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***Between a World of Need and a World of Excess: Globalized  
People, Migration and Cinematic Narrative***

Roger Bromley

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**ICMiC**  
**School of Sociology & Social Policy**  
**University of Nottingham**  
**NG7 2RD**

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## **Between a World of Need and a World of Excess: Globalized People, Migration and Cinematic Narrative**

### **Abstract**

This article is concerned with the ways in which globalization has impacted upon migration to the EU in the years since 1990. In particular, it looks at how the circulation in politics and the media of a set of negative images and vocabularies relating to refugees and asylum seekers has become part of a new exclusionary process. However, a number of films are examined which offer a representational challenge to this cultural and political narrative and it is argued that there are signs of an alternative set of discursive currencies emerging as part of a counter formulation and potentially radical cultural imaginary.

**Keywords:** migration, Europe, exclusion, refugees, asylum seekers, representation, counterculture.

### **Author**

Roger Bromley holds the Chair in Cultural Studies at the University of Nottingham. He is the author of *Lost Narratives: Popular Fictions, Politics and Recent History* (1988), *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions* (2000), *From Alice to Buena Vista: the Films of Wim Wenders* (2001), and co-editor of *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice* (1995), *A Reader in Cultural Studies* (1999) and *Working and Writing for Tomorrow* (2008). As well as working on issues of migration, identity, and narrative, he has written on film from a cultural studies perspective, and his work in progress, *Narratives of Hope? Conflict, Reconciliation and Cultural Fictions* (on film, literature, performance and commemoration in the context of Bosnia, Rwanda, and South Africa) combines these different approaches. He is a member of the International Association of Genocide Scholars and on the Global Advisory Board of the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Network. Contact: [roger.bromley@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:roger.bromley@nottingham.ac.uk)

## **Between a World of Need and a World of Excess: Globalized People, Migration and Cinematic Narrative**

### **Introduction**

John Berger called migration the quintessential experience of the twentieth century and there is every indication that this will be no less true of this century. The past ten years or so have seen renewed flows of refugees and asylum seekers from areas of conflict, violence and human rights abuses. The Brazilian photographer, Sebastiao Salgado, referred to those who have taken flight from their countries of origin or have been caught up in zones of conflict as 'globalized people'. His book, *Migrations* (2000), contains a vast number of images of people either on the move or trapped in arenas of violence. These images of a new diaspora, mainly taking shape in the poorest regions of the world, but also in Europe and the USA, help to document, in committed and dramatic fashion, labour, human movement and political economy. In a sense, the photographs contribute towards a framework for a newly emergent public imaginary, perhaps even a 'global' imaginary. In similar fashion, it will be argued in this article that a number of recent cinematic fictions which deal with 'undocumented' migrants, human trafficking, and sex slavery, might also be used as resources for a narrative understanding of the new 'global civilization' brought about since 1990 by the combination of economic and cultural global capitalism and the mass migration of peoples across the world. Three recent films, released in the period from 2000 to 2003, will form the basis of the analysis, while a number of others will also be referred to.

Together, these films form part of a new story that is still in the process of construction, a narrative of profoundly changing spatialities produced by globalization and territorialized in global cities. The movement of people across borders (the underside of the movement of capital and information) has contributed to the scale of spatial and socio-economic inequality found in these cities.

Despised and vilified by the tabloid press, shunned as aliens by many local populations, the flow of refugees and asylum seekers nevertheless constitutes part of a mobilized workforce without which much of the service sector of these

global cities could not function. This seems to be one of the principal 'pull' factors which draws people to travel thousands of miles, to take inordinate risks, and to suffer demeaning and degrading conditions in order to reach the global cities of the 'first world'. Conflict, violence and rights abuses might drive people out of their countries of origin, but economic deprivation, lack of opportunity, and the desire for a better life are also powerful motivating factors.

If, as has been argued, over the past twenty years or so globalization has meant

'the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole' (1) and

'the "global" increasingly exists as a cultural horizon within which we (in varying degrees) frame our existence' (2).

Then how can narratives enable us to interpret and understand this? In particular, a response is needed to the neo-liberal economic 'genre of discourse' that has come to dominate the narration of the global, silencing other voices and foreclosing alternatives. As globalization in its current form extends its power and domination, offers itself as the model to which all others must conform, is assimilative and appropriative in countering heterogeneity and alterity, what part can cinematic narrative play in producing versions of the 'global' which are dialogical, unconditional, inherently ethical, resistant to appropriation, and openly engaged with the distant and the different?

The challenge facing any counter-hegemonic moment is to bring into accessible narrativity the primary conditions of its alternative practice, those elements which can contribute to meaningful agency and empowerment. Neoliberalism proposes a 'global' world outside of which it, at times, seems as if it will be impossible to dwell, and it is a proposal which is gradually being sedimented in the contemporary cultural imaginary. It is this symbolic repertoire, and the stories that circulate from it, which sustain global capitalism ideologically, and that the emergent narratives, including stories not yet told or tellable, challenge and resist.

Bruner, and others, have written of the power of story to shape everyday experiences through the repetition of, implicit or explicit, normative messages. Alternative stories have to secure their own modes of repetition, confront the normative message in subtle and varied ways. As Bruner says,

'it is the sense of things often derived from narrative that makes later real-life reference possible', and the analysis of the films will demonstrate this. (3)

It is this 'becoming-referential' that is one of the tasks encountered by the emergent narrative – entering everyday discourse, enabling the transaction between the imaginary and the empirical. Again, in Bruner's terms, narratives 'subjunctivize' through the resources of metaphor, and operate, in turn, on the basis of a dialectic of the established and the possible. As yet, the narratives I am concerned with are very much emergent – the moment of wide public reception has not yet arrived, and may not arrive. Some, like *In this World* and *Lilya 4-Ever*, have, however, begun to initiate debates and have reached beyond the art house to a wider public domain, even if still very specialised. They have gradually acquired higher visibility and legibility and have been used as resources to publicise and politicise particular issues.

Michel Haneke's *Code Unknown* (2000) challenges the aesthetic and technical presumptions of much contemporary cinematic practice, especially those commodified narratives mentioned above. About modern-day migration in multicultural Europe, the film is, in all senses, about finding a language other than that which already forms the basis of existing representations. Located in a global city (Paris) the film brings together the 'undocumented' refugee, the racialised migrant, and the indigenous French in a narrative that synoptically focuses on (post) colonial legacies, globalization, post-1990 Eastern Europe and social exclusion. What is shown is the encounter between a 'comfortable France' and an 'uncomfortable France', whose paths seldom cross. The film also opens up a wider gulf between a 'comfortable' and an 'uncomfortable' Europe (a theme in some of the other texts) and the larger processes of globalization

which, in Haneke's practice, have an impact, in turn, upon the forms of narrative: *the always already narrated*.

The films, *Last Resort* (Pawlowski, 2000), *Dirty Pretty Things* (Frears, 2002), and *In this World* (Winterbottom, 2003) all, in their very different ways, tell the stories of the 'illegal', the undocumented. But each of the figures in these texts is also a carrier of stories, their own interleaved with others; stories which unfold and add layers in the context of the narrative process, to a point where they become 'documented', identifiable, subjects of value, rather than subject to value. All are commodified, their bodies traded or raided, at some point, and there are no easy resolutions but the very fact of their being *storied* is an act of witness itself. The focus in all the films is on the pressures that drive migration, and on providing an inline of the lives of those who are the cause of 'moral panics' in the western media.

Both *Spare Parts* (Damjan Kozole, 2003) and *Lilya 4-Ever* (Lukas Moodysson, 2002) deal in people smuggling and, in different ways, sex trafficking. The hallmark of both films is abandonment, desperation and longing. Grey, bleak, under-furnished spaces – road diners, dormitories and hotel rooms – house the dreams of the Russian teenager, Lilya, and her young friend Volodya, and of the estimated three hundred people who attempt to cross illegally between Slovenia and Italy each day, in Kozole's film. Unusually, *Spare Parts* sees the traffic of humans almost entirely from the point of view of the smugglers – almost destitute chancers exploiting a demand, carving out a niche in a global market in people. For Lilya, Sweden might as well be on the moon rather than a short flight away, until she unwittingly trades her body into sex slavery.

*Lilya 4-Ever* is a devastating and unrelenting story of abandonment, deception and exploitation, in which the only sustaining fantasies of a world other than the one the children and adults inhabit are of American cultural icons – the end (ends?) of history in post-Soviet Russia. What is interesting about this film is that, despite its clearly fictional structure, Amnesty International, UNICEF, the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left and the Third Baltic Sea Conference on WoMen and Democracy have taken it up, as though it

were a documentary. This is perhaps not surprising given the compelling direction and performances but it is rare for a film to be put to such constructive political use. It was screened at the European Parliament in Brussels, following a hearing on the latest developments on EU policy to help victims of trafficking by granting temporary residence, prior to being treated as asylum seekers. By condensing, synthesising, and synopsising aspects of the fall-out post 1990, a film such as *Lilya 4-Ever* can exceed its immediate aesthetic/cultural project and generate oppositional/counter narratives in new discursive forms. *In this World*, similarly, has been used by Refugee organizations and opened the Human Rights Watch film festival in March 2003.

As Haneke's sub-title to *Code Inconnu* indicates, these films are all incomplete tales of several journeys and each one uses its structure as a metaphor of the wider processes of globalization. *In this World* uses a time-based mode, *duration*, to suggest the circuitous, risk-filled, and endlessly protracted nature of the migrant journey, marked by subterfuge, menace and suffering. Winterbottom deliberately uses economic migrants as the principal figures in his film as a way of provoking controversy about the specious distinctions made by governments about migration. *Dirty Pretty Things* confines its refugees spatially to the kitchens and service areas of a luxury hotel in a global city (London), a refuge and meeting point of migrant stories, of exploiter and exploited, of buying and selling of the migrant body. At the centre of this film is a plot which revolves around the sale of body organs by 'illegal' migrants in exchange for new 'identities' in the form of false passports and other papers. This is a local instance of the global body trade opened up by neoliberalism and transnational market values. Restricted to the underside, the back passages, the 'unclean' areas of the hotel or to the narrow spaces of rented rooms, the migrant workers are by-passed by the sights, sounds and movement of global consumer wealth, their bodies their only 'passport' to this world. *Last Resort* imprisons its asylum seekers in the abandoned concrete towers of Stonehaven – a fairly obvious oxymoron – and circles round its blocked and stymied figures, also reduced to the narrow dimensions of their bodies – lured into posing for cyberporn movies or selling blood for extra cash. They've crossed endless borders only to be fenced in, limited and boundaried – on the margins of a 'paradise' which they

can glimpse but not travel to, or touch. In all of the films, the refugee is seen as a pollutant, a waste product, something less than human – linked, metaphorically, with the ‘excreta’ of western conspicuous consumption; this is a theme which will be referred to briefly throughout.

### **Securing Identity**

All of the films are concerned with migration to EU countries. In most cases, the subjects at the centre of the narrative are ‘economic migrants’ and people smuggling and/or people trafficking is a common feature. Although the EU is explicitly committed to addressing the root causes of migration (since the European Council meeting at Tampere in October 1999), what the people in the films experience is the effects of strengthened border controls and the criminalisation of migration. Even though it is widely acknowledged that the distinction between economic and political causes of migration is becoming increasingly blurred, many asylum seekers are forced to have recourse to people smugglers and to enter the EU illegally. Economic conditions have become so bound up with political consequences that the opportunity to escape from deepening inequalities, widespread corruption, and devastated economies proves irresistible. Almost all of the migrants in the films are ‘irregular’ and journeying in search of a better life. In some of the films,

‘the source countries are those experiencing the early stages of development and connection with global economic networks.’ (4)

There is a moment in Lukas Moodysson’s *Lilya 4-Ever* which captures much of the essence of the refugee experience, those who are outside the images, rhetoric, and representations of current geopolitical configurations. Abandoned by her mother, evicted from her apartment, and subject to abuse from her erstwhile friends, Lilya is seated on a bench surrounded by the bleak and desolate landscape of ‘somewhere in what was once the Soviet Union’ (as a caption describes it). Urged by her only remaining friend, the eleven year-old Volodya, to escape from the taunts and derision of her peers coming from a balcony above, she patiently carves something on the bench and refuses to leave until it is finished. The inscription is symptomatic of the refugee’s split

condition. She carves her name, Lilya, in Russian script, and then writes '4-ever' in English, the global language, of American 'dreamspeak'. The abandoned self is bound to her Russian location, without hope, without love, without future. The '4-ever' is the attempt to reinvent an identity, to project herself into a future, a permanent time of expectation and, above all, of possibility. It is this dialectic of a destitute 'here' and a 'there' full of hope, which motivates so many whose flight is not from overt persecution, conflict or oppression. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Western capitalism has begun to penetrate many of its former republics, but for the majority of people it has brought no benefits, save the substance less images and icons of celebrity with which to fuel their unrealisable fantasies.

Although the vast majority of the world's refugee population is not in the West, it is the wealth of the EU and the USA which is the magnet for those with even the remotest chance of reaching these places. Lilya's mother emigrates to the USA, while Lilya herself is left behind to fantasise with Volodya about being Britney Spears (they share the same birthday) and when asked later if she knows where Sweden is, simply says ;'somewhere in the EU'.

### **Policing the boundaries**

If, as John Agnew argues,

'the modern geopolitical imagination is a *system* of visualising the world with deep historic roots in the European encounter with the world as a whole'. (5)

Then migration is one consequence of this encounter. It is partly a reluctance to re-visualise the world produced by globalization that has led to the recent demonisation of refugees and asylum seekers as a means of shoring up a discourse of national consciousness at a time when the citizen/nation/state continuum is subject to challenge by the massive displacement of people and the shift of power away from the sovereign nation-state. (6)

As Jordan and Düvell have demonstrated,

'Migration [is] a requirement of, a response to and a resistance against, global institutional transformations and the integration of the world economy'. (7)

The break-up of the Soviet Union, the end of the bi-polar Cold War world, the fragmentation of, and deep ethnic conflicts in, the former Yugoslavia, and genocide and civil conflict in Africa, have all contributed to the changing geopolitical configuration, new forms of global governance, and the revision of existing concepts of territoriality. In the paradoxical and ambivalent ideological spaces created by the combination of transnational neoliberalism with renewed state 'watchtowers', the presence of the refugee and the asylum seeker adds to the complexity of efforts to script identity from bounded, territorial spaces.

Together the films constitute an emergent, alternative narrative in which the 'modern geopolitical imagination' is subject to question. In the process a re-mapping is taking place, with the refugee as the symbolic focus of a shifting in the boundaries of imagined national communities.

The films all try to give space to some kind of agency and voice to the complex and multiple 'event' of political and economic migration, as part of a counter-hegemonic narrative gradually finding articulation within civil society – part of, what Paul Routledge calls, 'anti geopolitics'. My concern is with the ways in which the films challenge,

'the representations imposed by political and economic elites upon the world and its different peoples, that are deployed to serve their geopolitical interests'. (8)

The films are part of a conjuncture in which stories are beginning to be told which confront the representational and symbolic repertoire which sustains global capitalism ideologically through its re-scripting of global spaces. Although the director of each film is Europe based, and the films address quite specific and localized instances of displacement, it is the larger discourse of globalization

which has given them their particular salience and, in some cases, has prompted their wider political and cultural use, as previously indicated.

In different ways, Simon Dalby and Nevzat Soguk have considered geopolitical space, sovereignty, and the citizen/nation/state paradigm in terms of spatial exclusion, othering and difference. Dalby claims that,

'the essential moment of geopolitical discourse is the division of space into "our" place and "their" place; its political function being to incorporate and regulate "us" or the "same" by distinguishing "us" from "them", the "same" from the "other''. (9)

Not only does this process construct a positive, inclusive ideological space but, more importantly for my purposes, it erects a negative, to be excluded, other space: currently occupied by the asylum seeker and, more generally, the refugee. As Michael Shapiro has shown,

'The dynamics associated with "globalization" reconfigure spaces at various levels, provoke cross-boundary flows of people, money, images and ideas, and put pressure on traditional territorial identities, as distinctions between local and global space become increasingly ambiguous'. (10)

The flow of money, images and ideas - mostly Western-sourced – is welcomed by global capitalism but the circulation of people is something else. The new discourse of security generated by the 'war on terrorism' has produced a situation in which Britain and the USA are now insisting on transit visas for people, from more than forty named countries, simply changing airports. This regime of regulation is not only designed to identify and exclude the 'other', but also to regulate and secure 'us' for a raised national/ist discourse in a context of globalization. These double interpellations are produced by constant repetition and by the successful recruitment of most of the agencies of reproduction to this dominant narrative. This 'boundary-producing' narrative is breached and threatened by the mobility of the 'globalized peoples', with their awkward and

inconvenient visibility; mostly, but not only, 'non-whiteness'. The 'there', the 'then' and the 'them' have forced their way into visibility by becoming 'here', 'now' and almost, but not quite, 'us'. A lot of legislation and ideological work has gone into preserving the 'not quite' by reconstructing real and virtual fences and re-establishing narratives of distance and difference. This new, or renewed, 'inhospitality' has been emphasised by Derrida:

'In its physical geography, and in what has often been called, its *spiritual geography*, Europe has always recognized itself as a cape or headland'.  
(11)

This hostility/inhospitality has also shaped the cultural and political narrative of exclusiveness to which the films offer a representational challenge.

What the films attempt to do is to reclaim the refugee and asylum seeker within a 'universe of obligation', to adopt Ó Tuathail's phrase, and to render them discursively, spiritually and morally visible, part of a shared, narratable space. 97 per cent of the world's population currently lives in its country of origin, yet it is the 3 per cent who do not which exercise our imagination, both positively and, of course negatively in political and media vilification. Subordinated, the process of asylum seeking is ideologically inscribed as *insubordination*, a challenge to the settled and territorial ordering of sovereignty.

In short, the films represent the first steps in challenging – inventing another gesture, as Derrida put it - the dominant vocabularies and image resources circulated and referenced by the state, and its mediating agencies, to anchor its, perhaps limited, power in a culture of entitlement and identity. An anxious state is strategically displacing its insecurities onto the 'always already' displaced.

A number of contextual issues have given rise to, and helped shape, the counter-narratives in the films to be examined. These are related to the ways in which refugee images come to circulate in respect of identity, security and rights, how these are mediated in the discourses and practices of everyday life,

and come to shape news and stories of asylum seeking. The films seldom address these matters explicitly, of course, but they form the unspoken starting point for their own narrative trajectories, of their dialogical structures – they are articulated in antagonism with these othering discourses.

In the course of theorizing the ways in which refugees have been problematized, Soguk draws upon de Certeau, and others, to formulate what he calls the 'statist' imagination. By this, he means that by awarding centrality to the specific category of the state, or the nation, or the citizen, a whole signifying and classifying system can be constructed which privileges and normalises those included within these categories, while excluding or marginalizing others (gender, race and sexuality hierarchies are comparable classificatory systems). This, in turn, comes to inform everyday discourse, vocabularies and cultural images/representations. Those who are UK, French or US citizens become sites of a specific coherence, or mindset, or classificatory system to which everything is referred for meaning and legitimacy; they are territorializing and naturalizing codes, the tropes of common sense. These constitute part of a national, cultural imaginary which becomes the 'real' world – seamless and absolute. Beyond these codes, regulations and boundaries are 'deficit' figures, the refugee or asylum seeker, characterized as absence or lack, incomplete, outwith and without – a symbol of pollution.

This representational regime is increasingly under pressure and coming unstitched, as its seams, its arbitrariness, and its contingency are made manifest. Its dominant conceptual and narrative currency is being questioned by

'the powerful, centrifugal, deterritorialising challenges in the acceleration of the globalization process'. (12)

The films analysed below also constitute a counter formulation, a representational confrontation with, and reflection upon, the 'bordered' imaginary at the level of the cultural.

If Soguk is right, and there is compelling evidence that he is, that the state is using the refugee as a resource to rearticulate itself, and secure its citizenry for a hegemonic and populist rewriting of the nation-state, in the face of deterritorialising and globalising processes, then the steady proliferation of counter-representational films takes on a new urgency, as they, at least, allow some space for the circulation of other currencies, alternative narratives of possibility. They keep the chance of dialogue open, even if their presence only registers as yet in the art house and the broadsheet. They are keeping alive the possibilities of stories that might cut across, interrupt, deconstruct even this representational ascendancy – the map of national certainties.

### **A Borderless World?**

#### *Code Inconnu*

The children in the classroom at the beginning and end of the film constitute in their deafness and muteness the possibility of other modes of signifying, productively freeing themselves from the always already known script of the spoken and the heard. Above all, they can see and they inhabit, unself-consciously, a multicultural space. The film's prologue is set in this classroom of deaf-mute children. Against a large, white background a little girl is miming something as she crouches down and reacts with surprise. Her classmates sign a number of possible interpretations - each arising perhaps from their own preoccupations - but cannot work out her mime. This indicates at the outset that there is no simple correlation between signifier and signified, and that decoding is something which will have to be extended into the context of the whole ensuing narrative. This scene is the first of forty-five micro-narratives which constitute the cinematic text. We cannot enter the world of that child directly, or experience her meaning, but can only develop an ethical sensitivity, an empathy (a partnership even) which recognises her, not as a deaf child, but as an experiencing other, a signing/signifying subject. This is something which applies to the other characters in this film and, by analogy, to the ways in which the characters in the other two films are constructed.

This links with Haneke's idea of taking the spectator as a partner in the narrative process. He recognises the limits and imperfections of cinema as a

means of expressing reality, and sets up his camera accordingly. Aware that the sense of 'being narrated', rather than narrating, is one of the effects of 'globalizing' people, commodifying human activity, and subordinating everything to profit, the film challenges passive representations of 'victim' migrants..

The extended, nine minute opening sequence takes place on a boulevard in Paris and involves virtually all of the characters who will figure in the film. Each one has a very different relationship to the city and they are brought together by a 'crossroads' incident which crystallises their ethnic and class inequalities:

'In big French cities such as Paris and Lyon, it is possible for the city-dwellers never to have anything to do with the *banlieues*, or those who live in them, and vice-versa. There is a "comfortable France" and an "uncomfortable France" and the paths of the two need never cross'. (13)

Extending this metaphorically, one might say that there is a 'comfortable' Europe (the world of the EU) and an 'uncomfortable' Europe (the former Eastern bloc) in *Code Inconnu*. Although the film is constructed around a series of discontinuously narrated communities, their paths do cross and they are brought into conflict and exchange. The Arab, the African (Amadou and his family) and the Rumanian illegal immigrant (Maria) might initially be seen from the outside, and the viewpoint of the comfortable spectator, as stereotypes ('typical' one shopkeeper says of Amadou), troublemakers, deviants, others: denizens of the 'uncomfortable'. Amadou's arrest and Maria's deportation remind us of the exclusive citizen/nation/state continuum described above. While remaining passive and relatively invisible, both are tolerated, but once they become active and make claims (to dignity and justice) they unsettle and destabilize the 'community of citizens' (in Soguk's phrase).

What the film does is produce a series of 'overflowing' micro-narratives (little narratives), inlines and deep profiles, which enable the viewer to journey into the spaces of the disadvantaged, in all their complex and contradictory habitations, and not just as reversed, and romanticised, stereotypes. This is one of the powers of narrative, this 'being a guest in someone else's space',

visiting and travelling. In both cases, moral distance is converted into narrative proximity and ethical possibility.

These stereotypes:

'occupy a very disadvantaged position in the hierarchy of media power structures. Even when they appear on screen, they do so largely in silent and often marginal roles [and are rarely] given the opportunity of giving their own point in their own words'. (14)

Maria, for example, is first seen seated in the bottom right corner of the screen - the iconic beggar – and she is silent throughout the first two scenes of her humiliation, apprehension by the police, and deportation. She, and those like her, is fundamentally alien, othered, seen from a privileged Western perspective. What Haneke does is to re-locate these figures in a global, post-colonial narrative: they are the bearers of our own cultural anxieties and fears. They are also, of course, carriers of stories and are given space to become active/voiced subjects/participants in their own narratives, however partial and fragmented – they become hosts, if you like. The migrants are invested with narrative agency and forms which, rather than seeing them as object or image, offer the possibility of recognition and 'authorship', empowerment. Every identity

'is mingled with that of others in such a way as to engender second-order stories which are themselves intersections between numerous stories....We are literally "entangled in stories". (15)

*Code Inconnu* is not, despite the comments of some critics, about something as banal as the impossibility of communication but very much about the ways in which narrative of a particular kind can open up the possibilities of communication, but not in the readily available forms. The film is concerned with population changes in the richer countries - multicultural societies - and as such, Haneke argues, could be set in any comparable large European city. Paris is the primary location of the film in all senses of the word. It is cosmopolitan,

the bearer of traces of a colonial history, a global city, a site of consumerism, and a migrant space.

Three core families in the film are linked by the opening incident, but also by situation. Jean and Georges's father is a struggling farmer; Maria and Amadou's 'root' families in Rumania and Mali, respectively, are also in rural locations. Nevertheless, Amadou's little sister in Paris asks 'where is Africa?' and the birth of a calf in Maria's home village is carried out under instructions from a relative in Rome by mobile phone. No simple or absolute distinctions are possible, but increasing urbanisation and the global rural exodus are themes in the film. The families are also linked by inter-generational conflicts. Maria and her daughters clash, for example, and she is let down by a fellow-immigrant. The ethnic 'others' are not romanticised but seen in complex and conflicted locations - a combination of roots and routes.

Maria, in particular, is tracked at a number of levels. The viewer enters her humiliation and poverty, her evacuation from spaces of identity and meaning. In the opening scene, which precipitates much of the following action, Jean throws his food wrapper into her lap as a sign of contempt for her begging; by disposing of his waste in this way he identifies her as a repository of the polluted, unclean, something outside the human. When she is deported, the over-bright colours of the aircraft and the insistent glamour of the air hostesses contrast with her dull, shapeless clothing and her silence. At home, family life is far from idyllic; ashamed, she lies about her status in Paris. Her village is full of families with someone absent as a migrant worker doing casual, menial work. Although isolated and marginalised there, Maria returns to Paris, at high cost and considerable risk, partly to earn money to send back to the village but partly, one feels, as an escape: the migrant's inchoate dream of possibility. When she returns to Paris, she finds someone begging in her former space on the boulevard, and, later, she is moved on from a new place by other migrants. Speaking to a friend, she recalls a time when a man was about to hand her money and then threw the note at her as if he was nauseated. Although embarrassed and humiliated by this, she also confesses that when she gave money to a gipsy woman she was disgusted and feared she might catch a

disease. The viewer sees the complex life behind the face and is enabled to follow a trajectory from iconic, tabloid figure to a heterogeneous narrative profile. At the end of the film, Maria is seen walking up and down the boulevard, tracing and re-tracing her steps in a vain endeavour to find somewhere to beg.

Haneke attempts to give back their stories to the 'always already narrated' so that they can narrate. It is an ethical project, a telling against the initial, pre-scripted story. The director is a figure who asks rather than tells, producing episodic narratives which can/must be continued, completed by others:

'to rewrite the event-without-a-witness into witnessing, and into history'.  
(16)

Narrative as witness is a concept which could be extended to all three films: the mobilisation of a fresh cognitive and ethical ordering.

In their different ways each film could be linked with ideas developed by Levinas, in particular inauguration into responsibility and, what he calls, 'the very possibility of the beyond'. In this process, we are called upon to respond to the vulnerability of the other, to act as the one-for-the-other, the stranger, the widow, the orphan. It is not merely a liberal gesture but a call for an ethical response to another who cannot be recognised within any shared cultural or political context:

'The strangeness of the Other, his [sic] irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and possessions, is precisely accomplished as the calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics'. (17)

Identity has its source in the engagement with radical otherness resistant to the grasp of appropriation, rather than in the reduction of the other to the same which assimilates everything so that nothing may remain other to it. For Levinas, the *encounter* (and in each film the narrative can be thought of very much as an encounter) is with 'the Stranger who disturbs the being at home

with oneself', the zone of the 'comfortable' referred to earlier. The other is always incommensurable with myself, excessive to representation (precisely Haneke's point, hence the fades and wipes, the inconclusive, the non-appropriative techniques). The 'I' is put into question by the encounter and the other is

'maintained and confirmed in his [sic] heterogeneity as soon as one calls upon him'. (18)

In similar fashion, Haneke's film interpellates the viewer by its technique of incompleteness and its heterogeneity. *Code Inconnu* is sub-titled 'incomplete tales of several journeys' and the episodic structure of fragmented sequences (many of which begin halfway and end inconclusively, followed by a wipe - a black screen) disturb, unsettle our 'comfortable' linear viewing habits. They put down markers or stakes and invite us to enter the fragment and construct our own continuities and narrative consequences. Above all, one of the effects of this film, and of the others to be examined, is the profound disturbance of 'the being at home with oneself', not by becoming the stranger, and thus reducing distance and difference, but by responding to the strangeness, beyond the known and shared cultural or political context.

### *Lilya 4-Ever*

Lukas Moodysson dedicated *Lilya 4-Ever* to the millions of children around the world exploited by the sex trade, which could sound like a prescription for a worthy polemic but the film resists all temptations to preach, instead allowing the narrative and the performances to carry the meanings. The film opens with a heavy metal sound which surrounds images of a teenage girl, alone, running, disorientated, exhausted, bruised and beaten. A series of elliptical images end with a shot of the girl, as yet unidentified, set to leap from a bridge. An abrupt silence follows and a caption announces 'three months earlier'. The film begins again, in a sense, as the girl, Lilya, is shown packing in preparation for emigration to America. Her mother has found a new partner through a dating agency, a Russian living in the USA. At this point, sound, light and mood all resonate with expectation, but this is disrupted. Lilya's mother and Sergei plan

to go to the USA first and call for her later when they are settled, but it is soon apparent that this will never happen. Against the landscape of a bleak and featureless concrete housing estate in the former Soviet Union, the mother and partner drive off leaving the 16 year-old Lilya abandoned, desolate and effectively orphaned. The first of a sequence of betrayals is completed.

The film is about betrayal at many levels, and beyond the story of Lilya and her friend, Volodya, is the theme of a larger betrayal in the post-communist world, riddled with images of the West which prove to be illusory and beyond the reach of the teenagers, except at an intolerably heavy price. Betrayed by her mother and her closest friend, Natasha, mocked, reviled and gang-raped by her former friends, Lilya eventually succumbs to the allure of the nightclubs and trades her body for money. Lilya and her glue-sniffing, drunken friends are – in common with those in the other films - capitalism's dispossessed, the losers in the speculations of globalization in a world in which, by 2000, the ratio of real income per head in the richest countries to that of the poorest was 60:1.

Trapped within this ratio, tantalized by Western music, Western clothes, Lilya dreams of escape, repelled by the cold, loveless sex she suffers in order to feed herself and pay bills. Her only relationship is with Volodya, a homeless eleven year-old boy, victim of his father's mental instability. Theirs is the only unconditional love in the film and Lilya's departure leads him to kill himself with an overdose. Caught between the violence and neglect of their parents' generation and the exploitative images of the West, the localised situation of the teenagers distils the experience of a much larger political process of globalization – within the orbit of capitalism, but not of it.

Despite the above description of betrayal and a narrative which sounds as if it is based upon a nineteenth century melodrama, the film rarely draws upon the stock images of the fallen woman, and the dysfunctional and derelict world takes on a normative quality. All references are emptied of meaning: an image of Lenin, the war medals found in the rundown apartment Lilya is forced to move to, and a 1967 speech by Brezhnev on the 1917 revolution discovered in an abandoned submarine base, mean nothing to Lilya or Volodya. Discontinuity

is added to betrayal as another theme in the narrative. Severed from history, rootless and static, Lilya and Volodya are symptomatic of a lost, unwanted generation, their future stolen from them by false promises. This is one of the contexts, repeated endlessly, which motivate economic migration.

Assuming that all she has left is her body, Lilya's despair is momentarily checked when she meets an attractive young man, apparently interested in a relationship with her, not just sex. Andrei soon suggests that Lilya should join him in Sweden and offers her a job and an apartment. Volodya warns her not to be fooled but she is lured by the prospect of love and the huge disparity between Russian and Swedish incomes. It is at this point that she is gang-raped (a cruel foreshadowing) and her apartment trashed, so she needs no further incentive to leave with Andrei.

Lilya naively accepts Andrei's plausible reason for giving her a false passport and his excuse for not being able to fly with her to Sweden, believing that he will join her in a matter of days. This marks the final, and central, betrayal of the film, as Andrei is a recruiter for a trafficking racket. Lilya is met in Malmo by a trafficker, taken to an apartment, where her papers are confiscated and she is imprisoned as a sex slave. Trapped by her illegal status, unable to go to the police who will return her to Russia and the mafia, Lilya is subjected to anal rape, assault, and brutal, exploitative sex. These sequences are filmed in a montage-like series that focuses, not on Lilya, but on the faces of the predatory Western males, violating the body of the migrant woman. As in the other films, the refugee is stripped of humanity, converted into a depository for the waste of the consuming male, a marker of pollution. This experience is anchored in the personal and the specific, but it opens out allegorically onto a wider exploitation which produces the trafficking and transportation of over a million children (mainly from Africa) across borders every year for domestic labour and the sex trade.

Like so many children and young women in similar circumstances, the migrant becomes a fugitive and throws herself off the bridge, after a series of shots in which she runs haphazardly in terror, like a hunted and wounded animal. A

repeated image of a bird in flight only serves to mock her. As she lies dying in an ambulance, she briefly reprises a number of earlier scenes and reverses the choices and actions she had taken. This also underscores one of the principal ideological seductions of Western capitalism: the illusion of choice and agency. She tells one of the clients who had taken her back to his luxury home that she is nobody's property and cannot be bought or owned. Ultimately choiceless, bought and sold as so much commodified flesh, her only freedom, like that of Volodya, lies in death. As an economic migrant, EU states would simply refuse Lilya leave to stay and return her to her country of nationality, so her only freedom of movement is across the border between life and death. This situation has changed for proven victims of sex trafficking since the film was made.

The film has exceeded its immediate aesthetic function as cinematic text and has become a resource in generating activist support. Amnesty and UNICEF are using it to promote a greater awareness of international sex trafficking. The DVD version of the film contains a UNICEF appeal, introduced and narrated by Robbie Williams, to end child exploitation, and an Amnesty International film about violence and rights abuses in the Russian Federation. One particular point that is made is particularly apposite to this film, that in forging alliances with the Federation, the West is prepared to stay silent on rights abuses.

### *In This World*

The films examined so far have focused upon the prelude to, or the outcome of, the migrant journey. The last film to be considered, *In this World* (2003), takes its narrative shape from the journey itself. The stress is on duration, time passing, and survival – living through.

Although a fiction, its use of a digital video camera throughout, its planning, design and mode of filming sequentially, brings the film close to the structures of the documentary. Captions, voice-overs, and other visual devices, add to this effect. Many of the actors, all non-professional, play roles 'borrowed' from their own lives – fixers, police, border guards, sweatshop workers, and, of course, the two lead refugee figures themselves. If *Journey of Hope* (Koller, 1990), an earlier film tracing the migrant journey, was a fiction based upon a

true story, in a sense *In this World* could be described as a true story based upon a fiction.

Designed as a response to, and intervention in, the asylum debate in the UK, the film is framed implicitly by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the US-led bombings of 2001. Both Jamal and Enyatullah, the two principal characters, are actual Afghan refugees living in a camp near Peshawar. The film tracks their journey from Shamsatoo Refugee Camp in the North West Frontier province of Pakistan through Iran, Turkey, Italy, France (partly filmed at the now-closed Sangatte camp) and, finally for Jamal, London. Using an improvised and minimal script, and under-stated narrative, one of the effects of the film is the appearance of a record or document of an extraordinary journey by truck, lorry, coach, cargo ship, freight container, and the undercarriage of a haulage lorry, through hazardous terrain, border patrols, and the demands of fixers and people smugglers. Like *Journey of Hope*, risk is at the centre of their experience. The journey costs \$15000, half paid in advance and the remainder to be handed over by their relatives at the camp when they reach London: one of the magnet cities for the impoverished refugee desperate for a better future. When it is realized that Jamal earns less than a dollar a day, the price is unbelievably high and, if in any way close to the actual costs of such a journey, underlines the scale of commitment and investment by families, 'sponsoring' one of their number in the hope that they will flourish and send back income for the rest of the family and/or will trigger a chain of other migrants. Ironically, the journey taken is that of the original smugglers' route of the old Silk Road.

In a voice-over we are told that there are 53000 Afghan refugees in the camp, and a further million in Peshawar itself; of the 14.5 million refugees in the world (figures vary from 12 million upwards) 5 million are in Asia. Of these, one million each year place their lives in the hands of people smugglers. The information given to the viewer is not simply ballast, but designed to remind Western European audiences in particular of the scale of the refugee and asylum seeker situation, as so many politicians and the popular media speak as if all the world's refugees are massed on the borders of the EU countries. Only the hardiest, most resourceful and enterprising get anywhere near. The film is

careful to place its narrative – localised and personalized – in a world context and there are graphics of maps and globes tracing their journey as though it were a military campaign being shown on a newsreel. With conflict as one of the major causes of forced and, indirectly, economic migration, these visual echoes of old black and white war films are not accidental.

The episodic, hazardous journey anchors and shapes the narrative, with the sense of danger heightened at times by the silent, ghost-like night light filming and the ambient sound. The continuous, but unstated, reference throughout is to the ‘real’ migrant journey, of which the film is but a synopsis and ‘sampling’, an elliptical digest of a brutal and, often, deadly experience. The film encodes and synthesises many styles of migrant travelling, and does not fail to include images of countless children at the camp who cannot move and have no future. People smuggling and trafficking (the former implies an element of volition, the latter deception and coercion) is, apparently, the third most lucrative trade after drugs and arms. The EU spends a lot of time and money to combat ‘illegal’ migration by increasing border controls and criminalisation – the *raison d’être* of smuggling – but, despite rhetoric to the contrary, shows little resolve to fight the causes of migration. Of course, with service economies sustained in part by low-paid, non-unionised, casual and ‘controlled’ illegal workforces, the management of migration is riddled with contradictions.

With its calendrical structure, its regular use of precise time and space coordinates, the film’s narrative is designed to place the refugee experience in identifiable locations. In fact, location in all senses of the word is very much what the film is about. Although the title of the film is derived from something Jamal says about Enyat: ‘he’s no longer in this world’, the larger meaning is intended to expand the European awareness of refugees as also being in *this* world, not alien or sub-human but of ‘our’ world.

Both Jamal and Enyat experience pain and suffering throughout the journey and are forced to improvise, bribe, and ‘fake’ their way through the harsh, physical and human, landscapes. In some instances, details of their travel are shown in close up and at some length, at other times captions summarise the passage of hours or days. The camera is rarely at a distance from them, they are almost

always subjects with primacy given to their point of view. It is never a film about 'victims' in any detached, liberal sense. The worst journey of all is the most subtly conveyed. We see Jamal, Enyat and a Turkish father, mother and child being secured in a freight container ( a space designed to store the non-human), aware of them only through whispers, the cries of the child and the occasional flicker of a lighter. We also see the outcome of this stage of the journey – the death of Enyat and of the parents – but the lack of food, airlessness and light deprivation, and the enforced silence is not narrated explicitly or melodramatically, but in a simple caption: '40 hours later'. Thus we are not shown, and only barely told about, this unendurable experience. It is in this way that the viewer is forced to imagine, empathise with and complete the 'missing' narrative – what illegal means in human terms, not only in this specific case but in the larger narrative of migration.

This 'absent' sequence quotes, in a metaphorical sense, from the event in March 2000 when 58 Chinese men and women were found suffocated to death in the back of a Mercedes truck at Dover. Nothing on this scale happens in the film but, as with so much in *In this World*, and many of the other films referred to, the '40 hours later' sequence is designed to crystallise and synthesise the illegal migrant experience.

Jamal finally reaches London and he is seen working in a café, hawking trinkets in bars and hotels, and stealing a handbag. A sense of aloneness, and alienation, rather than paradise is the overwhelming impression, with only the mosque as a space of transnational belonging. In a final move designed to make the viewer reflect on the 'truth of cinema', Winterbottom conflates the fiction/documentary dialogic of the film with a screen title which reads:

'On the 9 August 2002 the Asylum application of Jamal Udin Torabi was refused. He was given exceptional leave to enter and is now living in London and will have to leave the day before his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday'.

Using unexpired documents, the actor Jamal travelled back from Pakistan to London and claimed asylum. The outcome of this application was that described

at the end of the film, so actor and character elide. Also evoked, indirectly, is the situation of more than 6000 unaccompanied, asylum-seeking children in the UK in similar circumstances.

## **Conclusion**

The very precise and insistent timeline in *In this World* is used to construct the conjunctures of the specific and personal journey of Jamal and Enyatullah (what Michael Shapiro calls 'now-time'). As well as representing a detailed chronicle of events, the film also condenses and filters the experiences of the two principal characters and links them to a wider contemporary politics of migration in which the possibility of settlement beyond one's country of origin is rapidly diminishing (the three-month period covered by the main narrative in *Lilya 4-Ever* fulfils a similar function). Hence Winterbottom's deliberate emphasis on mobility, on the journey, with arrival – in any but a clandestine fashion – indefinitely postponed/deferred. The new geopolitical order has produced what Virilio called modernity's 'obligation to mobility' but, unlike other, earlier migrations, there is no longer a corresponding obligation of reception, of global hospitality, especially in Western Europe.

In 'Cinema and Time' Deleuze speaks of how a purely optical and sound situation does not extend into action as such but

'makes us grasp, it is supposed to make us grasp, something intolerable and unbearable'. (19)

It is something, he says, which outstrips our 'sensory-motor capacities', 'something has become too strong in the image'. The '40 hours later' moment in *In this World*, the montage of rape scenes in *Lilya 4-Ever*, and Maria's search for space to beg at the end of *Code Unknown*, are all instances of this in the films I have discussed. Empathy is produced, the unbearable is seen 'as from a third eye'. (20)

Something other than confirmation, or recognition, of what we already know is happening, a form of knowledge is generated 'forcing us to forget our own logic

and national habits'. The viewer travels beyond the immediate moment or image to become aware of larger forces of disintegration. 'What happens', the event which is shown, is secondary to the inexhaustible possibility that can be extracted from the 'moment'.

Although all of the films derive and distil their narratives from many of the stock tropes of the migrant story, the three referred to above, in particular, manage, in Deleuze's wonderful phrase, to tear 'a real image from the clichés'. (21) Unless the image of the refugee in cinematic narrative is able to break through, exceed, the cliché, then there is the danger of the films becoming part of a wider, liberal media saturation and 'compassion fatigue'. In the films cited above there is a sense of something which implies a 'beyond of movement', 'an image that never stops growing in dimensions'. (22) These resonate beyond the surfaces of the film's own construction, produce narratives which compel the viewer to trace and extend the meanings into a supplementary story filled with the implications, after-images, and incomplete tales of the originating text. The spare body parts trade (brokered by a migrant) in *Dirty Pretty Things* is an effective metaphor for the ways in which migrants are seen very much as waste, as surplus, as in/human resources in the neoliberal global economy of consumption.(23) The human heart found in one of the hotel toilets early in the film confirms this idea of waste but is also a reminder that the transnational migrant is disposable, devalued currency, once it has been used to service Europe's 'propertied nationals' (in Ginette Verstraete's phrase), those whose identities are validated by an inclusive territoriality predicated upon the exclusion of the 'unbelonging'. When Okwe, Senay and Juliette (three of capitalism's dispossessed in the film) prepare to hand over a kidney (that of the broker himself), one of the traders says, 'how come we have never seen you people before?' Okwe replies, 'because we are the people you do not see. We are the ones who drive your cabs. We clean your rooms. We suck your cocks.'

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