

MEDIA, CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION IN MIGRANT SOCIETIES

Edited by Deniz Bayrakdar and Robert Burgoyne

Refugees and Migrants in Contemporary Film, Art and Media

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Contemporary Film, Art and Media



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Media, Culture and Communication in Migrant Societies

International migration for work, study, humanitarian and lifestyle reasons is increasingly commonplace, representing an unprecedented movement of people, globally. With these transnational mobilities comes the emergence and establishment of migrant societies with their own distinctive cultures and socialities. These migrant societies however are not necessarily oriented to particular fixed ethnic nor national identities. Instead, they may be formed through other identity signifiers such as feelings of commonality of specific experiences. Migrant societies, moreover, may not be confined to geographical boundaries but due to the digital turn where media and communication technologies and products are ubiquitous parts of everyday life, may exist transnationally in the digital environment. This book series is dedicated to engaging and understanding the role, impact, breadth and depth of culture, media and communication practices in and across migrant societies. The series showcases high quality and innovative research from established and emerging scholars to engage readers in exciting and informed conversations on migrant societies.

Series editor

Catherine Gomes, School of Media and Communication, Melbourne, Australia



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*Edited by
Deniz Bayraktar and
Robert Burgoyne*

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In memory of Eileen Rositzka (1988–2021),
friend, scholar, and poet of the unbounded world.



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A selection of papers by keynote speakers and panel participants from the conference, along with several additional solicited chapters, form the contents of the volume. Our thanks to everyone who participated in an exceptionally stimulating exchange of ideas and images.

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Introduction: *Refugees and Migrants in Contemporary Film, Art, and Media*

Robert Burgoyne and Deniz Bayraktar

The unending drama of forced migration, with millions of people displaced from their homes and compelled to take on a life of nomadic transience or enforced stasis in permanent waiting zones, ranks as the defining story of our times, the most sweeping transformation of collective historical experience since WWII. The United Nations estimates that the overall population of migrating people, including economic migrants and those swept from their homes by war, persecution, and climate catastrophe, now numbers over a billion people—one in seven humans now alive. This vast exodus has been called the “largest diaspora in the history of the species” (Salopek, 2019). Already in 1951, Hannah Arendt saw the swelling numbers of refugees and stateless people as an insoluble threat to the existence of the nation state. The 21st century, with its ecological crises, civil wars, and intractable hardships, has seen a massive, unprecedented increase in the number of people wandering the Earth or locked in conditions of suspended mobility. The phenomenon of mass displacement, however, also brings into view a striking new mode of human existence: as one writer says, the journey is now shaping a different class of human being, “people whose ideas of ‘home’ now incorporates an open road” or, at the other extreme, people whose mobility is blocked, who have become, as the title of a recent exhibition puts it, “permanently temporary” (Salopek, 2019). Viewed through a guardedly positive lens, the refugee and the migrant, as Giorgio Agamben (1998) further suggests, may represent “the paradigm of a new historical consciousness,” pointing towards a future beyond the binary order of the nation state, defined as it is by the concepts of citizenship and exclusion. Thomas Elsaesser makes a similar observation. Describing contemporary Europe as a “thought experiment,” he characterizes modern Europe as

a continent of immigrants... both East to West and South to North, with migrants, refugees and mobile labour turning the nineteenth century

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European nation states into multicultural, multi-denominational and multi-ethnic communities which have not yet found a modus of how to live together. (Elsaesser, 2018, p. 85)

Although the intensive media attention that the refugee crisis and forced migration has intermittently received has illuminated incidents of a particularly tragic nature—the mass drownings in the Mediterranean, the bulldozing of refugee camps, the separation of children from their parents at the US–Mexico border—the larger and more urgent task of framing this new historical narrative, a narrative of vast collective and individual consequence, has not yet been met. The phenomenon of migration in its current forms poses a major challenge to narrative and imaginative representation, and it is this challenge that provides the impetus for this study.¹ The essays gathered here mark a new critical mapping of the visual culture emerging from mass migration in the 21st century. Drawing on documentary and fiction films, gallery installations, site-specific artworks, virtual reality (VR) projects, photography, and experimental film, the volume brings into relief the potent creative culture that has developed around the subject of forced migration and enforced stasis, both within and alongside populations driven to extreme hardship and precarity.

Departing from the customary rhetoric of Western news reporting, which uses images and narratives, now familiar, to reproduce migrants as media objects, the book considers the myriad ways works of art create a distinctive and nuanced aesthetic approach to the existential experiences of migration. We expand critical discussion to a wide range of expressive forms, exploring the worldwide artistic response to the most consequential story of our time—an artistic engagement that suggests the possible emergence of new

1 On the terminology of migration, please see IOM UN Migration, *International Migration Law No 34. – Glossary on Migration*, www.iom.int. According to the glossary, a *migrant* is a person “who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons”; an *emigrant* is a person who moves from their country of origin to another country, which becomes their new residence (2006, p. 18); a *refugee* is a person who is outside of their country due to “fear of persecution of race, religion, nationality . . . membership of political opinion . . . and unwilling to return” to the habitual residence (2006, p. 171); and an *asylum seeker* is an individual who is seeking international protection. “Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every recognized refugee is initially an asylum seeker” (2006, p.14). *Irregular migration* defines “movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination” (2006, p. 116); a *trafficker* (human) is a person who commits the crime of organizing the trafficking of persons (2006, p. 216).

forms of global citizenship, as well as exposing the escalation of social loss and exploitation.

The authors contributing to this collection work in the general areas of film studies and art history, and write from a wide range of geographic settings. Each essay brings into view a different aspect of refugee and migrant experiences. As the authors make clear in their analyses, the pervasive rootlessness, or its opposite, the enforced stasis of much of the contemporary world, manifests itself in different ways. From the drifting sense of invisibility that characterizes the lives of migrants moving between the “non-places” of motel rooms, urban streets, back alleys, and bureaucratic offices in Istanbul and Paris to the filmic self-portraits of refugees housed for years in the vast camp at Lesbos; from the existential isolation, the “inner exile,” of immigrants in Eastern Europe to the stunned, crowded caravans crossing the Sahara or the countless communities abandoned on small boats crossing the Mediterranean, the films and artworks that are the subject of this study depict the transient lives of stateless persons in nuanced and specific ways (Augé, 1995). What emerges is a striking portrait of the spaces that have come to define the refugee and migrant experience, distinct spaces that are nonetheless linked as places of transit and of the transitory, what Marc Augé calls “non-places.” Moreover, the distinctive temporality of the refugee and the migrant also comes into view, a temporality defined by waiting, of a life in suspension, a life without ordinary forms of agency. With its focus on aesthetic responses to this unfolding human drama, *Refugees and Migrants in Contemporary Film, Art, and Media* captures key aspects of contemporary historical life.

The volume explores the different ways the experiences of refugees and migrants has been represented in the expansive media forms of 21st-century visual culture. Focusing primarily on films, the work considers a wide range of modes and genres. Many of the films discussed in the volume are experimental, independent projects that unfold in a non-narrative style, such as *El Mar la Mar* by Joshua Bonnetta and J. P. Sniadecki. Some, such as Ai Weiwei's *Human Flow*, are relatively straightforward documentaries. Others are narrative fiction films, such as Christian Petzold's *Transit* and Melisa Önel's *Seaburners*. In *Natives of the New World*, the refugees themselves are the authors and directors of the work. And in the virtual reality films considered here, the explicit attempt to immerse the viewer in the world of refugees opens a form of interactive engagement, in which the gaze of the spectator/participant actualizes certain narrative events.

The work also explores the conditions of contemporary migration in a wide range of geographic settings, including Europe, the Balkans, Turkey,



the US–Mexico border, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. Previous scholarship on the subject of film, refugees, and migrants—such as *Transient Mobility and Middle Class Identity: Media and Migration in Australia and Singapore* (2017) by Catherine Gomes and *Migration, Arts, and Postcoloniality in the Mediterranean* (2018) by Celeste Ianniccielo—has provided important insights but has been limited in terms of geographic range. In addition to its broad spatial compass, *Refugees and Migrants in Contemporary Film, Art, and Media* takes a unique approach to the phenomenon of migration and forced displacement, emphasizing the subjective, interior dimensions of the migrant experience and the power of works of art to illuminate the uncharted emotional and psychological drama of lives defined by precarity and transience. Mass migration, the book suggests, has begun to shape a new mode of human existence, where ideas of home are now superimposed over the reality of nomadic life, or conversely, where home has become a vast encampment where all mobility is blocked.

The history of cinema is, of course, replete with stories of migration, a subject that forms a kind of leitmotif in world film history, dating from the earliest years of filmmaking and shared by many national cinemas. As Giorgio Bertellini writes, “The emergence of motion pictures and the phenomenon of world migrations are profoundly interrelated: their threads span from social and economic history to racial politics and film aesthetics” (2013, p. 1). Migrant stories, moreover, have been rendered in a wide range of genres, including epic, comic, crime films, road movies, slapstick, musicals, art cinema, documentary, and melodrama. The role of migration in the developing history of cinema extends, however, well beyond the realms of story content and subject matter, because immigrant directors, producers, actors, and audiences have provided the foundational elements of the art form. Scholarship devoted to the importance of migrants and migration in film history is extensive, ranging from studies of migrant directors in Hollywood (Morrison, 1998) to the influence of Italian immigrants on American film (Bertellini, 2005). It includes the role of the “Great Migration” of Black Americans to the north during the Jim Crow era, which forged both a new Black American cinema and a new urban audience (Stewart, 2005); the potential created by the European Union for cross-cultural expressions (Loshitzky, 2010); the prospect of migrant and diasporic cinemas as a creative force and agent of social transformation (Berghahn & Sternberg, 2010); and the representation of migration and mobility as a European ideal that is contradicted by forced migration and xenophobia in films and art works from the 1990s (Bayraktar, 2015).



Several recent books dealing with contemporary cinema and art may be usefully compared to our study. One such work is *Mobility and Migration in Film and Moving Image Art: Cinema Beyond Europe*, by Nilgün Bayraktar, published in 2016. This book contains chapters on Turkish German cinema and includes discussion of the French film *Hidden* as well as considering experimental videos and site installations. Another text that considers the interpenetration of film and migration is *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis*, by T. J. Demos, published in 2013. A theoretically sophisticated work oriented to challenging new forms of documentary practice, it focuses on activist art explicitly concerned with social change, arguing that the subject of refugees and migrants in moving images serves as a call for an experimental rethinking of documentary convention. A third text that considers the dynamic potential of film as an artistic response to migration is Yosefa Loshitzky's 2010 study, *Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema*. Loshitzky considers the representation of migrants and refugees in European films as engaging the discourse around a "new Europe." Analysing works by prominent directors such as Bernardo Bertolucci and Stephen Frears, she argues that diasporic films may influence European society, categorizing them in terms of different themes, such as the "journey to hope" or "the enemy within."

The subject of immigrants and the cinema of the "New Europe" forms an important area of recent scholarly concentration. İpek A. Çelik's book *In Permanent Crisis: Ethnicity in Contemporary Media and Cinema* (2015) details the powerful anti-racist deconstructions of ethnic stereotype in the work of Michael Haneke, Alfonso Cuarón, Fatih Akin, and Constantinos Giannaris. The European media economy that thrives on images of the ethnic other as either perpetrators of spectacular violence or victims of it receives deep contextualization in her work, as she charts the ways these four auteurs provide historically informed analyses of ethnic and racial tension.

Another highly influential work, Daniele Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg's *European Cinema in Motion* (2010), discusses the increasingly important role of migrant and diasporic filmmakers in the self-representation of migrant culture and experience, arguing that European filmmaking has been significantly transformed by the prominence of diasporic filmmakers. In addition, the book delineates the challenge to national narratives, ethnocentric myths, and traditional understandings of the historical past that these filmmakers convey, arguing that diasporic filmmaking may serve as a significant medium of redefinition of European identity. And Isolina Ballesteros (2015), in *Immigration Cinema in The New Europe*, provides a

theoretically rich account of a wide range of films that give voice to the immigrant experience, focusing on films that are “in between,” that dismantle stable film categories. Works that mirror the situation of immigrants in the New Europe, she argues, are characterized by hybridity, featuring an uncategorizable mix of styles, the deliberate blurring of categories of genre, national cinema, and authorship—reflecting, in formal terms, a concrete sense of “double occupancy,” to use a term set forth by Thomas Elsaesser.

Refugees and Migrants in Contemporary Film, Art, and Media contributes to and extends these important scholarly endeavours. It can be distinguished from the works described above by its panoramic focus on the representation of refugee and migrant experiences, extending analysis to multiple regions of the world. The volume also expands critical discussion to a range of media forms, moving beyond documentary and dramatic film to include virtual reality, experimental films, refugee self-representations, photography, and gallery installations. We consider the way distinct media forms shape representation and the different ways that migrants and refugees are portrayed through multiple channels of expression.

The book is also shaped by a sense of historical urgency, because the subject of mass displacement and enforced stasis has today pressed itself on the consciousness—and the conscience—of the world. The exponential increase in refugee populations across the globe has become a signature characteristic of the contemporary period. And where migration has been written into the history of a region for decades or longer, as in Turkey, the Balkans, or the US–Mexico border, the subjective, emotional drama of homelessness, of permanent temporariness and liminality, has now become a focus of artistic imagination.

The work is organized in two parts: The first section of the volume consists of chapters that address experimental films and artworks, projects that attempt to find a new visual and sonic language for representing the migrant and refugee experience. The second section comprises essays that explore the existential dramas of forced mobility and enforced stasis in narrative form, dramatic and documentary films that convey the personal, subjective experiences of migrant lives in ways that challenge the traditional syntax of film. In many of the works treated in this section, standard narrative conventions such as agency, event, and temporal progression have essentially dissolved as cardinal figures of plot.

Each type of media we consider, whether experimental film or VR, gives a different accent to the portrayal of the lives of migrants and refugees. The authors contributing to this volume, moreover, employ a varied set of theoretical perspectives. Details of social context, historical patterns of



migration and emigration, and the aesthetic lineage of the artworks we discuss are incorporated into the separate chapters, situating the migrant stories treated in these works in a larger aesthetic, historical, and theoretical framework.

The first chapter of *Refugees and Migrants in Contemporary Film, Art, and Media* sets a challenge to the rest of the volume. Dudley Andrew's essay, "Moving Peoples and Motion Pictures: Migration in Film and Other Media," centres on the urgency of representing the enormity of 21st-century world migrations, the great drama of our historical period, in a medium that achieves its impact from stories of a more modest, recognizably human scale. He argues that Western cinema has not yet found the visual or narrative language to convey the collective experience of mass migration with any real insight or dramatic power and that such a visual language may, in fact, not be possible. The limitations of film, as well as its possible resources for representing this immense subject, have not yet been clearly understood. Other art forms, he suggests, may offer examples and ideas. Ranging widely over a number of artworks in different media, including literature, video, opera, and theatre, Andrew provides a valuable survey of artistic work that has succeeded in illuminating one facet or another of the phenomenon of forced displacement or enforced stasis. Finally, Andrew's essay turns to a small number of recent films by directors such as Gianfranco Rosi, Philippe Lioret, Aki Kaurismäki, and Fatih Akin, who have created powerful and imaginative portrayals of the migrant and the refugee and the worlds they inhabit.

In the second chapter, Nagehan Uskan describes the visual art of self-representation conducted by the refugees sequestered on Lesbos Island. Her analysis, entitled "Modes of Self-Representation in the Images Collectively Produced by Migrants in Lesbos Island: *Natives of the New World*," focuses on the work of a group called Kino Mosaik, consisting of refugees from several different countries and continents. The several forms of self-representation the group devises are conceived as a counternarrative to the stereotypes of refugees as passive, consigned to endless periods of waiting. The film the refugees produced, entitled *Natives of the New World*, can be understood as a form of video activism, a project that breaks away from the representation of refugees as "silent actors and victims."

Robert Burgoyne, in "Abstraction, Bare Life, and Counternarratives of Mobility in the Refugee Films of Richard Mosse and Ai Weiwei, *Incoming* (2014–2017) and *Human Flow* (2017)," considers two very different attempts to convey the extraordinary changes in human life and history that forced migration has wrought. Mosse's gallery installation, *Incoming*, represents



refugees in both an intimate and abstract way, recording their faces and figures with a thermographic camera, a military-grade device that can register the heat signature of figures from a distance of up to 30 kilometres. Capturing the movements of refugees at sea, on transport trucks, and in refugee camps, the artist records the presence of figures from afar, in long shot and in close-up, with no significant loss of visual clarity or detail. In contrast to the distanced yet intimate observations of Mosse, Ai Weiwei's *Human Flow*, in which the artist visits some 40 refugee camps in 23 countries, attempts to comprehend in visual form both the enormous global scale of human displacement in the contemporary period and to extend a bridge of generosity and hospitality. The individual exchanges he initiates with refugees unfold as an attempt to change the discourse about refugees, who are often depicted in the media as a mass form of threat, and to extend to the refugee the ancient gestures of hospitality. The film asserts an ideal of the traveller having the right to be at home anywhere in the world.

Selmin Kara moves away from a concentration on the visual signs and meanings produced by film to consider the sound design of the abstract work, *El Mar la Mar* (2018), by Joshua Bonnetta and J. P. Sniadecki. Her essay, "Across the Sonorous Desert: Sounding Migration *El Mar la Mar*," considers the film soundtrack as a distinct medium, one capable of expressing in a new way the plaintive and tragic effects of forced displacement. Whereas films of refugee experience typically privilege the image, creating a familiar visual lexicon of suffering, abandonment, and death, sound design can reawaken our sense of strangeness and loss. Set in the Sonora Desert, a vast, desolate space—so harsh and hostile that it functions as a natural extension of US Border Control—*El Mar la Mar* uses a complex assemblage of imagery and sounds that Kara calls a "cartophony," a merging of cartography and sonic activity that may function as a counter-mapping of geosocial relations. The film conjures an experiential map of the Mexico–U.S. migrant trail.

Dora Apel, in "Dislodged from History, Confronted by Walls: Picturing Migration as a Global Emergency," explores several exhibitions and site-specific artworks that expand the visual, sonic, and gestural vocabularies of displacement, bordering, and trauma. The videos, photographs, and sculptures she considers make the global catastrophe of refugees and forced migration visible in a striking and haunting way, but they also suggest the limits of the global capital order as well, which fails to support and sustain its own populations. The critical, political thrust of much of the work she surveys confronts nation states' failure to meet the global crisis, while using materials and media that underscore how global capital creates the very economic, ecological, social, and political conditions that produce forced

migration. The growing visibility of creative work on this subject, with exhibitions, site-specific installations, videos, and sculptures appearing with increasing frequency in all parts of the world, has the potential, Apel writes, to galvanize resistance to inhumane treatment of refugees and to underscore the catastrophic dimensions of forced migration—a phenomenon that will ultimately affect everyone.

In “Virtual Reality and Immersive Representation in Recent Refugee Narratives,” Erik Marshall details two important VR projects on refugees and assesses their potential for creating an immersive—and potentially empathetic—experience for the spectator. The two works, *Carne y Arena* (*Virtually Present, Physically Invisible*, 2017), by Alejandro González Iñárritu, and *We Wait* (2016), Darren Dubicki, and produced by Aardman Studios and the BBC, employ very different approaches to use VR technology, but share the goal of encouraging spectator involvement. The Iñárritu film follows the trail of a group of Mexican migrants trying to cross the US–Mexico border, while the work by Aardman Studios follows a Syrian group trying to make their way to Europe through Turkey. Marshall provides a detailed technical and theoretical analysis of VR and its relation to narrative film, its status as a form of language using images rather than a reproduction of pre-existent reality, and the impression of bodily presence, of engagement with the simulated world, that VR induces. The impression of immersion in the virtual world breaks with the documentary tradition of distanced witnessing or impartial observation. In both the VR projects Marshall discusses, the new medium’s potential for engaged, politically sensitive presentations is manifest, because both projects succeed in suggesting the size of the problem—the vast numbers of people attempting to cross the seas or the deserts—while being specific enough to allow spectators to identify with the speaking characters.

In Part II of this study, Deniz Göktürk takes on the surprising but fundamental connections between migrants, refugees, and consumer waste. In “The Secret Life of Waste: Recycling Dreams of Migration,” she first considers the stereotypical appearance on-screen of “surplus populations” and proposes a set of alternative theoretical and filmmaking practices. When situated in particular concrete environments, she writes, film may be able to provide mediated access to aspects of the everyday lives of migrants that are ordinarily invisible, including the tales, dreams, and aspirations of those who live and work with waste. Refuse, she points out, plays an important role in the lives of migrants. A product of the contemporary consumerist world, waste is shunted out of view, to be tended to, transported, and recycled by a nearly invisible population, the dispossessed people who populate the

underbellies of cities. Discussing the short documentary *Afganistanbul* (Ulaş Tosun, 2018), she details the minute attention the film gives to a local group of Afghan migrants working as waste pickers in Istanbul's Fatih district. Her analysis links the seemingly disparate topics of garbage and refuse, with its intrinsic relation to capitalism and consumption, to the lives of people who are also deemed to be "surplus" to the capitalist order. Her essay foregrounds a critical migration studies framework that looks at the naturalized centre from the point of view of its margins. The film *Afganistanbul* succeeds in conveying a sense of life through migrant eyes, seeing the secret life of waste "through the lens of migration and migration through the lens of waste."

Eileen Rositzka, in "Waiting in Line, Moving in Circles: Spaces of Instability in Christian Petzold's *Transit*" (2018), explores a film that represents the migrant experience of liminality in nearly all of its possible articulations, depicting a character displaced in space, time, history, and from his identity. The sense of being unmoored, detached from a singular, meaningful past, without a sense of future, and suspended from ordinary forms of agency, defines the main character's meandering passage through what Marc Augé calls the non-places of modernity. The character, Georg, lives his life in various waiting rooms, train stations, and anonymous coffee bars. The obsolescence and historical displacement that is so often seen in Petzold's work is reinforced by a series of formal correlatives—the sudden shift to video security footage, the severing of sound and image, the irruptions of the Nazi past into the contemporary present, as Nazi soldiers flood the streets of modern Paris. The film creates a vivid sketch of blurred identity: Georg, who lives in a fictive contemporary world, in which France is occupied by Nazis, takes on the persona of a famous author, a recent suicide. Georg's appropriated identity, of a figure he knows nothing about, is that of a ghost, a holdover from an earlier time, a spectre. Here, the plight of the migrant and the refugee is represented as a figure adrift in space and time, persecuted by history and by the present, anonymous, precarious, and transitory, in a fragmented filmic form without any form of narrative overview.

Deniz Bayrakdar, in "Migrant Bodies in the Land/City/Seascapes of 2000s Turkish Cinema," explores six films (five Turkish and one Turkish German film) that centre on migration and refugees, analysing the shifts that have occurred in the key locations that frame the migrant experience in films from 1998 to the present. Once situated mainly in the outskirts of cities and in rural settings, films depicting the lives of migrants and refugees in Turkey have increasingly shifted to the seascape, with its tragic and



poetic associations. In considering a broad range of films, including *Bliss* (Abdullah Oğuz, 2007), *The Wound* (Yılmaz Arslan, 1998), *Rıza* (Tayfun Pirselimoglu, 2007), *Broken Mussels* (Seyfettin Tokmak, 2011), *The Guest* (Andaç Haznedaroğlu, 2017), and *Seaburners* (Melisa Önel, 2014), Bayrakdar provides a short history of migration in 21st-century Turkish cinema. Different settings, she finds, produce different types of plots and distinct forms of affect in the spectator. Employing Michel Foucault's concept of the heterotopia and of the non-place, Bayrakdar charts a subtle and important shift in the representation of refugees and migrants. Films set in cityscapes, such as *The Guest* and *Rıza*, portray the transitional spaces of call offices, motels, internet cafes, shopping malls, and basement flats as "waiting rooms," environments that are filled with predatory characters. In contrast, seascape films, such as *Seaburners*, suggest a sense of placelessness, of transitory experience in spaces deprived of human marks of history, bringing seemingly random characters and events into contact. In *Seaburners*, the sublime associations of the sea and the coastline, familiar from earlier Turkish art films, is evoked by the beauty of the setting—and harshly contradicted by the recurring figure of a washed-up body on the beach. The unidentified figure on the shore is an image that both opens and closes the film, underlining with one stroke the contemporary tragedy of refugees lost at sea.

Nevena Daković explores the long history of migration as it has been rendered in Balkan cinema in "Third World on the Move: Cinematic Destinations, Belgrade/Serbia." Characterizing the Balkans as a place that multiple waves of migrants have passed through or left behind on their hopeful and desperate transits to Europe, Daković shifts the ordinary perspective, explaining that the Balkans have recently become a desired destination for migrants from other parts of the world. This reverse migrant narrative, where the historical crossroads of the Balkans has now become a destination of choice, is the topic of the film *Practical Guide to Belgrade with Singing and Crying* (*Praktičan vodič kroz Beograd sa pevanjem i plakanjem*, 2011) by Bojan Vuletić. The film maps the return of an older, romantic vision of Belgrade as a place of vibrant escape, the "limina of the civilized world," where forbidden desires can come true. Daković describes the deep ambivalence that pervades the film and its protagonists, however, torn between a desire for Europe and a longing for the Balkans, an ambivalence sharpened by the different senses of cultural identity attached to each. The essay introduces the concept of "inner exile" as a mode of displacement characteristic of Balkan filmmakers, a displacement that is not spatial or geographic, but rather psychological

and existential, a state of liminal rootlessness that is expressed in the films she discusses.

In her essay, “On the Borderlines of South-Eastern Europe: Migration in the Films of Aida Begić and Želimir Žilnik,” Iva Leković analyses two recent Balkan films, *Never Leave Me* (2017) by Aida Begić, and *The Most Beautiful Country in the World* (2018) by Želimir Žilnik. *Never Leave Me* narrates the story of three Syrian refugee children living in an orphanage at the southern border of Turkey, the traditional site for the beginning of the migrant journey to Europe. In contrast, *The Most Beautiful Country in the World* concerns a different aspect of the migration story, focusing on the fate of an Afghan migrant who has begun settling in Vienna, the end of the journey, whose assimilation is complicated by the arrival of his traditionally minded grandfather from Afghanistan. Both films feature non-professional actors, playing roles that are close to their actual selves. Analysing the two works as examples of what Hamid Naficy calls “accented cinema,” Leković describes each work as an interior journey, reflected in narrative fragmentation and the juxtaposition and merging of present-day experience, memory, and fantasy. Each filmmaker focuses not on the external causes or consequences of the migrant story, but on issues that each finds most important—the possibility of the reconstruction of damaged childhoods, in the case of Begić, or the ways identity is reformed in different settings and ideological systems in the work of Žilnik.

The essays written for this volume illuminate the power of the aesthetic imagination, its capacity to reframe a world reality of almost incomprehensible scale into the vocabulary of local, situated experiences. Together these contributions emphasize the particularities of refugee and migrant lives as well as their commonalities. But, perhaps more to the point, we hope to convey in this volume the power of film, art, and media to invest acts of readership and spectatorship with empathy and a glimmer of understanding, to open a critical dialogue with the way the lives of so many have been represented in the media forms of the 21st century.

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