Films With Legs

Films With Legs:
Crossing Borders with Foreign Language Films

Edited by

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Following the FLFC as a venue for live dialogue about languages and film, and the language(s) of film, we are very happy to offer this selection of essays. Many thanks to Cambridge Scholars Publishing for facilitating this volume, especially to Carol Koulikourdi and Amanda Millar.

INTRODUCTION

ROSEMARY PETERS AND VÉRONIQUE MAISIER

The idea for this volume originated with the success of the Foreign Language Film Conferences, organized as a joint venture between faculty at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale and Louisiana State University. Since October 2007, we have been delighted to host the conference and welcome scholars from numerous campuses, both American and international. This conference began when a team of new faculty in SIUC's Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures discovered a shared interest in the cinemas, both established and experimental, of the diverse linguistic and cultural traditions that informed their work, in everything from syllabus-planning to article-writing. At the same time, they noticed the need for a venue that would allow them to develop these thoughts on cinema. Cinema-studies conferences typically focused on the history of film and its technical aspects; literary conferences featured interpretations of filmic texts; and language conferences concentrated on practical matters of pedagogy and skills acquisition. However, no single venue opened a space of dialogue in which all of these elements could come together. From this realization the Foreign Language Film Conference was born; from its inception it was recognized as a unique venture, a discursive space that "crossed borders" within the profession and in the process explored new disciplinary territories.

This volume gathers selected proceedings from the first three years of the FLFC, centered around the theme of "borders" and "border crossings" and grouped into four categories: history, geography, the physical body, and narrative. The articles included here discuss films made by twenty-four directors, with dialogue in nine foreign languages, representing cultural aspects from twelve countries and five continents. From Argentina to Algeria, India to Italy, the films studied in this book have legs that, indeed, cross many borders and take their audiences on distant journeys. These selections bring diversity in their varied approaches to film studies (literary, cinematic, psychological), and in the interdisciplinarity of scholarly fields that intersect in each article (cinema, literature, history, social sciences). The borders we approach through international cinematic

traditions exist on practical, representational, and generic levels–including within the genre of new scholarship on filmic texts. Each chapter of this book examines both real and perceived borders, their representation on the screen and their manifestation in filmic texts that can also be cultural documents and political statements. Simultaneously, these films comment on the ever-expanding nature of cinema itself, of filmic language and of film *as* language, and discuss how borders are constructed on the screen, not just in fences and walls and boundaries, but also in dialogue and dialect, speech and accent and silence.

There are many definitions and different sorts of borders. The *New Oxford American Dictionary* lists the following:

> 1) a line separating two political or geographical areas, esp. countries. [...] A district near such a line;
> 2) the edge or boundary of something, or the part near it;
> 3) a band or strip, esp. a decorative one, around the edge of something. (2010, 199)

A border is both the line of demarcation itself, delimiting space, and the zone on either side of that line; a border can therefore also represent a community. A border may be a frontier–calling up images of historic exploration and open space–or its opposite: the end of that open space. It might be a disciplinary distinction, cataloguing thresholds of knowledge. The many meanings and uses of the word have made it a popular term. Indeed, in the decade that saw the collapse of the former Soviet Bloc as well as major social and political changes from the Balkans to East Asia, "border" was one of the "major buzzwords of the 1990s" (1999, 19) according to Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson. With the increase in popularity comes the risk that the term's over-use may bring an accompanying loss of meaning. However, the very polysemy of the word makes it particularly appropriate for our collection of essays which, as we will see, all deal with different forms of borders, boundaries, and limits. Physically marked or not, legally enforced or not, political, historical, geographical, physical, metaphorical, or symbolic, borders exist all around us, affecting our daily experiences and our cultural productions. The representations of these borders in cinematic productions from around the world provide the substance that this volume's contributors analyze, interpret and discuss.

For borders significantly inform international cinematic traditions, both by habit and by necessity. Borders affect films in practical ways–in the location of studios, the legality of importing or exporting a cinematic document, the nationalities of actors requiring visas, the need for

interpreters on the set, etc.–as well as in representational and generic ways. A striking example that showcases each of these questions is 2007's *Persepolis*, the popular filmic adaptation of Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel. Written by an Iranian national living in France, directed by a Frenchman (Vincent Paronnaud), and starring an Italian woman (Chiara Mastroianni, herself the daughter of an Italian actor) and an Armenian man (Simon Abkarian), both of whom currently reside in Paris, Satrapi's autobiographical filmic story also crosses the borders of the fictional genre. Is the book a memoir, a comic, a novel? And what then to make of the film version, the book animated and cast onto the silver screen? With its international cast and production crew, its international subject matter, and its genre-bending content and style, *Persepolis* stands as an exemplar of the perplexing nature of borders in cinema, and of cinema as, itself, a border.

Alongside the question of borders naturally comes the question of the ways they are established, maintained, enforced, blurred, crossed, or abolished. These attendant issues find their aptest representation in the field of internationalism, or globalization. While the notion of globalization typically leads us to believe that–thanks to technology, travel, money markets, etc.–borders have disappeared, Donnan and Wilson tell us that this is not necessarily the case:

> The membership of the United Nations has grown to today's total of 185 states. As a necessary complement to this, the number of borders between states has grown apace, resulting in no fewer than 313 land borders between nation-states. Along with the growth in numbers of states and their borders comes a redefinition of their structure and function. However, some of these changes do little to increase communication and cooperation between nations. The transformations of the post-1989 world have brought with them a rise in the number, type and intensity of border disputes. (1999, 3)

If "a focus on borders can illuminate our understanding of nation and state" (ibid., xiii), in our contemporary context of internationalization, this focus can also shed light on shifts and movements that lead us to re-evaluate our conceptions of borders. The notion of globalization that keeps shrinking the planet by bringing us ever closer to each other is necessarily changing the way we look at geographic, political, cultural and institutional borders. An example of this process resides in the European Union which, after decades of developing and evolving, has more recently become a well-defined, structured entity delivering European passports to its

"global" citizens. With its own money–at least in the euro-zone–not to mention its own Parliament, its own constitution, its own capital, the E.U has in many respects softened the distinctions between its member countries to become, if not altogether *borderless*, then certainly *less bordered* than Europe used to be. Crossing borders has become easier for materials, goods, and ideas; but also for people who "are no longer as constrained by the boundaries of nation and state as they once were" (ibid., 10). New freedom of movement is afforded to students wishing to earn a degree in another European country; to employers seeking international staff; to artists wishing to expand their horizons. Filmmakers are at the forefront of those taking advantage of market globalization. The revenue a film can bring in outside its own national market is now a serious consideration for the producers. International ventures–between filmmakers, film production offices, or actors–are becoming a more frequent occurrence. To take the French example alone, director Cédric Klapisch, after failing the entrance exam to the prestigious Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques (IDHEC, now known as la FEMIS), upped and left France to study in New York City. Jean-Pierre Jeunet, known for his distinctive style in such films as *Délicatessen* and *La Cité des enfants perdus*, in 1997 crossed the Atlantic to film the big-budget Hollywood blockbuster *Alien: Resurrection*. Finally, iconic French actors such as Gérard Depardieu, Juliette Binoche and Audrey Tautou can be seen in a number of international films.

Then, transnational productions emphasize the new apparent borderlessness of the genre. In the last decade, Lars Von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011) unites a Danish director, an American actress (Kristin Dunst) and a French one (Charlotte Gainsbourg) with a Swedish filming crew. Joseph Ramaka's *Karmen Geï* (2001) recasts the famous Mérimée/Bizet story in a Senegalese women's prison. Josef Fares's film *Zozo* (2005) narrates the story of an Arabic refugee child who moves from Lebanon to Sweden. With her *La Bestia nel Cuore* (*Don't Tell*, 2006), Cristina Comencini reworks Émile Zola's 1890 novel *La Bête humaine*, in a twenty-first century transcontinental setting where a haunting family legacy receives redemption through both contextual and generic adaptation.

It is important to note that the "borderlessness" of these cinematic narratives–if we can attribute such a quality to them–does not make them apolitical. On the contrary, crossing borders opens the door for political statements in art. In Satrapi's *Persepolis*, cinema proffers a privileged space for border crossings, in which the subject can acknowledge and speak truths about her native culture that are inadmissible within that culture, and country, itself. Geographical borders and their correlates of

emigration, expatriation, diaspora and relocation are favorite subjects of scrutiny by filmmakers interested in showing the effects of displacement and uprootedness but also new beginnings and resettlements. The following three examples illustrate the dialectic of these negotiations between inside and outside, home and abroad, local and foreign. Abderrahmane Sissako's *Heremakono* (*En attendant le bonheur* or *Waiting for Happiness*, 2002) offers a different kind of political space entirely, where the people in an island waystation waiting to emigrate participate in the creation of a new polemics of spatial identity; in other words, participate in what Marc Augé has referred to as the discourse of the "non-place."[1] Suspended between geographical and political entities, these "lingerers" occupy a space of transition: like the genre of film itself, they must negotiate the borders of a blurred cultural belonging that always seeks an idealized "elsewhere" which may or may not actually exist. Dominique Standaert, in *Hop!* (2002), weaves together questions of language, race, and class in a picaresque story highlighting the importance of family against the rhetoric of illegal immigration in present-day Belgium. And Marco Tullio Giordana's *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti* (*Once You Are Born You Can No Longer Hide*, 2005) explores the grim realities of immigrant control centers and immigration politics in Italy. This harsh bildungsroman exposes the underbelly of a superficially seamless national identity which nonetheless functions as a caste system marginalizing those with subaltern origins.

As the films mentioned above demonstrate, the migration of large numbers of people affects both the country from which they originate and the place where they settle. Yamina Benguigui's 2001 *Inch'Allah Dimanche*, to take one more example, highlights the complex interactions between insular migrant communities and the society that integrates them.

> Culture and identity, like class-consciousness and class relations, do not disappear among the people who make the crossing. They simply change: they change within their home communities because of the loss entailed in their going as well as within the new political and economic context in which they find themselves, and they change in the communities who are now host to the border crossers. (Donnan and Wilson 1999, 114-115)

When people move, they generate new cultural demands and provide new markets within the countries that receive them. Many among the "border crossers" will repeat the crossing a number of times–whether returning

[1] Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*.

home definitively after a temporary absence or travelling back for special occasions or vacations–and, in doing so, will influence the cultural values they once left behind.

Dialogues, exchanges, maps, departures and returns … these tenets of film experience have been at the core of the cinematic *raison d'être* from as early as the "talking pictures" of the late 1920s, and even during the preceding silent era. Indeed, one of the first films made by brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière (*Arrivée d'un train à la Gare de La Ciotat*, 1895) features the now-famous tracking shot of a passenger train pulling up to a station platform, where people descend while others board. In forty-five seconds, the Lumière brothers presented many of the ideas that our volume now considers: the increasing mobility of populations; the interchanges that occur (by both chance and necessity) between those who leave, those who arrive, and those who stay; the visual representations of thresholds of space that contain and transport–and of those who cross those thresholds, bringing the exterior in or taking an interior out; the complex interweaving of mores and traditions in a space identified primarily by its transitional nature.

Then, too, exchanges and dialogues between filmmakers have effects on the films themselves. Intertextuality, adaptation and retelling are all results of the globalizing process at work. While Hollywood's influence over the rest of the world is often acknowledged (and/or deplored), foreign films successfully find their way into the American market–one can think of the successes of *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), *Volver* (2006) or *Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* (2001), for instance. At the same time, Hollywood studios frequently remake popular films from other countries to fit American sensitivities and tastes. To cite just one recent instance of this latter trend, the year 2011 saw the near-immediate Hollywoodization of the *Millenium Trilogy* films, co-produced by two Swedish and Danish film companies and already blockbusters in Scandinavia and throughout Europe in 2010. This practice of remaking shows both the permeability of borders and the persistence of cultural expectations that demand the original film's adaptation for specific audiences. Films' transformations, adaptations, and receptions from one country to another reveal much about the cultures associated with the global entertainment market, about cultural contexts, and about cinematic practices around the world. Films offer opportunities for communication from screen to audience (as newscast, as propaganda, as advertisement, as aesthetic), but the communication also goes from audience to screen, since a film's reception determines its "popularity and staying power" (Hayward 2005, 10). Dialogues also take

place between screenwriters and filmmakers; between film markets and producers; between filmmakers (movements, cross-fertilization, styles); between text and image or vice-versa; and, finally, between films (intertextuality, remakes). Film, as we have mentioned above, is its own language, with its own grammar and syntax, its own poetry and its own set of rules to be followed–or challenged. Films talk. It is what they say to us that the contributors in this volume seek to analyze and interpret.

Filming History: Narrating the Past, Preparing the Future

Until recently, cinema and history were considered as antagonistic terms. History belonged to documents and facts, whereas cinema created fictions and spectacles. History belonged to serious professors, patient research, and silent white pages whereas cinema introduced sound, music, animation, instant fame and large screens with colorful images. It was largely taken for granted that cinema was not fit for historical renderings so that, in Tony Barta's words: "It was a relatively straightforward matter some years ago for historians to criticize misrepresentations of dramatized versions of the past" (1998, ix). Lack of historical accuracy was a commonly perceived flaw in reviews that commented on a film's historicity. Indeed, in *Screening History*, Gore Vidal writes rather dismissively: "From earliest days, the movies have been screening history, and if one saw enough movies, one learned quite a lot of simple-minded history" (1992, 17). Today, however, "the relationship between film and history is less cozily opposed than it used to be" (Barta 1998, ix). In the case of historical (re)constructions, cinema has become a cultural product to be treasured: it reflects a moment of history and at the same time becomes part of that history as an archival document or as testimony related to that moment. This dual aspect of cinema–the observer observed, the recorder recorded–is all the more essential when a hegemonic discourse based on cultural bias, political amnesia or national myths has limited a population's perception of a historical moment. Numerous directors turn to films in order to offer new perspectives, additional voices, and original representations that can either promote or subvert the official discourse. As the essays in this first chapter illustrate, historical retellings in cinema offer invaluable lessons about the past, and about the ways a culture chooses to remember and represent its past. Each of these articles investigates the relationship between film and history, and studies how the two forces intersect and shape one another.

According to Will Higbee, "What takes place in post-colonial cinema of the 1990s is a process whereby the hybrid (Maghrebi-French) subject is negotiating (re-positioning/re-defining) his/her own sense of identity in relation to both North African origins and the French dominant cultural norm" (2005, 321). Higbee's suggestion about post-colonial cinema of the 1990s can certainly apply to the two films analyzed here by Clarisse Zimra, even though these two films date from the 1970s and 1980s. In her work on Algerian writer Assia Djebar's *La Nouba* and *Zerda*, Zimra examines "the precise relationship between film and fiction" in the case of Djebar, who seeks in her cinematic œuvre to tell complex stories of exile and homecoming, while maintaining that "film should not narrate." Zimra describes how Djebar's films thus challenge the dominant historical discourse around decolonization, gender, and the nature of "home."

Maria Clark also investigates the past through the personal stories of two sisters who left Argentina after the "Dirty War" that took place in that country from 1976 to 1983. Clark studies two Argentine films offering "intimate and women-centered perspectives on contemporary life that also answer to national issues." This examination allows her to look into the relationship between personal and national identities when they have been strained by historical events and emigration.

Véronique Maisier considers one film from a triptych by Guadeloupean director Christian Lara. Focusing on *Sucre Amer* (1997), Maisier reflects on the ways Lara uses the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the French abolition of slavery. The rereleased movie puts France on trial not only for its past actions but also for its present distortions of that past. Lara's oppositional cinema can perhaps explain why, as Will Higbee remarks, "... film-makers of Black African, Caribbean or Vietnamese origin continue to be conspicuous by their absence" (ibid., 317).

Finally, Kevin Bongiorni explores the use, or misuse, of historical precedent as represented in films to justify contemporary political and military decisions. In the fall of 2003, the Pentagon screened Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 *The Battle of Algiers*. Bongiorni discusses the implications of choosing that film–as opposed to Roberto Rossellini's *Rome Open City* (1945). He ponders what the choice says about the Pentagon's state of mind at the time of the screening, and how watching Rossellini's film instead could have constituted a different approach to the Iraqi insurgency.

National Mythologies: Crossing Borders, Creating Space

Geographical borders do not necessarily equate to national identity. As Mathew Horsman and Andrew Marshall wrote in *After the Nation-State*, "If the principal fiction of the nation-state is ethnic, racial, linguistic and cultural homogeneity, then borders always give the lie to this construct."[2] The papers in this chapter tackle this "lie" and discuss how borders have an impact not only on national cinemas and cinematic representations of nations but also on the very notion of nation–as concept, as identity, as space–for both domestic and diasporic populations. To use Susan Hayward's phrase, "cross-fertilisation" (2005, 121) between domestic and foreign cinemas, and between home and host countries, makes it possible to negotiate geographical borders, regardless of political climate.[3] On the other hand, a position on one side or the other of the border can make for a very different outlook: a subject's placement on the margin–i.e., close to the border–or in the center gives birth to radically different visions. In Susan Hayward's words:

> Without being too reductionist, the first point to be made is that the cinema of the centre and the periphery will re-present the myths in radically opposite ways. The former in its reconstruction will provide, in the main, hegemonic transparence. The latter will challenge, even deconstruct, that transparence and hegemony. (ibid., 15)

The papers in our second chapter all discuss this dynamic between center and periphery. In Carola Daffner's essay, the border is clearly represented by the Berlin Wall. Focusing on representations of space in post-1989 German cinema, Daffner looks at two of Leander Haußmann's movies, with protagonists on either side of the Wall. She then discusses the representations of space based on that East/West distinction, and deliberates on the relevance of the terms *Ostalgie* and *Westalgie* in her analysis of Haußmann's spatial exploitations.

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[2] Quoted in Donnan and Wilson, 1.

[3] In the context of French cinema, Hayward sees cross-fertilization on several levels: "First, France's cinema was enriched by the arrival of other cinemas into her frame of reference either in terms of influence (such as Swedish and German cinematic practices, especially lighting) or actual émigré groups (the Russians) who set up studios of their own, financed indigenous projects and significantly impacted upon decor and editing style" (2005, 121-122). She also mentions the importance of the "cross-fertilisation within France's cinema between mainstream and avant-garde cinema and vice-versa" (ibid., 122).

Heather Bigley examines the interactions between Bollywood cinema and diasporic Indian communities. Working with the theories of critic Hamid Naficy on "accented cinema," she asks whether "one [can] be called *more* diasporic?" Bigley looks at Indian films and discusses their rendering of tradition and modernity to demonstrate how films use "nostalgia to imagine a homeland" or else, "separated from the homeland in time and distance[,] ... comment politically on power differentials of different groups."

Then, Nava Dushi introduces a new meaning for the industry term "films with legs," referring to films' "capacity to move easily in global markets implying a textual volatility detached from cultural particularity." Using a grid developed by Deleuze and Guattari, she examines the relationship between dominant textual/cinematic fields and "minor" cinema. Comparing how differently two Israeli films fared on the international market, she hypothesizes about why one of them was better received by international audiences, and provides an empirical discussion of reception across borders.

Closing this chapter on geographical borders, Sevinç Türkkan questions national cinema studies which either use Hollywood–or the "West"– as a reference point, or else turn to other national cinemas for comparison purposes. Türkkan suggests first that the designation "national cinema" is not always appropriate, and second that comparative studies of national cinemas, which tend toward the reductive, should be replaced by introspective discussions on identity formation. She demonstrates the need to take into account the national production, distribution and consumption of films, and emphasizes the importance of the audience in order to develop an understanding of cultural identities. Using protagonists from Bulgarian and Turkish films as models, Türkkan shows how myths of national identity and constraints of cultural traditions confine the characters in predetermined roles.

Physical Matters: Mapping Identities

While the essays from the second chapter look at borders that can be visually assessed (walls, territories, lines to be crossed,) this chapter deals with borders more difficult to pinpoint. These articles consider the socio-cultural ideas associated with age, self-discovery, sexual orientation, and physical disability. As Donnan and Wilson aptly remind us:

> [W]hile geo-political territorial boundaries are necessarily always also cultural and symbolic, it is worth recalling that the reverse is not true, and

> that cultural and symbolic boundaries do not always have a spatial dimension. (1999, 26)

This chapter reflects, then, on the ways individuals navigate the constraints of physicality. More precisely, these four essays explore how cinema represents physical borders that confine the subject. In many cases, cinema provides, if not a plan of escape, at the very least the beginning of a dialogue about the possibilities, or plausibilities, of escape from such confinement.

Mainstream drama–as opposed to avant-garde–is often conservative in its representations of the world; it tends to look backwards, and "serves to preserve the dominant ideology" (Hayward 2005, 203). Such is the case in three recent Spanish films analyzed by Jason Klodt that focus on "youth as the undesirables of Spanish society." The young subjects of these films occupy "ambiguous spaces, located between adolescence and adulthood, between freedom and responsibilities, and between being dangerous and being in danger." Klodt points out the danger in representations of Spain that exploit the precarious social position of the young–as subjects, products, and audience–while at the same time blaming them for their vulnerability, thus rejecting them further.

Judith García-Quismondo García turns the lens to cross-eyed childhood with her analysis of *El Sueño de Valentín* (2002). Drawing a parallel between Valentín's self-discovery and Argentina's evolution in the 1960s, she researches the complex relationship of familial and cultural heritage. In the process, she shows how the nation itself, like the young protagonist, is circumscribed by its own limited vision.

Then, looking at the ways in which "issues of male intimacy, homosocial desire and the act of transgressing heteronormativity in homosocial spaces [have] been viewed on celluloid over the past few decades–as drama/tragedy, comedy, … or both," Kevan Self questions the portrayal of men's relationships in Mexican cinema, and suggests correlations between behaviors society deems acceptable (or not) and economic stability.

Rosemary Peters concludes this chapter with a study of two films centered on disabled bodies. Discussing how the protagonists negotiate their physical limitations, creating and propagating a message around their disabilities, she shows how the filmmakers simultaneously create a new cinematic language:

> the language of film transcend[s] borders traditionally imposed by and on narrative, helps give voice to a new post-postmodern subject … who can only speak from the inside, and whose communication must break down

> walls of what cinematic spectators expect from the very process of narration itself.

These films bring new meaning to the idea of crossing borders, and narrate the body in their own innovative and effective language.

Talking Movies: Translations and Adaptations

Few issues in cinema studies have been more debated in recent years than the question of the relationship between cinema and literature, especially with regards to the question of adaptation. Fidelity or faithfulness to the original text–the source–was traditionally assumed as the goal of any director adapting a work of literature.[4] Fidelity was seen as a mark of respect not only for the original text and its author, but also for the audience granted the right to expect a film version of a text with which they were presumably familiar. In a way, a contract was implicitly understood between the director and the audience. Change came in the 1990s when directors began to take more freedom with interpretations of the original texts, to focus on specific passages or characters, eliminate minor characters or else build them up, ignore entire sections of a book, or make the ending more suited to their audience. Today, filmic adaptations have become complex products that constantly challenge and negotiate the relationship between original and adapted texts. The rule by which the success of an adaptation is measured is no longer fidelity, but rather the film's ability to borrow from, dialogue with, respond to, question, or even rewrite the original text:

> Generic models and their historical transformations help viewers appreciate innovations and alterations in, say, how epic films respond one to another. Examining generic subjects and forms as they evolve from literary practices to the cinema deepens and enriches that appreciation and our ability to analyze what a work inherits and how it reinvents that heritage. (Corrigan 1999, 94)

The papers in our last chapter consider the implications of adaptations, and the effects of expectations and reception, before moving on to the values of bringing cinematic dialogues to the classroom. Serge Bokobza examines Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), the adaptation of

[4] In Linda Hutcheon's words: "For a long time, 'fidelity criticism,' as it came to be known, was the critical orthodoxy in adaptation studies, especially when dealing with canonical works such as those of Pushkin or Dante" (2006, 6-7).

Austrian writer Arthur Schnitzler's short story "Traumnovelle" ("Dream Story"). Surprisingly but convincingly, Bokobza demonstrates how *Eyes Wide Shut* simultaneously recasts aspects of *The Wizard of Oz*, and shows how the intertextual elements at play turn Kubrick's film into "a modernized and adult version of [a] uniquely American myth."

A survey of the negative press received by Uli Edel's film *Dark Kingdom* (2006) in Germany leads Christiane Eydt-Beebe to point out "the mottled textual and cinematic history" of the medieval epic *Das Nibelungenlied* from which *Dark Kingdom* was adapted. Wondering "is there such a thing as an original here?" Eydt-Beebe then looks into theories of adaptation and translation, and evaluates the relevance of loyalty both within and to the adapted text.

To round out the discussions of adaptations and genres brought up by many articles in this volume, Fred Yaniga and Eloïse Sureau-Hale present a pedagogical approach to Gothic films, one central tenet of which is the confrontation "with shifting and blurred images." They contend that because "the film viewer is able to enter … alternate realities from the relative safety of the cinema chair or family room sofa, these foreign ideas and concepts are experienced as far less threatening than in the real world." Their essay looks at Gothic films from the British, German, French and American traditions, and crosses additional borders by bringing cinema studies into the foreign-language classroom, discussing generic prerequisites, and explaining how traditional genres can be all at once represented, challenged and reinforced by the filmic medium.

All the essays in this volume represent diverse kinds of border crossings, between traditions, countries and genres. They examine the many ways in which territories both spatial and metaphorical are called into question and (re)defined by international cinematic practices.

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PART I

FILMING HISTORY: NARRATING THE PAST, PREPARING THE FUTURE

VISUAL / VIRTUAL MEMORY SITES: THE CASE OF ASSIA DJEBAR

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"Comme si des aveugles filmaient des mirages"

Algeria's leading woman writer, Assia Djebar, is one of the few controversial authors still active in the Middle East.[1] In a prodigious output that has now spanned half a century, she has been mapping the difficult trajectory from colonization to decolonization, as well as the continuing entanglement between Islam and the West. A current member and former president of the Strasbourg parliament of Writers, co-author of a petition to grant persecuted writers political asylum in the West, she is well aware that to put pen to paper remains a perilous business. Her principled positions on the question of female agency, political and human rights, have garnered her a number of world prizes, including the 1999 Neustadt and the 2002 Frankfurt Peace Prize. Translated into over two dozen languages worldwide, she is currently Distinguished Sterling Professor at New York University; and, as of June 2006, a full-fledged member of the Académie française.

Over a long and fruitful career, Djebar has tried her hand at just about every literary genre: plays, poetry, oratorio, novels, short stories, essays and criticism. An actress as well as a stage-director, she has also made two films about her native land: *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua*, finished in 1978; and *La Zerda ou les chants de l'oubli* in 1982.

Indeed, she has herself singled out this experience as the crucial exposure that freed her from the straightjacket of generic conventions.[2]

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[1] A preliminary version of this paper was presented in October 2008 at the second Foreign Language Film Conference in Baton Rouge. I am indebted to the conveners, Profs. Peters and Winston-Allen, who made such a fruitful exchange possible in inviting scholars trained in a wide array of disciplines.

[2] There exist several interviews on the matter, including the one we made for the American translation of *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, "A Woman's Memory Spans Centuries" in *Women of Algiers*, 159-211. She had expounded on this as early as Le Clézio's 1985 interview, "Ecrire dans la langue adverse," 230-

Her latest work to date, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (2007) hit the Parisian bookstores last winter. This overtly autobiographical narrative covers her formative years as a young adult in Algeria and leaves her on the eve of her departure to France. Yet, she persists in calling it a novel (*roman*). In a recent interview (January 10, 2008) on French radio, she contended that it should not be considered an autobiography, because it offers neither a unified narratorial voice nor a faithful chronology, devices that would imply a teleological purpose. Rather, she invoked the fluidity (and the quiddity) of its free-flowing montage that allowed for a purely imaginative experimental form.

Film should not narrate / *un film ne doit pas raconter*

Defying formal expectations has long been a Djebarian practice. During the 2000 film symposium she convened at Louisana State University in Baton Rouge on "Women in Film," engaging the practice of Vietnam's Trihn Minh Ha and Germany's Yvonne Rainer, Djebar summarized her own approach thus: "un film ne doit pas raconter" (film should not narrate).[3] This claim to free-flowing poetics away from the Aristotelian imperative deserves exploring: what, then, is this precise relationship between film and fiction; that is to say, how might the demands of different media shape her distinctive style?

Produced in Algeria and made in the mountain hinterland of her childhood in 1977-78, *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* managed to evade state censorship by disguising itself as a documentary on the war that had earned the country its independence in 1962. It follows the painful homecoming of a former guerilla fighter, a political prisoner in the colonial jails who has returned, ostensibly to interview those who had participated in that war. Such was the excuse the filmmaker had given state censors in order to obtain a jeep, a driver, and a sound-engineer. But she focused primarily on women, in marked departure from official hagiography whose sacrificial heroes tended to be men. Thinking about this subject years later, she deems this first film of hers, half-document, half-fiction, "semi-documentaire, semi-fictionnel" (Djebar 1999, 180).

43; prolonged the debate in Mortimer's interview of 1988, "Entretien avec Assia Djebar, écrivain algérien," 197-205; and, further expounded in "Mon besoin de cinéma," a lecture delivered in London in 1994 and reprinted in full, with most of her critical essays, in *Ces Voix qui m'assiègent ... en marge de ma francophonie*, 168-82.

[3] I am drawing here on my private notes during this meeting convened by the Center for Francophone Studies.

Nevertheless, *Nouba* was singled out as the most promising first work of the Venice film festival (Prix de la critique internationale, Biennale de Venise 1979). The second film came fast on the heels of the first. *La Zerda ou les chants de l'oubli* was finished in 1982 and tilted even further away from a half-baked narrative mode: it had none. Djebar and Algerian-born poet Malek Alloula, then her husband, had been told that Pathé-Gaumont was about to throw away a number of reels and assorted visual documents from the colonial era unless they could be immediately sorted, catalogued and, perhaps, salvaged. Out of this experience, Alloula would produce the fine book of photographs of women he called *Le Harem colonial*. For historian-trained Djebar, this was a no-brainer: all such documents must be preserved. By then divorced and remarried, in increasing disfavor with the Algerian regime that had finally figured out her less than politically correct take on the glorious socialist revolution, Djebar was living in Paris, the beginning of a long self-exile that has yet to end.

These two films to date, one composed in Algeria, the other in France, are in clear dialogue with each other: witness the deliberate use of colloquial Algerian Arabic in titles that a Western audience may find opaque. Colonial idiomatic French has itself adopted the phrase *faire la nouba* as an informal, sometimes coarse way to designate the careless kicking up of one's heels. In the Andalusian poetic tradition from which the term originates, the Derridean trace of several centuries of Arabo-Berber presence in Spain, *nouba* refers to a highly sophisticated, highly erudite, five-part musical form, alternating melody and *recitatif*.[4] In offering us a formal celebration of traditional practices, Djebar's first film thus immediately deconstructs the coarse expectations of the colonial idiom and asks us to measure the distance between these two slippery signified; i.e. formal celebration versus vulgar romp. Unlike *nouba* however, *zerda* has not found its way into contemporary French, idiomatic or otherwise. In dialectal Arabic, *zerda* simply refers to a festive village gathering. And yet, the images that the second film uses are far from festive since they all come from the self-congratulatory French colonial archives. Furthermore, the two films (1978 and 1982) neatly bookend the 1980 collection of short stories, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, a collection published exactly at their midpoint that saluted Djebar's return

[4] On the form, its medieval origins and its sophisticated structure the best essay is Bensmaia's "Introduction to the Cinematic Fragment," 877-84, devoted to the writer on the occasion of awarding her the Neustadt Prize (Fall 1996). The preparation of a third film, planned after Amrouche's famous autobiography *Histoire de ma vie*, was reluctantly abandoned when access to the hinterland could not be had safely.

to writing: from filmic text to written text and back to filmic text, 1978 to 1980 to 1982, this movement delineates a deliberate triangulation. If it does not "narrate," then what?

It is here my contention that these three works fine-tuned Djebar's structural poetics. Each focused on the imaginary birth of a new Algeria, freshly arisen out of the sacrificial travails of war heroes (as opposed to heroines). Djebar tells us that, in her felt urgent need to make a film ("mon désir de cinéma"), she had first refused the state's offer to buy and adapt her novels; but proposed, instead "a documentary" (1999, 178). *La Nouba des femmes* ended up being far more. In giving pride of place to the women's contributions in the revolutionary struggle, it highlighted the silences of the official version of history from which, battered and bloody, a new nation was nonetheless supposed to emerge. The paradox, though, was that both sides of the colonial divide found themselves complicit in manipulating past images to self-serving ends; an observation that *Nouba* suspended but that *Zerda* was eventually to extend to the whole of Maghrebian history, past, present and future.

In a 1994 lecture delivered in Canada, Djebar explained why she had rejected the canned formulaic suggestions of state-sponsored producers that generously bankrolled "pseudo-history" in a *deliberate* attempt–she insists on the adjective–at destroying all sense of an authentic Algerian identity: "arme de destruction identitaire, délibérément."[5] Punning in near-Derridean fashion by playing on homonymic phonemes ("panser" versus "penser"), Djebar expounded instead on her felt desire ("mon besoin de cinéma") to staunch wounds ("panser") alongside the urge to think recent history through ("penser"): "Panser les blessures et re-penser son histoire" (1999, 170). *Nouba* and *Zerda* erect such virtual rethinking memorials wherein "le travail de mémoire" of a people in mourning is simultaneously undertaken and interrogated–much like the progress of the ongoing quartet itself–because her films hide and enfold the key strategic question that subtends the entire Djebarian corpus to-date: who owns (and who shall retrieve) whose past?[6] It is a question she has formulated with increasing

[5] "Une certaine production de cinéma tournée à coup de millions de l'Etat vers le 'grand spectacle' pseudo-historique" [an expensive apparatus, state-sponsored with financial millions, that favors the pseudo-historical grand spectacle … a deliberate weapon, the destruction of Algerian identity] (1999, 171. All translations are my own).

[6] This interrogation is, as well, suspended in the unfinished quartet itself. Although there has been some critical confusion on the matter, Djebar has been quite clear, in private and in public, as to this project and has spoken about it freely; more recently, in the public exchanges of the 2004 Djebar symposium convened by *la*

urgency in such triangulating poetics, from novel to film, image to sound, short story to film and back to novel again, as she resisted the heroic monomyth of anti-colonial nationalism, "one nation, Algeria; one language, Arabic; one religion, Islam" that was then her country's official version of history. It still is.[7]

This was a question her fourth novel, *Les Alouettes naïves* (1967) shied away from. Written within the first heady years of a joyous return to the native land, throughout 1965-66, it should have confirmed the celebration that the previous work had so eagerly anticipated. Composed in exile, this third novel, *Les Enfants du nouveau monde*, had been published the very year (1962) that Algeria became independent. The abrupt shift in mood from the third to the fourth work, reflected in their respective titles, hinted at her abrupt disillusion with the realities of post-independence. Within three short years, her exuberant hope for this "new world" had turned wistful, the new citizens bemoaning the lost dreams of "too naive larks." If we are to follow the writer's oft-repeated contention that she has "always thought architecturally" when she writes, that is, that she prefers structural juxtapositions to deliver meaning, her choice of concluding scenes spoke volumes. *Enfants* ended expectantly with the little goat-herding girl who, bounding into a bright future alongside her animals, declared herself "unafraid" as guerilla fighters arrived in her mountain village. In contrast, the final lines of *Alouettes* pondered (and foreshadowed) the gender war soon to prolong that of colonized against colonizer: "Car je sais à l'avance–vieux préjugé? que la guerre qui finit entre les peuples renaît entre les couples" (For I know all too well–an ancient prejudice? that the war that has just finished between people is rebirthed within couples) (Djebar 1967, 481). A few short years of homecoming had persuaded Djebar of the impending failure of this "new world," a somber diagnostic her films would then confirm.

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maison des écrivains under the aegis of Mireille Calle-Gruber. The four planned works of this "historical fresco" are *L'Amour la fantasia* (1985); *Ombre sultane* (1987); *Vaste est la prison* (1995). Although she does have a working title for the fourth (which she would rather not divulge), it will continue her excavations of her familial past, from the grandfather who served in the colonial army of what was then called Indochina all the way back to St. Augustine, Berber bishop of Annaba, her compatriot.

[7] This was originally the motto of Ben Badis's anti-French nationalist *ulema* of 1931: "Islam is my religion; Arabic my language; Algeria my country," quoted in Horne's *Savage War of Peace*, 37-8. It has been picked up again by the far more radicalized F.I.S. during the ten proctrated years of the more recent civil war. Cf. Bensmaia's chilling meditation on its consequences, "The Phantom Mediators: Reflections on the Nature of Violence in Algeria," 87-97.