather than “Stop shooting migrants!”), recalling a very similar sequence from another film exploring racial conflict, Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing*.

The implicit connections *Mediterranea* draws between the plight of disenfranchised Europeans and refugees become more explicit in *Terraferma*, which examines the encounter between an old Sicilian family of fishermen on the island of Linosa, part of the commune of Lampedusa, and a group of African refugees. The story centers on the young Filippo, who lives with his mother, Donatella, and grandfather; his

father, a fisherman, disappeared at sea three years earlier. The film paints a detailed picture of the precarious life on the island, as most of the remaining fishermen are getting old and selling off their boats, while their children have either left to look for better opportunities elsewhere or rely on tourism to support themselves. Filippo's family decides to hide three of the African refugees, a woman and her two children, in their house. When the African woman shares with Donatella—who also dreams of leaving the island to search for better work in a nearby town on the mainland—her plan to join her husband in Torino, Donatella dismisses it as impractical on account of the great distance she has to travel: for Donatella, like for many Southerners, Northern Italy is so far away that it might as well be another country. This portrayal of the Italian South as a poor and archaic region, as “an Africa a casa” (Mary Wood 2005) is in line with a long tradition of representing the migration of Italians from the poor South to the affluent North—e.g. Matteo Garrone's *Ospiti/Guests* (1998) draws a similar connection between an Albanian illegal immigrant to Italy and a poor, unemployed Italian who has migrated 30 years ago from Sardinia to Rome. Although *Terraferma* invokes the continuities between the plight of African refugees and that of the inhabitants of ‘Africa a casa’, in the most visually striking scene in the film the ‘arrival’ of the African refugees on the island is depicted as a violent and horrific event. Filippo and a girl are enjoying a date on a boat when dozens of black bodies rise up menacingly from the dark water and swim furiously towards them in a shot strikingly reminiscent of the shark attack in Spielberg's *Jaws*.

*Shun Li and the Poet* focuses on a Chinese immigrant, Shun Li, working in a café in Venice to pay off for her move to Italy and to bring her son over from China. She befriends Bepi, an older Serbian immigrant who came to Italy 30 years ago and is now perceived by the locals as Italian. The first part of the film emphasizes the widening gap between the older, traditional working class Italian culture of the fishermen and the younger generation who have grown under the neoliberal order. Conversations about family, work and fishing reveal that all characters in the film, regardless of their racial or national background, share the same history of traditional work (related to the sea) passed down from one generation to the next, but this kind of traditional lifestyle, and the worldview that it comes with, is now declining: Shun Li works in a factory (like many other immigrants), Bepi and his old Italian fishermen friends are now retiring, while the

younger generation of Italians have none of the work ethic and respect for family and tradition of the older generation. Davis and his friends (the younger generation of Italians) are portrayed as ignorant (they take Shun Li for Japanese), Mafioso type good-for-nothings, who only care about money but refuse to pay their tabs at the café, despise work, do not honor their families, and prefer to spend their days speeding around the lagoon in their boat. In the second part of the film, as Italians observe with growing suspicion the blossoming friendship between Shun Li and Bepi, generational conflicts are gradually overshadowed by racial ones. Significantly, throughout the film Shun Li refers to Bepi as “Italian” i.e. she sees him first and foremost as a white European man rather than an immigrant like her. As the Italians become increasingly hostile to Shun Li, they rationalize their racial prejudice through recourse to economics: in one scene Avvocato explains the economic threat Shun Li represents to Italy as Chinese immigrants continue to steal jobs from Italians: “It’s an invasion! The New Empire!” With the animosity directed at Shun Li and the Chinese in general escalating, the older and younger generation of Italians that were previously at odds with each other reunite against the common threat of the racialized Other.

The issue of race is similarly foregrounded in the film *Samba* (Olivier Nakache and Eric Toledano, 2014), in which Samba, an illegal immigrant from Senegal who settled in Paris ten years ago, and Alice, a white senior executive suffering from a ‘burn out’, meet under unlikely circumstances and fall in love (Alice takes a break from her job and goes on a ‘charity sabbatical’ during which she volunteers at an office processing illegal immigrants’ cases). As he searches for work throughout the city, frequenting the unofficial sites where employers look for cheap illegal labor, Samba runs into Wilson, another illegal immigrant who introduces himself as Brazilian but later confesses he is in fact of Maghrebi origin (he explains that he decided to pretend he is Brazilian after seeing how much easier it is for Brazilians in Paris). In a later scene Wilson takes Samba to a guy running his own black market for fake IDs from the back of a grocery store. As the three men haggle over prices Samba is shocked to learn that fake IDs for blacks are considerably cheaper than those for whites, while fake IDs for Chinese are even cheaper than those for blacks. The scene demonstrates the commodification of race in the construction of legality and illegality with immigrants’ desirability and acceptability

being rated in accordance with the desirability and acceptability of the races to which they belong. The fact that throughout the negotiations Wilson acts as Samba's translator, translating into French everything the fake ID seller says to Samba, despite the fact that Samba speaks perfect French, hints at yet another, even more hidden racial 'ranking' of immigrants according to their provenance within France's former colonial territories, the Maghrebi Wilson being, unlike Samba, visibly indistinguishable from a white man. On the other hand, however, although Samba spends the majority of the film hiding from the French authorities i.e. from 'the white man', in the end his life is put in danger not by a white man but by another black immigrant, Jonas (who, having been released from the detention center, comes looking for Samba after hearing about Samba's sexual relationship with Jonas's lover). Although Jonas and Samba share the same racial identity they find themselves, at the end of the film, on opposite sides of the law, with Jonas already a legal resident and Samba still *sans papiers*, a divide that in the end proves more important than their shared racial and postcolonial identity.

*Illegal* follows two illegal Russian immigrants—Tania, a former teacher now working as a cleaner, and her 13-year-old son Ivan—living in Belgium. After being denied Belgian permanent residence, Tania deliberately burns her fingers to remove her fingerprints and avoid identification.<sup>33</sup> After being caught without her papers Tania is arrested (her son escapes) and sent to an immigration detention center for women and children, where she repeatedly refuses to disclose her name, since another illegal has told her that if the authorities cannot identify her she will be released after five months. At the detention center Tania befriends Aissa, an African woman who has spent eight months at the center and barely survived numerous attempts of forceful expulsion from Belgium.<sup>34</sup> Although all women at the detention center share the same status—illegal aliens—they are far from being 'equal'. Significantly, Aissa is the only illegal alien we see brutally beaten up, over and over again. The center refuses to hospitalize her until one day she gives up, unable to resist any more, and hangs herself in the shower. It's likely that Aissa's story makes reference to the heated debate in Belgium around the forced expulsion of illegal immigrants sparked by the death (in 1998) of Semira Adamu, an African immigrant who didn't survive the violence used during her expulsion. Her death was the reason for a thorough revision of the expulsion procedures.<sup>35</sup> In *Illegal*, however,

it is the attempt at the forceful expulsion of the white, Russian illegal—not the death of the African illegal—that draws the media’s attention to the strong-arm approach of the police to deportations (thanks to passengers’ cell phone recordings of police brutality against Tania on the plane). Unlike Ayssa, who meets a tragic end, in the film’s final scene Tania is seen reunited with her son.<sup>36</sup>

While the films I have discussed so far foreground the socio-economic or racial questions that migration and/or the refugee crisis raise for Europe, the remaining films I am going to briefly allude to focus on the ethical aspects. Daniele Luchetti’s *Our Life* (which I already discussed) suggests the possibility for a new kind of relationship between East and West, one based on a more open notion of hospitality and reciprocity and embodied by the ‘unconventional family’ that forms around Claudio, his brother, his brother’s Romanian girlfriend Gabriela and Gabriela’s son Andrei (Romanian but born in Italy), who by the end of the film has become a kind of surrogate brother to Claudio’s children. One could read Robin Campillo’s *Eastern Boys* (2013) along similar lines. The film follows Marek, a young Ukranian illegal immigrant in Paris [later we learn he is actually from Chechnya], who begins an affair with a French businessman (Daniel). Over time their relationship evolves and as Daniel learns more about Marek’s personal life he becomes less and less interested in him as an object of sexual pleasure. Eventually Marek moves in with Daniel and learns to speak French while Daniel encourages him to break his ties to the gang of East European hustlers he has been hanging out with. If the first part of the film, which tracks Daniel’s and Marek’s affair, presents both characters as exploiting each other, in the film’s second part their illicit sexual relationship transforms, surprisingly, into a filial, reciprocal, legitimate one.<sup>37</sup> The film thus functions as a metaphor for the kind of relationship in which ‘the West’ and ‘the East’—a distinction that here overlaps with ‘European’ and ‘immigrant’—have long found themselves—exploitative and predatory on both sides—and the kind of relationship that *could* possibly develop between them, one of genuine *hospitality* and reciprocity.

Aki Kaurismaki’s *Le Havre* depicts helping refugees as something self-evident, not a conscious decision that one has to mull over but an instinctive, natural human response—not a political issue but an unwritten ethical law.<sup>38</sup> The film tells the story of an aging shoe shiner in the port city welcoming an African boy, Idrissa, an illegal

immigrant, into his home. The issue of Idrissa's racial identity is raised only once, and indirectly—through irony—in the scene in which Marcel meets the director of the refugee center and asks to meet Idrissa's grandfather. When the director declines his request Marcel insists that he is the grandfather's brother and when the director expresses disbelief Marcel claims to be the albino of the family and accuses the director of racial discrimination (against albinos), threatening him with a heavy copy of the French Civil Code.<sup>39</sup>

Ethics is also Weiwei's approach to migration in the documentary *Human Flow* (2017). Since Weiwei intends the film as an appeal to our humanity he inserts himself in numerous shots, covering distraught refugees with a blanket, offering them tea, or listening to their stories. However, the self-congratulatory feel of such shots, which emphasize the humanitarian role Weiwei believes himself performing, eventually becomes too uncomfortable to bear, especially in light of the ironic discrepancy between the unprecedented freedom and visibility of his mobility and the forced, clandestine, invisible mobilities he tracks in the film.

One of the major effects of the mass migration and mediation of images of mobility has been the declining importance of 'primordial markers of identity' (inherited and thus taken for granted) and the increased rationalization of identity (viewing identity as a matter of conscious choice). In Appadurai's words, "as group pasts become increasingly parts of museums, exhibits and collections, both in national and transnational spectacles, culture becomes less what Bourdieu would have called a habitus (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an arena for *conscious choice, justification, and representation*" (*Modernity at Large* 44, my emphasis). Thus, dismissing the common sense notion of identity as 'sameness and constancy over time' social and political theorist Peter Wagner asserts that the question 'What is European identity?' is, first and foremost, a political question.<sup>40</sup> In this sense, the question 'what is European identity' is not properly formulated since it fails to take into account the *prospective* aspect of identity. Similarly, for Bo Strath, "the concept of European identity is of limited value today. Like the classification of human beings according to ethnicity and 'race' it has reached its limits. It should be seen as a historical concept, which played a crucial role during a difficult phase of European integration between the 1970s and the

1990s. The 21<sup>st</sup> century requires a new conceptual topography, less Eurocentric and narcissistic and more global.”<sup>41</sup> In this talk I have tried to show that inasmuch as they demonstrate the increasing difficulty of separating stories about migration from stories exploring life under the conditions of neoliberalism, i.e. separating the plight of migrants/refugees in Europe from that of EU citizens, recent European films about migrants and refugees reclaim the value of *fraternite*, pointing to a shift from a concept of European identity rooted in a shared cultural past to a concept of Europe as a common *political* project.

CLIPS: Import/Export, Princessas, It’s a Free World: 6min

Shun Li: 12:58 – 14:34

Terraferma: 14:34 – 15:34

TOTAL: 8:30min

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Max Beloff dates the emergence of the idea of ‘Europe’ to the Middle Ages, arguing against extending this time frame any further back, for Europe “only came into being with the final collapse of the classical Mediterranean world under the impact of Islam (35).

<sup>2</sup> The Euro as a common currency has, of course, also been mobilized in the construction of ‘Europe’, testifying both to “a ‘commercialization’ of the European project: an explicit acknowledgement of the central role of the market economy in the union” and to “a ‘culturalization’ of the economy, acknowledging the fact that even money as aesthetic material objects are part of an experience industry” (126). <sup>2</sup>And yet, a recent comparative study by Johan Fomas of the design of Euro coins and bills in different EU members—significantly, none of the Euro coin or bill designs feature any references to mass migration—has found that although the Euro’s intended message is unity in diversity, the real message is difference in unity, suggesting the need for the EU to make use of popular images of inter-human and trans-national rather than supra-national encounters” (147).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Gifford, “Defining ‘Others’: how interperceptions shape identities” (13-38) in Paul Gifford and Tessa Hauswedell

<sup>4</sup> “The Crisis of Western Societies (1982)”, pp. 253-266 in *The Castoriadis Reader*, ed. David Ames Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997).

<sup>5</sup> “The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy” (1983)”, pp. 267-289 in *The Castoriadis Reader*

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that this ‘universalism’ is “Eurocentrism’s most efficient double” (Mata 91-92) inasmuch as it suggests that Europe should serve as a model for the rest of

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the world. Inocencia Mata, “On the Periphery of the Universal and the Splendour of Eurocentrism”, pp.91-100 in *Europe in Black and White*

<sup>7</sup> Similarly, White (2000) suggests that, “tradition, like historicity, scientific achievement, and the advancement of civilization, is a strong signifier through which the Europeanness of Europe is identified” (qtd in Meyda Yegenoglu 104).

<sup>8</sup> John Durham Peters, “Exile, Nomadism, and Diaspora: The Stakes of Mobility in the Western Canon” pp. 17-41 in *Home, Exile, Homeland*:

<sup>9</sup> Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh UP, 1968).

<sup>10</sup> Meyda Yegenoglu, *Islam, Migrancy and Hospitality in Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Delanty points to Karl Lowith’s thesis (1949) that “modernity is itself a secularization of Christianity” i.e. that “the liberty of the individual derives from the Christian belief that all people stand equal before the eyes of God” (83) where ‘God’ is replaced by ‘law’ (83). But Delanty says that although the liberal values of solidarity and individual responsibility have a certain resonance in Christian ideas they can also be related to pre-Christian traditions, such as the Roman and Greek ones.

<sup>12</sup> Vron Ware has explored the other side of this issue, focusing on the resentment felt by white working class members toward what they perceive as ‘privileged’ treatment of racial others. See Vron Ware, “White Resentment – The Other Side of Belonging”, pp.157-172 in *Europe in Black and White*. Srečko Horvat has also argued that the extreme right and nationalism are “increasingly mobilizing the working class. It’s not by chance that the name of the extreme right party in the Czech Republic, infamous for organizing pogroms against Roma people, is the ‘Workers’ Party” (Horvat 44-45).

<sup>13</sup> Still, Verstraete remains sensitive to the power imbalances concealed by this idealized view of European-identity-as-unlimited-mobility through a homogenous economic space, reminding us that this neoliberal notion of ‘shared belonging through shared mobility’ defines only one particular subject—the white, male, Northern European, Christian, EU citizen (8).

<sup>14</sup> According to most recent statistics there are now 68.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. Of those 40 million are internally displaced people and 25.4 million are refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18. There are 3.1 million asylum seekers. 57% of refugees worldwide come from three countries: Syria (6.3 million), Afghanistan (2.6 million) and South Sudan (2.4 million). The top refugee-hosting countries are: Turkey (3.5 million), Pakistan (1.4 million), Uganda (1.4 million), Lebanon (1 million) and Iran (979,400 million). There are 10 million stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement. Only 102,800 refugees have been resettled. 44,400 people are forced every day to flee their home because of conflict and persecution (UNHCR statistics, November 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Prior to the late 1970s asylum applications were fairly low, coming mostly Eastern European dissidents. As the number of applications began rising in the late 1970s and 1980s, and their origin changed from Eastern Europe to Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, there was a growing skepticism regarding the authenticity of the applications (Boswell and Geddes 35-36).

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<sup>16</sup> La Haine (made by a French Jew, not by a member of the beur community) reflects the shift from the ‘Jew’ as the classical other of old Europe to the principal others of the new Europe: the postcolonial Arabs, the South Asian Muslims and the African blacks.

<sup>17</sup> However, as Soysal already recognized, most ‘universal’ human rights still have to be claimed within the framework of the nation state.

<sup>18</sup> At the 2000 meeting of the International Union of Roma Emil Scuka argued that it was time for the world to recognize the Roma as a cohesive nation—albeit without territory (1). After all, “if the world is global, who is more global than a historically existing transnational group?” (Mabel Berezin, “Introduction: 2)

<sup>19</sup> Francesco Cattani, “New Maps of Europe by Some Contemporary ‘Migrant’ Artists and Writers”, pp. 55-66 in *Europe in Black and White*

<sup>20</sup> Wendy Everett, “Leaving Home: Exile and Displacement in Contemporary European Cinema” (pp.18-32) in *Cultures of Exile*

<sup>21</sup> Cagla E. Aykac, “What Space for Migrant Voices in European Anti-Racism?” pp. 120-133 in *Identity, Belonging and Migration*

<sup>22</sup> In *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Essays* Kant articulates a notion of ‘conditional hospitality’: “the visitor must be a citizen of another country [which] implies that...nomads, asylum seekers, or people who are displaced for a variety of reasons cannot be granted hospitality...for they remain a potential menace to the...sovereignty of the nation-state” (11).

<sup>23</sup> (New York: Columbia University, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> T.Elsaesser, “European cinema into the Twenty-First Century: Enlarging the Context” (17 – 32) in *The Europeanness of European Cinema: Identity, Meaning and Globalization*. Ed. Mary Harrod, Mariana Liz and Alissa Timoshkina. London: I.B.Tauris, 2015. At first, Elsaesser observes that “the prefix ‘Euro’ is now more often linked to cheapness and embarrassment, not wealth or welfare: Euro-trash, Euro-pudding, Euro-pudding, Euro-shopper, Euro-crisis” (18), which points to “the collapse of relevance within the geopolitical context of Europe’s new marginality” (20). It turns out, however, that Europe’s ‘self-deprecation’, is simply another name for a faculty that has long been deemed specifically ‘European’—self-doubt. As I argued in my *Introduction to European Film Theory*, scholars have consistently described European consciousness in terms of a fundamental ambivalence, a hyperbolic skepticism or ironic distance. In the words of French philosopher Antoine Compagnon, “[E]ach category deemed to be European contains or implies its own negation: like progress, or humanism, or universality. At the root of those negations, doubt, it seems to me, might be the essential European faculty: not only Descartes’ hyperbolic doubt, that is, the strength to make a tabula rasa of one’s own reason . . . but also the doubt which I would call, with Hegel, the moment of ‘unhappy consciousness’.”

According to Elsaesser, European cinema is fully responsible for its own marginalization, which is the direct result of Europe’s self-doubting or self-questioning i.e. its questioning of the very values upon which Europe was built and upon which its political and cultural authority and significance used to rest: “Europe has undermined itself philosophically through secularization, skepticism, nihilism, critical theory, epistemic relativism and deconstruction. It has systematically cast doubt on its moral, epistemological and ontological foundations, most notably by challenging from within the universality of the

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values of the Enlightenment humanism, and in the process has embraced a form of social constructivism and relativist multiculturalism that ends us distrusting the legitimacy of its political institutions, undermining civic pride, and breeding both cynicism and apathy. [Europe's marginalization is thus linked to]...the corrosive effect of post-metaphysical philosophy and deconstructivism, the dominant intellectual trends from the 1950s to the 1990s... Rejection or over-coming of this anti-foundationalism and anti-universalism is what unites an otherwise disparate group of philosophers currently in vogue in film studies: Deleuze, Ranciere, Nancy, Agamben, Badiou and Levinas" (22).

<sup>25</sup> Contary to those who argue against invoking the Holocaust as the epitome of Absolute Evil of which other crimes against humanity are variants, Antonio Sousa Ribeiro regards the Holocaust as the reverse face of modernity (as Adorno and Horkheimer's Dialect of Enlightenment has shown) and thus justifying comparisons to other experiences of violence and exclusion inherent in the process of modernity (145). Thus the experience of colonialism is comparable to Nazism with its essential anti-Semitic ideology of racist domination, although until recently scholars have ignored the comparison between the experiences of colonized people and of the Jewish people, except for Paul Gilroy's *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures, and the Allure of Race* (2000). Antonio Sousa Ribeiro, "Reverses of Modernity: Postcolonialism and Post-Holocaust", pp.145-154 in *Europe in Black and White*

One might argue that what Elsaesser says about the role of the Holocaust in the construction of European identity holds true of the refugee crisis today: "As the memory of the Holocaust has become Europeanized, its political function and afterlife have changed. Once a monstrous crime committed by the Germans as a nation, it has become a moral catastrophe and humanitarian disaster in which all of Europe has a share of blame and guilt, so that its remembrance and memorialization now form the rallying point for a specifically 'European' moral and cultural unity" (23).

Far from being marginalized and having lost its relevance on the global scene. Europe now occupies the center of debates around global migration and mobility. As Leen Engelen and Kris Van Heuckelom remind us, "A lot of immigration films.... imply that Europe is still the 'center' that all from the periphery—be it Africa or Russia—long for" (ix). Seeking to re-politicize the debate surrounding the European border crisis and not to let Europe off the ethical hook, Nicholas de Genova claims that Europe is responsible for all migration movements, a superlative claim that could also be read as an instance of eurocentrism: "The European border crisis has been commonly depicted in depoliticizing language as a humanitarian crisis with its root causes always attributed to troubles elsewhere, usually in desperate and chaotic places ostensibly 'outside' Europe. These putative elsewhere, beyond the borders of Europe, are systematically represented as historically sanitized i.e....shorn of their deeply European (post)colonial histories as well as disarticulated from the European political and economic interests implicated in producing and sustaining their fractured presents. [...] [The truth, however, is] that virtually all migration and refugee movements that today seek their futures in Europe have been deeply shaped by an indisputably European (colonial) past" (Nicholas de Genova, "Introduction" 18).

Zizek puts a similar spin on his otherwise sincere criticism (and even mockery) of Europe so that ultimately Europe's marginalization is precisely what grants Europe a special

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mission, to ‘save’ the world from neoliberalism: “The Third World cannot generate a strong enough resistance to the ideology of the American Dream; in the present constellation it is only Europe that can do it. The true opposition today is not between the First World and the Third World but between the whole of the First and Third World (the American global empire and its colonies) and the remaining Second World (Europe). [...] Jihad and McWorld are two sides of the same coin. Jihad is already McJihad” (40-41). The future of the world depends on Europe: “If it does not do something quick, it will gradually be transformed into “what Greece was for the nature Roman Empire, a destination for nostalgic cultural tourism with no effective relevance” (75). Slavoj Žižek and Srećko Horvat. *What Does Europe Want?* (New York: Columbia UP, 2015), p. 40-41.

<sup>26</sup> The term ‘humanitarian’ has itself become suspect. For instance, Ruben Andersson has shown how “humanitarian initiatives have accompanied—rather than contradicted—draconian migration controls in recent years. [...] The intermixing of care and control in migratory reception and destination settings has by now generated a substantial critical literature, including investigations of the ‘compassionate repression’ traced by Fassin in the old Red Cross-managed camp for migrants in Calais; the control justifications enabled by humanitarian exceptions in French migration policy; the conflictive humanitarian stakes of the deadly US desert borders; and the containment functions of largely Western-funded refugee camps” (69). See Ruben Andersson, “Rescued and Caught: The Humanitarian-Security Nexus at Europe’s Frontiers”, pp. 64-94 in Nicholas de Genova, ed. *The Borders of Europe: Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering* (Duke UP, 2017), p. 69). Insofar as “diversity and openness have become defining keywords in contemporary understandings of Europe and the EU” (Liz 16) the idea of Europe and of a European identity has become associated with humanism, cosmopolitanism and universality, with ‘universality’ originating in “the medieval era but...particularly developed at the time of the Enlightenment” and ‘cosmopolitanism’ “inherited from the Stoics that gained currency in the 18th century” (17). Mariana Liz’s celebration of the emergence of a “more organic flavor of Euro-puddings” (as distinguished from the Euro-puddings of the 1980s and 90s), “genuine multinational stories told in multiple languages with multiple settings” (82) that “tackle the growing interconnectivity of European society” (Jaafar 2007 qtd 82)—e.g. *The Edge of Heaven*—is a case in point. Whereas older Euro puddings, like *Auberge espagnole*, offer only “amorphous representations of Europe” (78), a co production like *Merry Christmas* reinvents the Euro-pudding by replacing “nationalism with humanism...[thus rewriting] European history. Depicting the war not as a moment of conflict but as an opportunity for concord, the film legitimizes the European integration process widely challenged in the year of the film’s release (2005) after the rejection of the EU’s constitution” (81). Mariana Liz, “From European Co-Productions to the Euro-Pudding” (73-85) in *The Europeanness of European Cinema: Identity, Meaning and Globalization*. Ed. Mary Harrod, Mariana Liz and Alissa Timoshkina. London: I.B.Tauris, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Anne Jackel, “Changing the Image of Europe? The Role of European Co-Productions, Funds and Film Awards” (59 – 71) in *The Europeanness of European Cinema: Identity, Meaning and Globalization*. Ed. Mary Harrod, Mariana Liz and Alissa Timoshkina. London: I.B.Tauris, 2015. See Randall Halle “Offering Tales They Want to Hear:

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Transnational European Film Funding as Neo-Orientalism” – he cautions that film festivals and co-productions funded by programs like Media and Eurimages breed a new type of orientalism in line with European political images (27). A similar conflation of humanist/universal values with European ones is notable in the ‘pro-Germany rehabilitation’ that has been going off and on screen. Liz gives Sophie Scholl as an example of a dominant trend in the historiography of WW2, the shift from nation and national history to humanism (89). As Pechkam notes, “attitudes to history and memory are changing within the context of a new ‘moral politics’ where the emphasis is on testimony, trauma and restitution” (qtd in Liz 84). There has been a shift from “an institutionalized public memory centered on Nazi crimes and a private and personal memory that has been underpinned by notions of suffering, hardship and heroism” (85): this is part of a more general “pro-Germany rehabilitation” with a shift from “a history of hard facts to story, human interest and emotionalization” (Helmut Schimtz qtd in Liz 84). Sophie Scholl is thus not “specifically about WW1 but about the wider notion of injustice” (85) which places it in a universal sphere, “an idea very much in tune with the European filmic sensibility the EU supports” (85).

<sup>28</sup> Bottici and Challand date the East-West divide back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the image of an Eastern despotism and Eastern backwardness was already very influential among European intellectuals (80).

<sup>29</sup> Scholars have also pointed out the continuities between cinematic representations of Europe’s “Other(s)” — which have largely come from those who encounter them as others i.e. those who also dominate and marginalize them — and representations of African-Americans in American cinema (De Cuir 104), making a case for seeing Europe’s Other as part of the ‘Black European experience’ (108).

<sup>30</sup> Olga works as a nurse in an impoverished hospital’s baby ward, where she gets paid only 30% of her salary, while Paulie is training to be a security guard, though he is not physically fit and violent enough for the job.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-film-life/contemporary-italy-under-spotlight-in-our-life-idUSTRE64J7J120100520>

<sup>32</sup> Like many of the other films considered here *Our Life* suggests the possibility for solidarity along socio-economic lines but not along racial ones.

<sup>33</sup> Tanya’s landlord is a Polish immigrant, Mr. Novak, to whom she is financially obligated for providing her with fake identification papers. He advises her to keep her papers at home and make a copy for work and, in the event she gets stopped by the authorities, to lie she has forgotten her papers at home and show them her health card instead. Significantly, Mr. Novak always speaks to her in Russian, as if to underscore the reversal of power roles following the fall of the Soviet Union, the former ‘colonized’ (the Pole) now occupying a legal place in Belgium (he has a legal immigrant) while the ex-‘colonizer’ (the USSR) lives on the periphery of Belgian society, occupying the unenviable status of ‘an illegal alien’.

<sup>34</sup> While his mother is in the detention center Ivan moves in with Tania’s friend Zina, a Belorussian who still has not applied for legal residence in Belgium even though Tania maintains that Zina would have no problem getting permanent residence since she comes from what the West officially considers a dictatorship, unlike Tania.

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<sup>35</sup> Semira Adamu (1978–1998) was a 20-year-old asylum seeker from Nigeria who was suffocated to death with a pillow by two Belgian police officers who tried to calm her during their expulsion effort.

<sup>36</sup> The authorities make several forceful attempts to deport Tania but once they get her on the plane she starts screaming for help until the other passengers protest against the brutality of the police and the pilot insists that she is taken off the plane. After being beaten up severely on her way back to the detention center, she ends up in the hospital, where her lawyer informs her that the phone recordings of her forceful expulsion by passengers on the plane have drawn the media’s attention to the strong-arm approach of the police to deportations.

<sup>37</sup> As important as the rapprochement between East and West with which the film ends is the representation of the relationships within the group of East European illegal immigrants/hustlers. When we first meet Marek, working the street in front of Gare du Nord with his friends, we are led to believe he is Ukranian. It is only later, after Marek has become a regular fixture in Daniel’s life and their relationship is no longer based on paid sexual services that Marek confides in Daniel about his childhood in Chechnya, the death of his parents during the war, finally revealing that his real name is Rouslan. One could argue that Marek’s adoption of a fake identity, and specifically of another Eastern European identity (swapping Ukranian for Chechen identity) knowingly plays into—in order to take advantage of—the West’s perception of Eastern Europeans as one homogenous group.

<sup>38</sup> The premise of Philippe Lioret’s *Welcome* is the same as in *Le Havre*: a local resident decides to help an illegal immigrant—in both cases a young boy—to cross the border. Weiwei’s *Human Flow* treats global migration as a quasi-natural phenomenon, obliterating the particular historical, political, and economic reasons for it.

<sup>39</sup> Although in the beginning of the film we have seen the bakery owner, Ivette, demand that Marcel pay her for the baguettes he has been getting for free every evening, once Marcel welcomes Idrissa into his home Ivette suddenly offers Marcel free baguettes, while the grocery store owner who used to hide from Marcel, presumably because he knows Marcel cannot pay for his groceries, now suddenly apologizes for having being rude to Marcel and offers him a crate of free groceries under the pretext that they are past their expiration date.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Wagner, “Does Europe Have a Cultural Identity?” pp.357-368 in *The Cultural Values of Europe*

<sup>41</sup> Bo Strath, “Belonging and European Identity”, pp. 21-37 in *Identity, Belonging and Migration*. For Strath, the notion of homeland is not relevant or promising today: “When applied to our multicultural urban environments today homeland connotes nostalgia and diasporic longings for a remote distance and a remote past. There is a need for an alternative conceptualization that emphasizes the continuities and overlappings with other migrant communities, and develops ties to the larger polity in which migrants live, a conceptualization that emphasizes solidarity in the cityscapes of diversity” (31). Bo Strath, “Belonging and European Identity”, pp. 21-37 in *Identity, Belonging and Migration*