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This paper examines the relevance of Gianni Vattimo’s concept of *pensiero debole* (weak or post-foundationalist thought) to the debate around national and post-national European cinema.¹ The notion of *pensiero debole* refers to the exhaustion—but *not* the vanishing—of the project of modernity (the belief in reason, progress, history, the nation-state etc.). In *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*² Vattimo argues that the postmodern is “not only...something new in relation to the modern, but also...a dissolution of the category of the new—in other words...an experience of ‘the end of history’ rather than...the appearance of a different stage of history” (4). Vattimo does not read the postmodern de-historicization of experience nostalgically or pessimistically. Rather, he argues that the ideas of Nietzsche and Heidegger “offer us the chance to pass from a purely critical and negative description of the postmodern condition, typical of early 20th century *Kulturkritik* and its more recent offshoots, to an approach that treats it as a positive possibility and opportunity. Nietzsche mentions all of this...in his theory of a possibly active or positive (accomplished) nihilism. Heidegger alludes to the same thing with his idea of a *Verwindung* of metaphysics which is not a critical overcoming in the ‘modern’ sense of the term” (11). Heidegger’s term *Verwindung* seeks to describe the overcoming of modernity and metaphysics, “a going-beyond that is both an acceptance and a deepening” (172). Analyzing the etymology of the term, Vattimo underscores the connotation of ‘convalescence’ (to be healed, cured of an illness), also linked to resignation, and the connotation of distortion (to turn, to twist). One is cured of an illness and at the same time resigned to a pain or loss: “Metaphysics is not something we can put aside like an opinion. Nor can it be left behind us like a doctrine in which we no longer believe; rather, it is something which stays in us as do the traces of an illness or a kind of pain to which we are resigned. It is neither a critical overcoming nor an acceptance that recovers and prolongs it” (175). Following Heidegger and Nietzsche, Vattimo insists that post-histoire (‘weakened history’) is not yet another discourse that tries to legitimate itself on the grounds that it is more up to date and thus more valid or more authentic than the bankrupt discourse of modernity.³

In her book *European Cinema after 1989*⁴ Luisa Rivi relies on Vattimo’s idea of ‘weak thought’ to refer to the exhaustion—but not the vanishing—of national cinema. For Rivi, the decline of Europe’s master narratives does not mark their end; instead, these narratives are realized in ‘declined’ ways, “through the introduction and acceptance of concepts of plurality, alterity, difference, opaqueness, and heterogeneity” (32). This process involves Europe acknowledging its past myths and master narratives and instead of trying to overcome the past or recover it nostalgically,⁵ rethinking its master narratives to make them reflect the new social, political and economic realities. Thus, Rivi argues that rather than discarding the concept of ‘national cinema’ in favor of ‘post-national cinema’ we should approach post-1989 European cinema as ‘weak’ or ‘declined’ national cinema, one that acknowledges the different ways in which transnational forces and supranational bodies are altering the notion of national identity and national cinema. In what follows I examine recent European films in light of Rivi’s concept of ‘weak national cinema’. I distinguish between (for lack of a better term) ‘progressive’ and ‘regressive’ engagements with the idea of ‘national’ and ‘European’ identity. The films I consider ‘progressive’ 1) foreground the ways in which personal and transnational conflicts and

allegiances disrupt national ones; 2) present conflicts within the nation and conflicts between the national and the global capitalist order as mutually imbricated; 3) conceive European identity in terms of what Elsaesser calls “double occupancy” or an “‘always-already’ state of (semantic) occupation.” For Elsaesser, “an ‘always already’ occupation (which includes as its crucial dimension an overdetermined, that is to say: non-binary, a-symmetrical ‘self-other’ relation) suggests that there may be no space in the ‘fortress’ of selfhood—and especially no space in the Fortress Europe, which can be defended against an ‘outside’ of which ‘I’ or ‘we’ are the ‘inside’. There is no-one in Europe...who is not diasporic or displaced in relation to some marker of difference—be it ethnic, regional, religious, linguistic, and whose identity is not always already split or hyphenated.”⁶ By contrast, ‘regressive’ films continue to recycle a familiar narrative of integration, which constructs the ex-colonizer (Western Europe) as suffering from a split identity and the (neo)colonized (the ‘other Europe’) as an ‘authentic’, core part of the ex-colonizer’s identity that he must acknowledge.

In opposition to those who argue that the new Europe should be discussed in “post-national” terms, Rivi maintains that “It is precisely the persistence of the nation-state, with its form of political associations and communal belonging that will provide a unique opportunity to shape and sustain...a supranational enterprise [Europeanism].⁷ Yet for this to happen, the conventional meaning of the nation-state [and the conventional meaning of identity] must be rearticulated in different ways” (3). Rivi reads the co-existence of more than one nation within the geographical boundaries of same state—e.g. Turkish immigrants in Germany or Catalonians in Spain—as a sign that we can now talk of a ‘weakened national cinema’ rather than of a new, ‘post-national’ stage in the history of national cinemas. Following Anthony Smith, Rivi envisions the new types of identities articulated in the new Europe as a series of “concentric circles of loyalty and belonging”: “There is nothing to prevent individuals from identifying with Flanders, Belgium and Europe simultaneously and displaying each allegiance in the appropriate context” (Smith qtd. in Rivi 37).⁸ However, one thing that is becoming increasingly apparent in European films is that these concentric circles of belonging, which move out from the regional to the national to the supra-national, are complicated by class and generational allegiances that often override national or regional loyalties. For instance, in the Dardenne brothers’ film *La Promesse* (1996) power relations between characters are not structured neatly along national or regional lines but rather along class lines: migrants from Burkina Faso, Belgium’s ex-colony, migrants from the former Communist empire, and Belgian nationals from the rural, underdeveloped parts of the country, share the same subordinate position in the film. The same is true of the French farm lad in Haneke’s *Code Unknown* (2000) and of second generation Arab and African immigrants in both *Code Unknown* and *Caché* (2005). The farm lad is a white, French citizen but his agrarian lifestyle places him on the periphery of the post-industrial, global order represented by the Parisian metropolis. His marginalization is due to the fact that the criteria that establish his identity as ‘French’—the notion of a distinctly ‘French’ ‘ethnoscape’ or ‘ethnomemory’—have become obsolete. His marginal position with respect to the metropolis and the post-industrial order it represents place him closer to the various (legal or illegal) immigrants in France, who occupy a similar position of homelessness, albeit a ‘double’ homelessness (existing on the periphery of the capitalist order *and* having lost their own homeland) than to French middle-class nationals.

I turn now to my main examples: *35 Rhums* (*35 Shots of Rum*, Claire Denis, 2008), *The Edge of Heaven* (Fatih Akin, 2007), *Yella* (Christian Petzold, 2007), *Exils* and *Transylvania*

(Tony Gatlif, 2004 and 2006). Claire Denis's *35 Rhums* is a family drama about the inevitable separation between parent (Lionel, a train conductor of African descent) and child (his daughter Joséphine, a university student) following years of intimacy and co-dependence. The two live a modest but comfortable life, in which routine plays a central role, in an apartment building on the outskirts of Paris. Only a few of the scenes take place in the city, notably a scene set at Josephine's university, in the course of which she and her professor discuss the dependency of the global South on the global North and the continued exploitation of the former by the latter. Her professor urges her not to approach global political issues personally or emotionally but to focus instead on improving her analytical skills that will allow her to dissect such issues rationally. The discussion dramatizes the conflict between a weakening sense of national identity, no longer a source of strong, personalized feelings of belonging and fierce loyalty, and a more detached, analytical attitude toward identity in tune with the impersonal and transient forms of identification brought about by globalization. With the exception of this scene, the film does not broach directly the subject of race, politics or globalization: such issues are relegated to the background of the film's personal story of the relationship between father and daughter. The film then consists of a series of elisions of what we would have expected to be central concerns. For instance, the film does not consider, in a direct, transparent way, the question of identity in an increasingly multi-cultural, multi-ethnic Europe: we know Josephine's mother was a German woman who fell in love with Lionel while she was in Paris but we are given no clues as to how either of them ended up in Paris. Neither does the film explore potential conflicts between white French citizens and first or second generation non-white immigrants. In other words, the characters are not marginalized by being reduced to their racial, cultural or national background. Anything that could have marginalized the characters is part of the back story but not all of the back story is 'marbled into' the main story.

Does Denis avoid addressing the questions of race or history directly so as to avoid exoticizing and marginalizing her characters or is her seeming indifference to these issues equivalent to suppressing them or minimizing their real significance? Does the film comment on what it means to be European precisely by avoiding or refraining from commenting? Denis seems to suggest that history—the history of colonialism, immigration, integration—is no longer something to be excavated, reclaimed, or rewritten but simply part of the back story of every European i.e. she presents the past not as something 'behind' us, something to which we return purposefully and consciously, but rather as co-existing with the present. This is not a film about the painful process of immigration or about the nostalgic attempt to reclaim a common past, a shared history, a lost homeland. It is instructive to compare *35 Rhums* to a film like *Inch' Allah Dimanche* (Yamina Benguigui, 2001).⁹ By foregrounding the painful process of immigration and integration in a new society, the conflict between the immigrant's traditional culture and the host society's 'modern ways', *Inch' Allah Dimanche* relegates the immigrant characters to the inevitable status of perennial outsiders. By contrast, in *35 Rhums* the changed face of Europe as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society is presented as a *fait accompli*—all characters in the film are French and none of them are white¹⁰--rather than as something still in the making. The national or the colonial/post-colonial question emerges only through the prism of personal relationships (father and daughter, daughter and lover).

Just as the discussion in Josephine's university course dramatizes the effects of globalization rather than excavating France's colonial history, the protagonists' back story, revealed through their trip to Germany, where Josephine's mother is from, is figured as always

already transnational. Lionel and Josephine travel to Germany to visit Josephine's mother's girlfriend, who lives alone with her own daughter. A parallel is established between Lionel, who is on the verge of separating from his daughter and the German woman, whose separation from her daughter is equally inevitable, thus mapping the transnational onto the personal. The perennialist concept of national identity, defined in terms of 'ethnoscapes' or 'ethnomemory', is no longer relevant here.¹¹ In place of a distant, exotic homeland, the film depicts a 'return' to another, geographically and culturally close, West European country, Germany. The homeland's geographical and cultural proximity flattens the experience of temporality and history: instead of going back in time to the period of colonization and de-colonization, we travel across space. The past is rendered close and familiar, with migration an always already constitutive element of it. Josephine's German ancestry positions her as unquestionably European precisely by virtue of her transnational identity: African-German-French. This foreshortening of history and its mapping out in terms of spatial proximity, whose effect is to emphasize the link between personal and transnational identity, rather than national identity—distinguishes Denis's film from what I consider 'regressive' films, which continue to construct identity in terms of 'ethnoscapes' and 'ethnomemory'.

Christian Petzold's *Yella* (2007) is the last film in what critics refer to as his "ghost trilogy" (the other two films are *The State I Am In*, 2000 and *Ghosts*, 2005). The story begins in a quiet, provincial town in the former East Germany, where Yella, the title heroine, lives with her father, while being stalked by her ex-husband. She finds a job in Hannover (in the former West Germany) but upon arriving in Hannover she finds out that the company has gone bankrupt. At the hotel where she is staying she meets a businessman, Phillip, with whom she enters into a strange partnership as he teaches her the ins and outs of venture capitalism. Her past continues to haunt her, in the form of her ex-husband who may or may not be stalking her at the hotel. The film is structured around a false flashback. It begins with a car accident, which Yella seems to survive; however, toward the end of the film, the car crash is repeated and this time she dies, suggesting that everything we have just seen was the dream (nightmare?) of a woman in the last seconds of her life. *Yella* is reminiscent of Kieslowski's *The Double Life of Veronique*, which also plays on the doppelgänger motif both from a metaphysical/aesthetic and political perspective. Like Nicole Kidman's character in Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others*, Yella exists in a limbo between life and death, refusing to acknowledge that she is dead and desperately hanging on to her elaborate fantasy projection of herself as a budding corporate accountant.¹²

Petzold structures the film around a false flashback (the protagonist to whom we are supposed to attribute the flashback is actually dead), a technique widely used in Hollywood psychological thrillers (e.g. *Stay*, *The Sixth Sense*). The fantasy aspect of the false flashback has a precedent in German post-1989 cinema, most notably in Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye Lenin* (2003). In both films the fantastic or surreal element comments indirectly on the Germans' perception of the differences between the East and the West, the past and the present. *Good Bye Lenin!* is a comedy about a young east Berliner trying to convince his mother, who falls in a coma and misses the fall of the Berlin wall and the reunification of Germany, that nothing has happened and that they are still living in the GDR. The film paints an ambivalent picture of life before and after the fall, lovingly mocking the empty rituals of communism and the naivety of its earnest supporters and yet idealizing them by virtue of their association with the protagonist's nostalgic childhood memories. The film freezes historical time and reproduces the communist past, which now continues to co-exist with the capitalist present, despite the fact that they are

unthinkable together. Similarly, *Yella* freezes time while the protagonist's fantasy play out to its bitter end, at which time it cancels itself and the stark reality of the present is reaffirmed. In *Good Bye Lenin*, a young man recreates a vanished world, East Germany, in order to save his mother. In *Yella*, an East German woman imagines/dreams a possibly better life for herself in a reunified Germany, only to discover that her death is inevitable in both worlds (the obsolete, pre-capitalist East and the profit-driven West of venture capitalism).

The film conflates Yella's past (her ex-East German identity) and her present (her identity as a successful team player in the game of venture capitalism) by making her East German ex-husband and her West German lover and 'teacher' visually indistinguishable (doppelgängers). Thus, a dominant theme in German cinema—negotiating the past—is given a new twist: instead of the linear temporality of returning to the past or uncovering things that have been long buried or repressed (e.g. the Nazi past), the film works through the trope of 'haunting' whose temporality is left ambivalent or reversible: is it the past that haunts the present (the memory of a politically divided Germany haunting the present re-unified nation) or is it the present that haunts the past (the present of venture capitalism retrospectively reveals the increasingly irrelevant or obsolete political divisions of the past)? *Yella* dramatizes the difficulty of making the transition from the past to the future. The West-East political division is here mapped onto a temporal division between the present/future of venture capitalism and the communist past. Since the future, identified with Philip and with Western capitalism, is presented as uncannily similar to the past (Yella's ex-husband and the ex-communist regime in East Germany), the implication is that, paradoxically, it is *both* the past and the future that keep haunting Yella (and that she haunts in return).

Petzold complicates the past division within the nation (East-West) by superimposing on it—or reading it through—another division or conflict between a more rooted, uncomplicated past guaranteeing a stable sense of identity (here this ideal past and this stable identity are mapped onto the East half of German national identity) and a mobile, deterritorialized present/future (here mapped onto the West half of German national identity). The central conflict in the film is not any more (or not simply) that between the East and the West; rather, it is a conflict between a simpler, more rooted life (represented in the film by Yella's life with her father in a provincial town in the former East Germany) and the nomadic life inaugurated by globalization, a life scattered between Autobahn motels (Deleuze's 'any-place-whatever') and anonymous looking corporate cities, seen only through the windows of a train or from the conference room in an office building. The film underscores the increasing obsolescence of the political distinctions that defined the past in the face of the impersonal allegiances demanded by the global capitalist order. The particular historical/national conflict shifts to the background of the larger/universal problem of the effects of cut throat capitalism and globalization on personal relationships. Just as *35 Rhums* approaches European identity as transnational/personal rather than as national, *Yella* uses the traces of division within German national identity to dramatize and underscore another, more important division in the film, the division between the national as such (the pre-global order of the past, in which a division between East and West Germany still made sense) and the transnational, global order of the present (in which belonging to a successful global corporate order outweighs belonging to a particular nation: e.g. Philip teaches Yella corporate tricks he himself has learned from American corporate thrillers like John Grisham's bestseller *The Firm*). Both in Denis's and in Petzold's film the European is understood through the transnational, not through the national. Both films operate within a framework of flattened

historical time and space: the geographically and culturally distant/different—ethnoscapes and ethnomemory—is made spatially and temporally close: in *35 Rhums*, the past and the motherland to which one returns is identified with a geographically and culturally close European country, Germany; in *Yella*, too, a deterritorialized, corporate present has supplanted any ‘deep’ political and historical divisions within the nation’s past. *Yella* does not emphasize distinctions between East and West ‘scapes’, whether ‘cityscapes’ or ‘landscapes’, but instead distinguishes between past-scape and future-scape. The past-scape—small town/agrarian/rooted/provincial—is juxtaposed with the present/future-scape, suggested visually through a series of U-ban motels (Deleuze’s ‘any-place-whatever’) and indistinguishable, anonymous looking corporate cities, seen only through the windows of a train or from the conference room in an office building, never from street level. The ‘corporationscape’ is nationally unspecific.

Fatih Akin’s *The Edge of Heaven* (2007) introduces us to Ali, an old Turkish man who immigrated to Germany (Bremen) a long time ago. Ali lives with his son, Nejat, a professor of German literature who lectures on Goethe to sleepy college students. Ali meets Yeter, a Turkish prostitute, and offers to take care of her if she moves in with him. When he accidentally kills her in a fit of jealousy, his son travels to Turkey to bury her and find her daughter Ayten, who is now a member of a resistance movement. Eventually, he decides to stay there and buys a small German bookshop. Following a clash with the police, Ayten escapes to Bremen where she meets Lotte, a German university student, who wants to help her. Eventually the two young women fall in love. Lotte’s mother, Susanne, suspicious of the foreigner from the East, insists that Ayten follow the law and apply officially for asylum. Ayten is deported back to Turkey and sent to a women’s prison. Lotte travels to Istanbul to find her but is accidentally killed by a group of kids. Susanne moves to Istanbul, where she lives in her dead daughter’s apartment. As she mourns the death of her daughter, Susanne’s feelings toward Ayten change and she becomes determined to help her get out of prison.

Like Claire Denis, Fatih Akin is not interested in exploring immigrants’ problems of adjusting to a foreign culture. In *35 Rhums* the conventional image of France as white and middle class is replaced with an image of middle class, French-African characters; similarly, in Fatih Akin’s film we are not even introduced to German characters until later, even though the first part of the film is set in Germany: the first characters we are introduced to include Ali, his son, Yeter and two Turkish men whom she meets on the bus and who demand that she repent for her sinful ways (for prostituting herself). The only German characters we see in this part of the film are the extras at the bar where Yeter accepts Ali’s offer. *The Edge of Heaven* appropriates the discourse of interconnections and coincidences characteristic of hyperlink films like *Traffic* and *Babel*. Throughout the film we see characters passing each other, unaware, as they look for each other. The fate of every character in the film is reflected in the fate of another character in a series of reflections, substitutions, and symmetries: Ali, a long time immigrant in Germany, is deported back to the home country after he commits an accidental murder and serves time in prison; Nejat, his son, feeling homesick, abandons his academic career in Germany and moves back to Turkey; Yeter emigrates to Germany where she prostitutes herself to support her daughter back in Turkey; upon Yeter’s death, her coffin is transported back to Turkey; her daughter, Ayten, also leaves Turkey (for political reasons) and travels to Germany but is eventually deported to Turkey; Ayten’s German lover, Lotte, leaves Germany and moves to Turkey to help her lover; when Lotte is killed, her coffin is transported back to Germany, like Yeter’s coffin before it. When Susanne moves to Turkey and starts living in her dead daughter’s

room, she lives Lotte's life, while reading Lotte's diary in which Lotte observes that she herself is following in Susanne's footsteps, who used to be a hippie and hitchhiked through Turkey on her way to India 30 years ago, a trip Lotte also takes. The fate of every character in the film is reflected in the fate of another character, providing a perfect instance of Elsaesser's notion of the 'double occupancy' of the 'hyphenated character' in European cinema. The characters are 'paired off' symmetrically across nationality: each of them is either a parent who has lost a child or a child who has lost a parent.¹³ In the last section of the film the parent-child bond that has been broken by death is re-established: daughter and mother are 'returned' to each other, but the nationalities are now switched. The film intertwines and treats as inseparable (rather than as merely metaphorical) the relations between nations and between generations. At the end of a series of symbolic exchanges of national identity and of family bonds, it becomes clear that nothing is ever lost for every loss is symbolically recuperated: when one mother is lost, another one (of a different nationality) occupies her place, and when one daughter is lost, another one (of a different nationality) occupies her place, along the lines of Elsaesser's notion of an 'always-already' state of (semantic) occupation that transcends national differences: following Lotte's death, Susanne becomes Ayten's surrogate mother and Ayten becomes Susanne's surrogate daughter. The structure of this series of symbolic exchanges demonstrates that political, social, cultural or national identity in the film remains subordinated to generational or family bonds, which are universal. The motif of children walking in the steps of their parents and of parents walking in the steps of their children (visually underscored by repeated scenes in which different characters traverse the same space or ride the same ferry boat) also underscores the generational, rather than the national, aspect of the main conflict.

The Edge of Heaven moves beyond *Head-On*, in which a Turkish-German young woman struggles to reconcile the two sides of her split national identity. Unfortunately, *Head-On* eventually falls back into conventional identity-politics.¹⁴ Conversely, *The Edge of Heaven* consistently decouples nationality from the idea of home (*heimat*) with which it has been traditionally associated. When Susanne moves into Lotte's apartment, she feels more at home there, in a foreign country, than in her native Germany, simply because that's the last place her daughter lived. Similarly, Nejat is not homesick for some lost, idealized image of home; 'going home' for him means working in a German bookshop in Turkey. The film acknowledges that the desire for an unmediated return to some lost (idea of) home is impossible. The only return that is possible is, paradoxically, the return of one's new identity in the host country to the old country, the implication being that the new identity constructed in Germany is constitutive of the supposedly pure identity associated with the homeland. This complicates the conventional geographic and temporal flow in terms of which we think immigration, as the film suggests that being German is constitutive of being Turkish: it is not coincidental that all characters, Turkish and German, come to the end of their travels in Istanbul, which is/was/will have been/becomes a home for all of them. If Germany is one of the Western European countries that still stands, synecdochically, for 'Europe', then the film suggests that being European is 'always already' constitutive of being Turkish. The isolationist, fortress mentality of 'old Europe' (Susanne's original xenophobia and paternalistic attitude toward Ayten) and 'the new Europe's' conservative, patriarchal attitudes (Ali and the two young Turkish men who force Yeter to repent) are the obstacles that prevent Europeans from seeing that they are all interconnected. However, these problems, the film suggests, can be resolved on a personal level (e.g. the relationship between Susanne and Ayten) rather than on an impersonal, bureaucratic level

(consider Ayten's "Fuck the EU!").

Finally, a few words about what I consider "regressive" post-national cinema. Tony Gatlif's films willingly participate in the discourse of Western versus Eastern Europe, which associates the West with rationality while positioning the East as irrational and slightly dangerous or exotic. In *Swing* (2002) Max, a 12 year old boy, spending his summer vacation with his grandmother starts frequenting a run-down part of town where he takes guitar lessons from a gypsy. He wants to learn to play like Jango Rhinehardt. The minimal story is loosely organized around several set musical pieces that allow the spectator to enjoy some virtuoso guitar playing. Over the course of the summer Max falls in love with Swing, a gypsy kid his age whose gender is not immediately obvious (it's gradually revealed that Swing is a girl). In addition to being a coming-of-age story about first love, the film resembles Gatlif's other films insofar as it suggests that authentic feelings, such as love, are somehow the prerogative of gypsies. And because this is a Tony Gatlif film, gypsy music is positioned as more authentic than other kinds of music—as the teacher tells his student, to learn to play this kind of music it is not enough to be disciplined and patient, but rather one has to feel the music with the heart and play from the heart, not from the head. For instance, in one sequence the gypsies teach a female orchestra—consisting of white French girls—how to sing gypsy songs with the right pronunciation and how to keep rhythm. The French singers and violinists are depicted as too timid and disciplined: they have to be taught to loosen up, to play and sing from the heart, the implication being that the gypsy is teaching them not only how to sing and play better but also how to feel more, how to achieve a level of emotional authenticity, how to express emotions more authentically. Thus, the Romani sensibility is once again contrasted with French (West European) rational, intellectualizing worldview. Gradually, Max is 'gypsified', a transformation that the West European (child or adult) cannot fight because it's inevitable: Max starts spitting, not bathing, drinking alcohol, and engaging in other kinds of activities and behaviors that suggested by the familiar old stereotype of the dirty, uncivilized but carefree gypsy. The film pretends to introduce an element of realism into the stereotype with the sudden death of Max's guitar teacher. However, even this tragedy is recuperated immediately by the re-inscription of another gypsy myth: the gypsy lives intensely, like a strong fire, until the fire is suddenly extinguished (rather than pathetically fading away). After the teacher's death, all the dead man's possessions (including his guitar) are set on fire, a symbolic act of destruction that keeps the memory of the living gypsy alive and refuses to associate his now epic figure with any earth-bound or all too human feelings such as grief: the myth of the happy, carefree gypsy is simply too potent to destroy. The film depicts the encounter between the French Max and the gypsy circle of friends and family as strictly one-directional: Max undergoes the predictable 'gypsification' but none of his gypsy friends are transformed in any significant way as a result of their encounter with him (other than Swing eventually falling in love with Max). Thus, for the French character the gypsy occupies, from the very beginning, the position of 'always already Other', a position that remains unreciprocated because for the gypsy, the French could never occupy the position of the 'Other.' The film's ending—Max leaves town and Swing is now alone, her father dead—ends with a beautiful sad song that once again denies the gypsies any reality, relegating them to a never-never-land of music and joy. The film leaves us with the suggestion that the gypsy is not of this world, that his music—and he himself—transcends this trivial world.

In *Exils* (2004) Zano and Naima, two lovers living in Paris, travel to Algeria to reconnect

with their roots. On the way they meet Leila and Habib, an Algerian couple traveling in the opposite direction, France, in search of jobs. Leila gives the French couple a letter of introduction to her family; once they arrive in Algeria, the two of them are befriended by Leila's brother Said and together with him they explore the city and the culture that seems so foreign to them. The couple's 'search for identity' resembles an improvised weekend trip West European kids like to invent for themselves in order to impress themselves (and others) with how rebellious and uncivilized they are. None of the Algerian characters the French lovers meet is affected in any way by their encounter with them. The one-directional nature of the encounter makes it appear as another form of colonialism, whereby Algerian culture fulfills a purely therapeutic function for the confused West European.¹⁵ *Exils* is still premised on the idea of national identity described in terms of 'ethnoscapes' and 'ethnomemory': an actual blood line connection (the protagonists are descendents of refugees from Algeria) provides narrative justification for the quest. On the contrary, *Transylvania* (2006) pushes the idea that every West European is missing a core part of their identity, which they can find in the non-European, the not-yet-European, or the not-quite-European 'Other'. Significantly, there is no blood connection between the characters in this film: indeed, the film underscores the different cultural, ethnic and national identities of the characters (hence the multiple languages spoken in the film). Whereas in *Exils* identity is still understood in terms of belonging to a land, a culture, a people, a language, a common heritage, in *Transylvania*, made two years later, identity is decoupled or dissociated from any specific material signifiers (land, language, or culture). The film title refers not to a real country or a nation but to a historical region in the heart of Romania; however, the film strips it of any national or even regional specificity and reifies it into an idea of 'authenticity': any West European who feels lost and confused is welcome to travel to this mystical land where he can be sure to overcome his identity crisis. The title refers to a cliché, firmly positioned in the West European mind, of a place of unreason where every nervous breakdown (especially over unrequited love) takes place to the musical accompaniment provided by a couple of Roma musicians plucking their sad violins. Europe's 'margins' in Gatlif's films are always presented as the 'core' of West European identity that the West European has forgotten or suppressed but that eventually returns and demands to be acknowledged. The films are thus always structured around a health-disease or degeneration-regeneration metaphor: the West European suffers from some kind of malaise, for which a marginalized, not-yet-European identity—East European or, even more marginally, the Roma—constitutes the miraculous cure.

Transylvania tells the story of an Italian woman, Zingarina, who meets and falls in love with a Roma musician while he is working illegally in Paris. The musician is deported back to Romania and Zingarina, two months pregnant and suffering the familiar pangs of *amour fou*, travels to Romania to find him. The question is: what would cure the West European woman? Sure enough, the only cure is to 'become Gypsy': Zingarina goes through a literal 'makeover', donning gypsy clothes, acting uncontrollably, and drinking with abandon.¹⁶ The film pushes 'becoming-gypsy' as a kind of Prozac for the afflicted West European. Ignoring the attempts of her French girlfriend to take her back to Paris, Zingarina abandons her friend in the middle of the road and impulsively decides to follow a homeless Roma kid. They wander through the country together, sleep wherever they fall, all the while the kid trying in vain to shake up Zingarina from the comatose state she is in. On the road they meet Tchangalo, who travels from village to village buying various ethnic artifacts from the villagers, which he then sells back in Germany. Tchangalo is a truly transnational character: he alternates between speaking in English,

Romanian, Romani, and German but we are not sure of his national identity, though there are hints that he might be a Turkish-German living in Hamburg. Despite the variety of languages spoken in the film—German, Turkish, Italian, French, Hungarian, Romani—miscommunication is rare thanks to what seem to be two ‘universal’ idioms: money and Gypsy music. After Zingarina’s awakening to the brutal reality of unrequited love she is crushed, but slowly she regains her ‘*joi de vivre*’ thanks to Tchengalo, who mocks the sappy, romantic love she professes for her lost lover.¹⁷ The film demands that we reject West European ideas about love as false, inauthentic and deserving of mockery. The only measure of authenticity we can hope to find, we are led to believe, lies in our liberation from such ideologies. The film idealizes a marginalized identity (the Roma) as a source of authenticity, setting it up against the alleged inauthenticity of the dominant group (West Europeans).¹⁸

In films like *Transylvania* characters from marginalized groups (gypsies, Eastern Europeans etc.) do not suffer from an identity problem; instead, they suffer from ‘trivial’ afflictions, e.g. economic ones (poverty). Of course, Roma characters don’t suffer even from such trivial afflictions in accordance with the common stereotype of the ‘poor but happy’ gypsy. Gatlif’s portrayal of the Roma as free, happy-go-lucky, intense and irrational, in contrast to West Europeans, who are depicted as confused and lacking a stable sense of identity, belies an unconscious paternalism.¹⁹ *Transylvania* works through the familiar trope of the white European suffering an identity crisis.²⁰ Examples of other films, including non-European films, working through this trope abound. In Douglas Sirk’s *Imitation of Life* Laura tries, unsuccessfully, to reconcile the conflicting identities of ‘mother’ and ‘independent career woman’ while her black servant ‘enjoys’ an unproblematic, stable identity: a servant. The West European’s identity crisis is rooted in his deep-seated sense of guilt, which he disavows even as he tries to atone for it. The notion of identity crisis, or split identity, is a construct peculiar to the colonizer. Unable (or refusing) to bear the colonizer’s guilt, the West European deals with his identity crisis by inventing for himself a tragically split identity and internalizing that flattering image of himself, thereby replacing the less flattering image of himself as victimizer, oppressor or intruder.

According to Rivi, we now live in a transnational, heterogeneous Europe in which we can no longer assume “a massive and primal condition of domination, a binary structure with ‘dominators’ on one side and ‘dominated’ on the other, but rather a multiform production of relations of domination that are partially susceptible of integration into overall strategies” (29). She approaches the new European cinema from a post-colonial perspective: “Contemporary European cinema engages with the legacy of colonization at its site of origin. It specifically addresses migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, diasporic communities, and extracommunitari (those outside the EU) who move in the opposite direction, from the peripheries to the metropole, toward an encounter that the ex-colonizer fears and feels as a reversed invasion” (8). It is instructive to compare Rivi’s rhetoric, which denies the continued existence of a binary structure of ‘dominators’ and ‘dominated’, with Aniko Imre’s account of the New Europe as a space that wants to *disguise itself as ‘post-colonial’* while maintaining the colonial divide within Europe between the ex-colonizers (Western Europe) and the ‘other Europe’ (the former Communist colonies). In *Identity Games* Aniko Imre argues that, unlike neo-colonialism, the term ‘post-colonial’, “seems to erase the possibility of an anti-colonial or anti-neocolonial struggle. For example, the term ‘post-colonial’ ignores or does not acknowledge the fact that the fall of Communism created in the Other Europe conditions similar to those of the ex-colonies in Asia and Africa and a similar migratory movement toward Western Europe, just as it ignores the

fears of many Europeans that the EU represents a new supracolonial undertaking under the disguise of ‘integration’ (113).²¹ Although Rivi’s appropriation of Vattimo’s notion of ‘weak’ thought is useful in reminding us of the continued importance of the nation and national identity in European cinema, her description of ‘the new Europe’ in ‘post-colonial’ terms should give us pause.

‘Weak national cinema’ should not be seen as a new stage in the history of national cinema, that is, as a more up-to-date and more authentic discourse that has safely overcome the bankrupt ideas of ‘the nation’ and ‘national identity’ by representing formerly marginalized identities. To think of post-national cinema in terms of identity politics, to try to re-establish something ‘proper’ or ‘more authentic’ in the face of the decline or weakening of history and national identity, would be to give in to passive or reactive nihilism, the opposite of the ‘accomplished nihilism’ of Nietzsche and Vattimo. Post-national cinema cannot be ‘more authentic’ because authenticity, “understood as what is ‘proper’,” has itself vanished” (Vattimo 25). ‘Post-national’ cinema can only be a sort of ‘revised’ (*verwunden*), distorted form of national cinema, rather than its overcoming. “For the accomplished nihilist,” writes Vattimo, “even the liquidation of the highest values does not signify the establishment or re-establishment of a situation of ‘value’ in the strong sense of the term. It is not a re-appropriation, because what has become superfluous is whatever is ‘proper’ in the first place. [...] Examples are easily found to show that, in the face of the devaluation of the highest values and the death of God, the usual reaction is one which makes a grandiose metaphysical appeal to other, ‘truer’ values (for example, the value of subcultures or popular cultures as opposed to dominant cultures)” (24-25). Similarly, and following Derrida’s critique of the already “exhausted programs of Eurocentrism and anti-Eurocentrism” (i.e. “the liberal concern with regionalism, minority representation and transnationalism”), in *The New European Cinema: Redrawing the Map*²² Rosalind Galt rightfully argues that “to focus on films that narrate the ‘Other’ of Europe...directly, that articulate an anti-Eurocentric hybridity...transparently, is ultimately a self-exhausting critical endeavor. [...] If we are to take seriously the post-Wall European subject’s impossible responsibility, we cannot stop with a comfortably liberal celebration of the Other” (3).²³ ‘Weak’ national cinema dramatizes the dissolution of national identity without, however, erecting another type of identity in its place that tries to legitimize itself as ‘more authentic.’ The nation remains relevant to ‘weak’ national cinema but it is no longer presented as constituted by stable, indigenous traits; rather, ‘weak’ national cinema stages the ways in which transnational forces and allegiances—class, gender, political, generational and transnational ones—question and disrupt the national.

Notes

1 *Il pensiero debole* was the title of a famous book by Vattimo and P.A. Rovatti (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1983).

2 Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 1991.

3 ‘Post-histoire’, a concept first introduced by Arnold Gehlen, is the condition made possible by the secularization of progress: “By depriving progress of a final destination [as opposed to the Christian idea of history as the history of salvation] secularization dissolves the very notion of progress itself” (Vattimo 8).

4 New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

5 In contrast to Rivi's optimistic account of the new Europe, in *Identity Games: Globalization and the Transformation of Media Cultures in the New Europe* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009) Aniko Imre stresses the forceful presence of nostalgia discourses in the new Europe, where the communist past of the former Communist countries has been packaged and re-packaged for consumption.

6 Thomas Elsaesser, "Fantasy Spaces and Mutual Interference in European Cinema" in *European Film Theory*, ed. Temenuga Trifonova (New York: Routledge, 2009). 47.

⁷ Rivi identifies three main stages in the development of 'the European idea': (1) The European idea developed in the aftermath of World War II at the first Congress of Europe (1948) was "moral rather than economic or political" (14). (2) The idea of a united Europe following the 1989 disruption of the 'other Europe', the Communist bloc, plunged Europe into an identity crisis: "by losing the East—or rather by losing the Western construction of the East as 'the other Europe'—the West also finds itself in a state of crisis because all places seem to have become the West" (23). (3) The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 created the conditions for "an agonistic co-existence of localisms, regionalisms, nation-states, and supranationalism...[so that] a dualistic configuration of Europe no longer corresponds to the actual state of things; the nation-state is not opposed to Europeanism, the region is not opposed to the state, and the locality is not crushed by the center" (29).

8 Myria Georgiou argues for the importance of an additional category, the city, "as the ultimate location of diversity and of growing challenge to national and supranational formal mechanisms for politics and culture" (242). Georgiou stresses the cosmopolitan or virtual identity of national and European citizens who "have expanded their virtual but also experiential space of belonging beyond the nation-state and its bounded logic of belonging. Mediated mobility has transformed 'the experiential spaces of the nation-state from within' (Beck qtd. in Georgiou 256). See "Shifting Cultural Landscapes, Shifting Boundaries: Diasporic Media in Europe" (p. 241-257 in *Shifting Landscapes: Film and Media in European Context*. Ed. Miyase Christensen and Neziha Erdogan (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 241-257.

⁹ See my discussion of the film in Temenuga Trifonova, "Code Unknown: European Identity in Cinema," *Scope*, June 2007.

¹⁰ Interestingly, when Noé, the young man who eventually marries Joséphine, expresses a desire to leave the neighbourhood where they all live and find a job abroad, he does not dream of moving to Paris or to another European city but rather to Africa (Gabon).

¹¹ Perennialists define the 'nation' in cultural terms as a 'people' linked to a particular ancestral territory or 'homeland' and held together by a collective memory, which gives rise, over time, to 'ethno-history'. See Anthony D. Smith, "Nations and History" in *Understanding Nationalism*, ed. Montserrat Guibernau and John Hutchinson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001). 9-31. The perennialist concept of the nation, which depends on the atmospheric evocation of myths, symbols, traditions, national costumes and memories, emphasizes a nation's embeddedness in history. 'Ethnoscapes' play an especially important role in linking generations and constructing the idea of 'home' in agrarian societies where the relatively low levels of mobility render migration a particularly painful experience. The perennialist theory has become obsolete in the age of globalization as migration is increasingly becoming the norm rather than the exception and as the process of industrialization is speeded up everywhere, including in formerly predominantly agrarian societies. On the other hand, modernist theory—represented, for

instance, by Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*—applies social communication theory to the debates around nationalism, positing mediated communication as central to the formation of a sense of national identity. This argument privileges what is internal to the communicative community over what lies outside it. However, as Philip Schlesinger has argued, the functionalism of social communication theory, on which studies of national cinemas are based, tends to produce an image of a strongly bounded communicative community, an image that has been increasingly challenged by the globalization of communication. See Philip Schlesinger, "The Sociological Scope of 'National Cinema'", *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (New York: Routledge, 2000), 19-32. The 'imagined community' argument does not take into consideration the instability or contingency of the national and, instead, privileges films which narrate the nation as a tightly-knit, homogeneous collectivity, a finite, closed-off space impervious to other identities besides national ones. The modernist theory of the nation is not an appropriate model for studying contemporary European films, because it is still premised on the idea of 'belonging'—as well as its complementary idea of 'exclusion'—even if belonging is no longer conceived as inherited but as constructed. See Andrew Higson, "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema," in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (New York: Routledge, 2000). 63-75.

¹² Sound is the only element of reality contaminating her fantasy world: intermittent aural memories of the wind in the trees and the sounds of a lonely crow, both associated with the place of her death, continually cast doubt on her ontological status.

13 Hence the first section is called 'The Death of Yeter' (the death of the mother) and the second 'The Death of Lotte' (the death of the daughter).

14 See Thomas Elsaesser, "Fantasy Spaces and Mutual Interference in European Cinema": "The uncanny power of the first half of the film comes from not only *not* marking any difference between 'Turkish' and 'German' culture – and thus to forego the hyphenation I began with, which is indeed exceptional in the context of films about multi-cultural life – but from showing how the non-marking of cultural difference and the non-marking of the fantasy-frame (here the 'contract' that they do not love each other) are mutually interdependent. Therein lies the paradoxical hope, which the second half of the film, for me at any rate, takes away again, falling back into a more conventional identity politics" (60).

15 Despite the trance dance during which the protagonists supposedly find themselves, the rest of their experience there (in the wake of a devastating earthquake which does not dampen their wanderlust) underscores their alienation from their 'origins': the woman is forced to wear a robe and a scarf which she eventually throws away (reasserting herself a free, independent French woman) and when the man looks through old family photographs, we cannot help but feel how strange the photographs of men and women wearing scarves and turbans must seem to him. Indeed, over the last shot of the film the title *Exils* appears once again, as if to emphasize that they remain strangers in this land just as they were at the beginning of the trip/film.

16 However, she still preserves her West Europeanness: she scolds Tchengalo for feeding a homeless dog but refusing to feed a starving gypsy kid; and she feels pity for an old man on a bike and insists that they give him a ride. Her liberal sense of 'justice' remains intact despite her overall gypsyfication.

17 In one scene, Tchengalo and Zingorina make fun of German shlagers and Italian love songs: these songs, we are to believe, are sappy and false. Only gypsy songs are ‘authentic’, reflecting real passions.

18 *Imitation of Life* provides another example of this insofar as the film portrays ‘the black experience’ as more authentic or meaningful than the white woman’s experience, which is condemned as a mere ‘imitation of life’.

19 A viewer’s comment on the film, on www.imdb.com, lists the numerous correspondences between *Transylvania* and *Gadjo Dilo*, suggesting that the former is nothing but a loose remake of the latter, this time with a female lead.

20 That *Transylvania* falls victim to the tendency to idealize and romanticize the marginalized Romani identity is not, in the end, surprising, given the background of the film’s director, Tony Gatlif, of Gypsy ethnicity, born in Algeria before the country won its independence from France.

21 As József Böröcz reminds us, “the attractive image of a common European home continues to downplay the economic inferiority of peripheral states and the exclusion of those countries that are not part of the Euro family. This scheme disavows the arrogance with which the EU re-creates itself in the image of Europe’s imperial glory, standing for the universal values of the Enlightenment, which the new states support even at the expense of collaborating in their own re-colonialization” (qtd. in Imre 51). For Böröcz, the expanding EU is a “geopolitically continuous empire with shared space and culture between colonizers and colonized, where the flow of goods and people cannot be prohibited but can be severely regulated, and where the colonized is represented less as a slave but as a poor relative, a country bumpkin” (qtd. in Imre 56).

22 New York: Columbia UP, 2006.

23 Rosalind Galt cites Derrida’s 1991 essay “The Other Heading,” in which Derrida inaugurates the discourse of the new Europe, “calling for a Europe that refuses self-identity and engages rigorously with what he [Derrida] terms ‘the heading of the Other’. This ethics of the Other combines the contemporary philosophical elaboration of Emmanuel Levinas with a reading of Europe as a spatial and temporal figure (the ‘heading’)” (3).