SUBALTERN MIGRANCY AND TRANSNATIONAL LOCALITY:
THE UNDOCUMENTED AFRICAN IMMIGRANT IN INTERNATIONAL CINEMA

By

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To my Parents
Für meine Eltern
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Clandestine African migration into the global North has been discussed extensively in the social sciences over the past two decades, but the representations of undocumented immigrant characters in literature and film have not yet received significant critical recognition. This dissertation is a response to the scarcity of scholarship on visual representations of contemporary clandestine migration movements out of West Africa. By analyzing cinematically recreated and visualized secret border crossings and clandestine lives in the Global North, I want to contribute to the current discourse on transit cinema to account for the filmic specificities used in recreating a cinema about a contemporary “subaltern African diaspora.” My discussion includes films by European and African filmmakers, among them Abderrahmane Sissako, Mohammed Soudani, Stephen Frears, Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, Jean-Marie Téno, Sola Osofisan, and others.

This dissertation addresses tropes such as imaginations, waiting, hope, and invisibility that appear consistently in the films. In addition, I define and outline the
cinematic subaltern laborscape, based on Arjun Appadurai’s definition of global “-scapes,” through comparing cinematic spaces and conditions in and under which undocumented African workers act and in which they negotiate their relationship with the workplace, fellow clandestine workers, and middlemen who can move between illegal and legal laborscapes. I thereby maintain that The creation of clandestine landscapes within the subaltern labor diaspora remains inextricably linked to the imagination of the migrant and its constant revision.

Furthermore, I discuss the cinematic representation, on- and off-screen, of the migrants' countries of origin vis-à-vis the representation of the host nation states in the context of undocumented labor. The portrayal of the host nation state often quite obviously reflects on the filmmakers' background as well as the most prevalent national discourse on clandestine immigration in the film's country of production in that the productions reflect on societal anxieties regarding immigration. While many European filmmakers highlight issues of xenophobia and racism in their films, both in the narrative and aesthetically, transnational African filmmakers tend to focus more on the individual's position within the host culture, especially as s/he relates to other immigrants from her/his home country.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Undocumented Migration and International Cinema

Recent filmmaking across the globe shapes and has been shaped by globalization processes in which exchange, borders, and flows of people and objects, including the films themselves, challenge commonly held notions of nation states, citizenship, and a “global community.” Theories and scholarship about “transnational filmmaking” have emerged at a rapid pace and have broadened our perception of national cinemas, emphasized concepts of transnational identities, and highlighted the changing characters of contemporary borders. When it comes to film studies, the “transnational” in the discourse refers to the narratives and plotlines, but also to cast and crew, filmmaking techniques, funding, and distribution. In other words, the formerly clear-cut geographies of a film have become increasingly difficult to pinpoint as the production process increasingly transcends national borders. At the same time, filmmakers have taken on issues of migration, which lead to a number of films that are transnational in their conception, narrative, production, and distribution.

In this dissertation I highlight a yet different part of what constitutes the transnational. I am thereby responding to the scarcity of scholarship on cinematic representations of contemporary clandestine migration movements out of Africa. I situate this modern diaspora vis-à-vis the old diaspora born out of the Atlantic slave trade and the “non-clandestine” modern diaspora as they all relate to mobility and the restriction thereof. The relationship between migration and historical and contemporary global dynamics, within which the global North presents itself as a space of progress
and opportunity, while at the same time barring most citizens of the global South from participating, frames this analysis. By analyzing cinematically recreated and visualized secret border crossings and clandestine lives in the North, I also attempt to refine current discourse on transit cinema to account for the filmic specificities in productions that cinematically recreate a contemporary “subaltern African diaspora” and its complexities. My emphasis of migration out of Africa reflects on my concern with the links between the old and the new African diaspora because “for Africans, exile and alienation are not unilateral but rather multi-dimensional concepts, difficult to ‘tame’ into single, straightforward arguments” (Dovey 59-60).

Large numbers of Africans, particularly from West African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal, among others, have migrated to Europe and the United States since the 1980s. During the years 2000 until 2004, a reported 387,000 undocumented African migrants and 5,000 alleged traffickers were stopped and arrested at the border between Morocco and Spanish Ceuta in North Africa (Falola and Afolabi). After this border was secured in 2005, Europe-bound African migrants turned to other routes and destinations to get them inside the European borders, among them the Spanish Canary Islands off the West African coast and the Italian island of Lampedusa in the Mediterranean. In August 2009, almost 75 migrants, most of them from Eritrea, died when their boat ran out of petrol while enroute from Libya to Lampedusa. Libyan and Italian heads of states are working in collaboration to stop African migrants who attempt to reach the European shore by boat because they were not able to acquire visas. The human tragedy of failed attempts by African migrants to cross European borders without detection has become a familiar part of newscast in many European
countries. But even for those who do make it into Europe, this success is often short-lived, as it was for the passenger on my 2008 flight from Frankfurt to Lagos who begged the police officers who had brought him on the plane in handcuffs to not deport him. By the time we arrived at Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos, I had become painfully aware of my freedom and that of others to cross borders because of our citizenship, social status, and/or profession while large parts of the global population do not enjoy the same freedom of mobility.

Unfortunately, the debate on unauthorized migration has been dominated by those nation states that are afraid of being “overrun” by “illegal immigrants.” Mojúbàolú Olúfúnké Okome and Bertrade Ngo-Ngijol Banoum observe that “[i]n the wake of September 11, 2001, Europe continues to shore up its anti-immigrant fortress . . . to combat what is believed to be a law and order problem of foiling wily human traffickers” (5). Therefore, while newspaper articles about drowned migrants might create sympathy to some extent, the rhetoric of “illegal immigration” still predominantly creates and instills fear for the livelihood of the nation state as it is supposedly “overrun” by illegal residents. The political discourse of undocumented immigration is further complicated by the obscure nature of unauthorized border crossings and the failure to account for the complexity of those global dynamics that cause the “globalization of the poor” in the first place.

National cinemas often reflect on contemporary societal fears, such as the above-mentioned fear of being flooded with illegal immigrants, and for the past two decades, the issue of clandestine African migration to the global North has made its way into a number of films from a variety of countries. While individual commercially
successful films, such as Stephen Frears’ *Dirty Pretty Things* (United Kingdom, 2002) have drawn scholarly attention, the majority of productions and their central theme of undocumented African migration have not yet received significant critical recognition. I therefore explore how this “new African diaspora” is recreated by filmmakers around the globe and how the films themselves influence these migration movements. More specifically, I am concerned with filmic representation of a “clandestine African diaspora” in American, African, and European cinema and emphasize how different cinematic aesthetics and filmmaking traditions recreate the global spaces that undocumented African migrants occupy in Europe and the United States. I am thereby focusing on cultural productions that are primarily concerned with undocumented African immigrants in the Global North because although migrant cinema has been in the spotlight of current criticism, for example through the groundbreaking work of Hamid Naficy and Laura Marks, this particular side of global movement has not yet received much attention in film studies. Here I foreground films in which West African migrant characters play significant roles.

For many diasporic West Africans, today’s comparably easy access to West African films, particularly from Nigeria and Ghana, has given African cinema a new significance within African migrant communities in the West. Many African films, specifically those that are part of Nollywood, the booming Nigerian video film industry, that depict legal as well as illegal migration are now more easily available to Africans in the diaspora through Internet downloads and streamings. Therefore, these films are more likely to reach the African diaspora, both legal and illegal, than literature, which emphasizes the significance of visual images. In addition, a number of international
productions from both Europe and the United States have attempted to describe the
difficult circumstances of undocumented African migrants in the West and make visible
the spaces within which the individual navigates a life of illegality, uncertainty, and
racism from a Western perspective.

The Dispersal of Margins and Subaltern Diasporas

In his essay “Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic,” Paul
Tiyambe Zeleza criticizes the “analytical tendency to privilege the Atlantic, or rather the
Anglophone, indeed the American branch of the African diaspora” (35). Instead, it
highlights the failure of current diaspora studies to fully account for the specificities of
modern migration waves out of Africa. More importantly, however, Zeleza points to the
limitations of the very term “African Diaspora”:

It is interesting that, whereas the other diasporas are defined in national or ethnic
or even ideological terms, for Africa they are simply called African; whether the
referent used is racial or spatial is not always clear. Also common are
descriptions of African diasporas as ‘black’; rarely are diasporas from other
regions draped in colour. Whatever the liberatory politics of a ‘black’ identity, the
point is that other diasporas have ethnic names, national names, or even
linguistic and religious names. (40)

The need for African Diaspora Studies to expand its focus is obvious not
because the Black Atlantic has lost its validity, but because of the need to critically
assess the cultural productions that were inspired by the “new African diaspora,” or
more recent migration patterns. The social sciences have covered significant ground in
debating contemporary migration, but as far as literary and cinematic expressions of
recent African immigration are concerned, scholars still have some catching up to do.
My contribution to the discourse of a “new African diaspora” emphasizes a sub(altern)
diaspora in which clandestine migrants have gained access to the geographical location
of a Northern host nation, but cannot become part of the hegemonic culture, which includes access to civil rights, employment, healthcare, and other rights and services.

In the context of gaining temporary access to the economic privileges of the global North, Gayatri Spivak’s useful discussion of contemporary migration serves as a starting point for my theoretical framework to discuss undocumented temporary labor migration. Cinematic representations of North-bound African migration exemplify Spivak’s concept of “participating” in the economic opportunities of the global North:

In the new diaspora . . . the new scattering of the ‘seeds’ of ‘developing’ nations so that they can take root on developed grounds means: Eurocentric migration, labor export both male and female, border crossings, the seeking of political asylum, and the haunting in-place uprooting of ‘comfort women’ in Africa and Asia. (357)

Spivak also urges us to acknowledge that migrancy is a result of the margin wanting to be a part of the center: “[we] cannot use ‘cultural identity’ as a permission to difference and an instrument for disavowing that Eurocentric economic migration . . . persists in the hope of justice under capitalism” (395). In other words, cultural identity cannot be used to grant different rights to different people, as is being done in immigration policies of most, if not all, nation states. Spivak also speaks in favor of acknowledging that South-North migration is the result of a desire to become part of the dominant for both the intellectual and the subaltern migrant. Migration, according to Spivak, is the attempt of the margin to enter the dominant.

Spivak provocatively labels poor migrants from third-world countries the “detritus of globality,” to highlight a process of disintegration or destruction. The term diaspora itself suggests dispersal or shattering. The poor migrant of the global South becomes the “debris” that is the result of a disintegration of the margins which now seek livelihood
in the diaspora because the center of their respective nation state cannot provide it for them. Spivak’s argument therefore views the diaspora as a result of “destruction” and a subsequent dispersal. In doing so, she alludes to the necessity that a destructive force must exist, which, in her mind, is the neocolonial economic situation. The margins are destructed by an exploitative global capitalism and turn to the resource of this destructive force, the North, for survival and participation. In suggesting this, Spivak shifts the focus away from the variety of “push and pull factors,” which are problematic because they categorize migration into “justified” and “unjustified.” This is to say that the movement of people who are pushed out of their country by war, persecution, hunger, or other humanitarian situations that give them access to asylum laws is considered justified and they are able to legally seek asylum and therefore gain legal access to the nation state (at least initially).

Seeking out the North without having faced direct physical or mental harm back home makes immigrants undesirable, especially when they have entered the country without documents. In all cases the notion of “wanted” vs. “unwanted” seems to be directly linked to the impact of the immigrant on the nation state. Asylum seekers are only supposed to stay temporarily. They are often housed in institutions among themselves and in many nation states, they are not allowed to find employment, which denies them access to economic opportunity even if they are temporarily safe from physical and mental harm from which they fled (although they are likely exposed to other challenges in the diaspora). Within Spivak’s concept, the different reasons for South-North migration are irrelevant. Regardless of whether migration results from economic, political or other reasons, South-North migration is ultimately always caused
by a geo-political and global-economic present. In light of this view on migration, there is no “justified” reason for South-North migration. Instead, members of the global South, according to Spivak, have a right to participate in the North regardless of what their personal reason for migration might be because Northern imperialism has created the unequal global conditions in the first place.

Furthermore, globalization discourse and theory needs refinement in order to account for the variety and diversity of the components included in globalization processes. Ulrich Beck argues that globalization consists of “the processes through which sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities and networks” (qtd. in Davis 34, emphasis mine). The difference in opportunities between global actors to gain access to certain spaces within globalization dynamics is based on who they are, where they are from, and what they know. My interest lies with those transnational migrants who undermine the world order created by nation states who make up the global economic elite. Global inequality particularly manifests itself in the experience of global migrants who cannot rely on citizenship, visas, and economic resources to navigate across borders and within foreign nation states where they are not welcome. Within the current world order, diasporic movements include the dispersal of people who do not necessarily share a cultural and/or ethnic background, but a position within global dynamics that distinguish between “legal and illegal” border crossers.

The “subaltern diaspora” consists of people whose attempts to improve their lives and livelihoods are not considered legitimate by the nation states of the global North that are both the destinations and the judges of who can enter and who can stay. Often
the discourse around unauthorized immigration takes place within and from the point of view of exactly those nation states that have established restrictive immigration policies and use those to label this group of immigrants illegal, unwanted, a burden, and even a threat. Eithne Luibhéid points out that “policymakers and analysts tend to treat illegal immigration as a self-evident problem that is generated by and reflects undesirable individuals or criminal operations” (289). But this illegalization is only one dimension of unauthorized migration in our contemporary world order. I argue that clandestine transnational border crossings are as much acts of agency and resistance through which poor transnational migrants defy blatant global inequality.

**Migration, Globalized Imaginations, and Cinema**

Arjun Appadurai addresses the triggers that lead people to leave their home countries and argues that migration patterns have changed because “moving images meet mobile audiences,” which generates a complex interplay between consumption, mobility, localization, and identification (Appadurai 7). Out of this interplay, new images are created that start the cycle all over again. Or to say it in terms of cinema, circulating films, especially in the digital age and therefore with easier access, create imaginations and the migrants who have developed those imaginations and create their realization through movement might make films that again circulate. The discussion of undocumented transnational migration requires a close look at the triggers that are responsible for convincing individuals to leave behind what they know to enter a life that is unpredictable by secretly crossing borders into nation states they have never seen before.
According to Appadurai, “images, scripts, models, and narratives that come through mass mediation” largely shape contemporary migration: “For migrants, . . . the stimulus to move or return are deeply affected by a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space” (6). For example, In his 2005 film This America, screenwriter and director Bethels Agomuoh recreates the important link between circulating media images and immigration. The film begins with a street scene in a New York City neighborhood in which immigrants sell and buy DVDs and CDs. The arrival and subsequent chase with the police indicates the illegality of the sales, but it also reflects on the cycle of media images that inspire immigrants who might very well end up having to engage in the illegal selling of these media images, including this film itself.

In his discussion of globalization and modernity, Appadurai summarizes the driving forces of diasporic dispersal in naming the “diasporas of hope, diasporas of terrors and diasporas of despair” (6). The pursuit to “move upward” geographically and economically necessitates the imagination of the target country as a place where economic survival is possible. According to Appadurai, “images, scripts, models, and narratives that come through mass mediation” largely shape contemporary migration. People then shape their movement according to how they perceive the world and how they want to situate themselves in the diasporic spheres of a world that is constantly on the move. Appadurai accounts for the formation of complex diasporas by formulating “five dimensions of global cultural flows that can be termed (a) ethnoscapes, (b) mediascapes, (c) technoscapes, (d) financescape, and (e) ideoscapes” (33, emphasis in original). He emphasizes that the -scapes are changeable and dependent on the perspective from which they are viewed and integrated into an imagined worldview. The
perspective of what labor is worth shapes the imagination of a prosperous vs. a poor
country and the desire of a prospective migrant to leave one nation state and move to
another.

The prosperity of a nation state, according to Appadurai, can also be mediated
through technoscapes in that, for example, sophisticated technology crosses borders
and BMWs appear in well-off neighborhoods in Lagos and Accra. In fact, Nollywood
films are known for their array of luxury cars and houses and convey the impression that
most people in Lagos drive these vehicles and live in lavish mansions. These cars are
associated with quality, high value, and a high price and become associated with the
global region in which they were produced. At the same time, the BMW becomes a
symbol of wealth and opportunity that is supposedly more easily accessible in the global
North. Financescapes can shape imaginations and desires in form of the impact of
remittances that flow back into the sending nation and create a “non-official” movement
of global capital that takes place removed from global investment and stock exchanges.
Furthermore, this particular form of financescape is often the driving force behind a
migrant’s decision to go elsewhere because this flow of money sustains a community
back home. The target nation state then becomes an imagined place that can
potentially “feed the village.” Often the lack of ability of undocumented migrants to make
as much money as needed to substantially support the community back home leads to
prolonged stays in the global North.

Mediascapes describe the “image-centered” and “narrative-based” (35)
depictions of places, events, etc. that the viewer or reader transforms into an imagined
reality that applies to his or her own life and that of the community. These scripts, as
Appadurai refers to them, “help to constitute narratives of the Other and protonarratives of possible lives, fantasies that could become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement” (36). Mediascapes take on the form of films, international news, newspapers, internet, and similar globally circulating media. Several African immigrant interviewees in Jeremy Rocklin’s 2007 documentary Dollars and Dreams – West Africans in New York explain that they watched movies set in New York and started to imagine it as a place of opportunity and prosperity they wanted to move to. Ironically, the most compelling images of nation states are produced in national cinema that is distributed internationally, but originates in the nation state that restricts the immigration of people who seek out the imagined places shaped by products from this nation state. And even more ironically, a pirated copy of Rocklin’s documentary might very well make it into the interviewees’ hometowns and create similar imaginations all over again.

The driving forces behind the migration attempts in the films I am discussing in this dissertation are largely economical, and therefore migrants are often considered undesirable. Beginning in the 1990s, European nations have experienced increased anxiety with regards to what they perceived as being overrun by illegal immigrants. This anxiety has been expressed in a number of films that depict the migration experience of their protagonists and at the same time take stock of the nation and its attitudes towards migration. Spanish and Italian films made during that decade, for example, often address issues of the “Mediterranean Boat People” and undocumented migration harvest workers.¹ National cinema is largely understood to be a cinema that reflects on the nation state and in some shape or form offers channels of identification and

¹ These films include, besides the ones discussed here, the Spanish production Bwana (1996) by Imanol Uribe and the Italian 1990 film Pummaro by Michele Placido.
difference based on and shaped by a national identity, but also informing this identity. Philip Schlesinger draws on Andrew Higson who suggests that “we might define a national cinema by looking at a range of features: its industrial and business aspects, exhibition and consumption and their impact on national culture” (Schlesinger 25). Furthermore, one of the defining feature of a national cinema is “the recognition of other groups as foreign” (Walsh 8). However, at the same time national cinemas become increasingly transnational due to globalization processes that change the ethnic and national make-up of nation states, as well as the increasing recognition of diasporic filmmakers whose films transcend national boundaries to account for multinational identities. National cinema in the global age is not about nation building or binding a national collective, but rather an expression and a product of the nation both in content, form, and modes of production. In this dissertation I argue that films about undocumented immigrants made by European filmmakers very clearly reflect on the national debate on the same issues. The most important feature of national cinema in the context of this discussion is that it sparks discussions about identity and difference, ethnicities, traditions, tensions between the inside and the outside, and relationships between film industries.

**Accented Cinema and Clandestine Migration**

Hamid Naficy argues in his book *Accented Cinema – Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* that “although there is nothing common about exile and diaspora, deterritorialized peoples and their films share certain features, which in today’s climate of lethal ethnic difference need to be considered, even emphasized” (3). In his book, Naficy offers a specific perspective of exilic filmmaking in terms of aesthetics and
narratives that reflect on the filmmaker’s position in exile. Accented cinema, or films made by deterritorialized individuals, according to Naficy, needs to be viewed with the displacement of the filmmaker in mind because of its reflection on the films’ content and form. In order to further refine Naficy’s approach, I argue, the discussion should be extended to films by non-exilic filmmakers that trace and represent diasporic movements of people without visas and green cards because the common goal of these films and Naficy’s accented cinema is the concern with questions of displacement. Therefore I intend to highlight the features that many of the films concerned with undocumented migration have in common, regardless of the filmmaker’s origin. Thereby I want to show that they, just like Naficy’s accented cinema, employ techniques of fragmentation, communication, reflection, and many other features that re-inscribe the political and social concern of undocumented migration in terms of journey, arrival, displacement, alienation, secrecy, opportunity, and loss. Furthermore, the value of these films lies in their capability of separating individual migration experiences from the macro-level discourse of diaspora and transnationalism.

While the individual experience of undocumented migration remains mostly hidden in reality, films can take on the role of aesthetic representation as social practice by visualizing the underbelly of global migration waves that circulate in the form of exploitative labor formerly associated, for example, with third-world sweatshops. The representation of individual undocumented migration in almost all of these films is closely related to this form of exploitative labor. Therefore, the films illustrate the global forces of economic inequality by highlighting the personal global experience. During the course of my analysis, I argue that there is a distinct difference between clandestine
migration films made by European filmmakers and those made by accented filmmakers. What distinguishes many Africans migrants, and almost all the characters in the movies discussed herein, from other migrant groups is that they are less concerned with building a permanent life in the diaspora than with meeting economic goals. Instead, the primary intent is to take a piece of the Northern economy home to support local communities such as families and villages.

Moreover, my discussion centers on migrants who are not able to cross national borders legally due to restrictive immigration policies, and are therefore undocumented. I also take a closer look at how the prospective immigrant imagines the global North in relation to its potential benefit for the African local context or the individual him/herself. At the same time, as I have mentioned before, the very production of these films represents the creation of imaginations in that they are fictionalized, filmed, and released back into the global flow of images that informs the global constituents about the North (and the South, for that matter). I will discuss the representation of how the African local is informed by global flows that make up a collective imagination because these films represent the formation of imaginations concerning economic opportunities in the global North in both narrative and aesthetics. I suggest that current discourse requires refinement in order to account for not only the unique situation of illegal immigrants, but also that of illegal African immigrants whose main goal is not the establishment of a "better life" away from home, but a temporary stay in search of funds that can flow back into the global South. In other words, this particular way of temporarily gaining access to economic opportunity and its representation in cinema needs to be situated in a discourse that so far has highlighted notions of border
crossings, identity formation, and cultural conflict in a context of more permanent migration and resettlement.

Naficy asserts that the globalization of cinema experiences an important shift in that third world filmmakers are now making films in the West. In order to account for this, I am including a group of African filmmakers into this discussion to highlight how filmmakers as well as their films embody a sort of “third world filmmaking” that has developed without influence and without support from Northern countries. By using Nollywood conventions to visualize clandestine migration experiences, Nigerian émigré filmmakers have created cultural productions that are transnational on multiple levels. Concerning the diasporic identity, Hamid Naficy observes that “[like] the exiles, people in the diaspora have an identity in their homeland before their departure, and their diasporic identity is constructed in resonance with this prior identity” (Naficy 14). Naficy goes on to argue that the diaspora “is a collective, in both its origination and its destination” (Naficy 14). This requires the collective memory of the homeland. The subaltern migrant, however, does not necessarily have access to this ethnoscape because, as Spivak reminds us, s/he is concerned about hiding and survival. By including the “illegal diaspora” into the discourse of migration and globalization, we are forced to take a close look at the creating forces behind illegal diasporic spaces, such as the interplay of economic and social pressures and the restricted mobility of poor African nationals.

Dovey also emphasizes the significance of the filmmakers’ geographical positioning when making films about protagonists who either try to or actually cross borders between the African and, in these particular cases, the European and North
American continent: “Although the situation of exile is defined by pain, there is also artistic-aesthetic and moral-ethical pleasure to be found here, due to the creativity associated with alienation” (59). Whenever critical assessment includes cultural productions from a variety of geographical locations with complicated historical, political, and economic relationship, there seems to be a tendency to situate cultural productions within these relationships. In African filmmaking, the concept of global spaces gains increased significance because of the complicated history of national African film cultures. Colonialism has established a global hierarchy still dominated by inequality and geographical division in terms of prosperity, but also of global visibility of national film productions. African films, especially when they have not received significant funding from European sources, still depend on international film festivals for audience recognition. Local audiences, on the other hand, rarely gain access to these films.

In film studies, African film scholars fought, and are still fighting, the battle of moving their subject of study out of the “ethnic” margins. They also contest the still overwhelming dominance of cinema produced in the global North in university classrooms and at conference panels. Moreover, even the field itself is riddled with hierarchical perceptions of what constitutes “good cinema.” In the case of African cinema, “It no longer makes sense to divide African screen media into oppositional categories such as ‘FESPACO films’ and ‘video films,’ . . . ‘arthouse films’ and ‘commercial films’, or ‘serious films’ and ‘entertainment films’.” (Dovey).\(^2\) This is not to say that the circumstances of production do not matter; in fact in my analysis they absolutely do, but that analyses should not stay within a respective category.

\(^2\) FESPACO stands for “Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou.”
Categories are especially problematic because they imply a hierarchy of high and low culture in which Nollywood is clearly at the very bottom in contemporary criticism. I try to emphasize that we can only eradicate the hierarchies of high and low cultures when we analyze them horizontally, rather than vertically. This is to say that Nollywood films should be discussed at North American conferences about film studies and popular culture to legitimize their existence in scholarship outside of the African context.

In this dissertation I categorize the films herein according to issues and features that are relevant in the context of clandestine migration. This is not an attempt at invalidating categories of African, European, diasporic, or accented cinema, but rather my effort to argue in favor of another category that spans all of the above and sheds light on the specificities of what I call “clandestine migration cinema.” I am aware that with my focus on African migrants, I cannot speak for films featuring undocumented migrants from other global regions. I am confident, however, that many features I find in the films included herein can also be traced in clandestine migration cinema about people of non-African backgrounds. Even for films about African clandestine migrants, I do not claim to present a comprehensive analysis as there are films I have not included due to language barriers and a desire to keep this analysis somewhat contained.

Following this introduction, chapter two addresses the formation of imaginations that trigger the migrant’s desire to participate in the economic opportunities of the North. I briefly address the transition from postcolonial migration films to cinema concerned with modern migration movements. Chapter two analyses the narratives, aesthetics, and techniques employed to visualize African imaginations of the North that trigger a desire to secretly cross dangerous borders. This chapter furthermore addresses the
reality of border crossings and discusses how on-screen secret border crossings reflect on the obscurity of the journey not only in the narrative, but also through filmic aesthetics. The political state of illegality starts at the border, but the trip itself is a journey of invisibility as illustrated by the smuggled wife of an immigrant, dangerous and secret journey across the water from Senegal to Spain, as well as to Italy. This chapter traces the journeys and arrivals and the way in which these immigrants initially situate themselves into the context of the host country.

Chapter three focuses on the different cinematic spaces of undocumented labor, which I term “subaltern laborscapes” based on Arjun Appadurai’s definition of global -scapes. I define and outline the cinematic urban laborscape through comparing spaces and conditions in and under which undocumented African workers act and in which they negotiate their relationship with the workplace, fellow clandestine workers, and middlemen who can move between illegal and legal laborscapes. The creation of clandestine landscapes within the subaltern labor diaspora remains inextricably linked to the imagination of the migrant and its constant revision. Diasporic spaces are only to a certain degree dictated by the limitations imposed on the migrant by the target country’s immigration policies. Individual migrants are not passively led through the subaltern diaspora based on the channels that are opened up for them; instead, their imagination and subsequent determination initiates the negotiation of spaces based on vision and purpose.

Here I also emphasize the significance of laborscapes in American urban centers as presented by accented Nollywood filmmakers. The Nigerian film industry, or Nollywood, has clearly become a global phenomenon and films are now distributed into
the African diaspora and other places of spectatorship throughout the world. Nollywood’s uniqueness is therefore not limited to its commercial success, but includes its potential to reach an audience way beyond its native Nigeria while at the same time remaining local in terms of themes and aesthetics. In recent years, not only the films themselves, but also their production has become transnational in that Nigerian filmmakers have been making films outside of Nigeria. In this section, I analyze Nollywood films with regards to the urban laborscapes which their clandestine migrants navigate.

Chapter four discusses the cinematic representation, on- and off-screen, of the migrants’ countries of origin and the representation of the host nation states. As I have mentioned above, the portrayal of the host nation state often quite obviously reflects on the filmmakers' background as well as the most prevalent national discourse on clandestine immigration in the film’s country of production. While many European filmmakers highlight issues of xenophobia and racism in their films, both in the narrative and aesthetically, transnational African filmmakers tend to focus more on the individual's position within the host culture, especially as s/he relates to other immigrants from her/his home country. The characterization of undocumented immigrants ranges from victimization to the representation of global agents who defy the attempts' of Northern nation states to keep them out.
CHAPTER 2
IMAGINATIONS, MOBILITY, AND BORDER CROSSINGS

From Postcolonial Ties to Globalized Imaginations in a Shifting Migrant Cinema

While my general focus is on films made between 1990 and 2009, I would like to take a moment and direct attention to African filmmakers who have addressed the desire of African nationals to emigrate and their inability to do so, as well as the challenges migrants face in exile. By doing so, I acknowledge that clandestine migration films are not a recent phenomenon and offer a brief look at filmmakers who have taken on the issue before contemporary labor-centered African migration movements even began. The fascination of the North plays out in early African cinema, especially in the francophone countries of production. Significantly, Paulin Vieyra, who is widely considered to be the first Black African filmmaker, set his first film Paris Sur Seine in Paris itself because the French government forbid filming in Africa (Diawara). The irony is apparent on multiple levels, but most importantly it signifies the complicated colonial control of space and its representation. Manthia Diawara’s attempt to reverse the ethnographer’s gaze onto himself by making a film about Jean Rouch, on the other hand, represents the resistance against the Northern filmmaker whose cinematic subjects consist of Africans. The relationship between the place of production and the space of representation therefore has been especially complicated during the history of African filmmaking and filmmaking about Africa and Africans.

Several well-known African filmmakers have addressed the desire of African nationals to emigrate, among them Senegalese actor, poet, and director Djibril Diop Mambéty. With his 1973 film Touki Bouki (The Hyenas’ Journey, Senegal), Mambéty

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1 Vieyra was a graduate of the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques at the time and conceded to make his film about Africans living in Paris.
“[typifies] a trend dedicated to total decolonization of both the content and style of movies” (Ukadike, “Black African Cinema” 172). Mambéty’s style reflects on his attempt to direct attention to neo-colonialist injustice, as well as complacency and political tyranny in post-independence African nations. To this day, Touki Bouki receives international praise for its unconventional style and is lauded as the turning point in African cinema in terms of deconstructing existing power hierarchies not only within the narrative, but through aesthetic techniques such as montage and non-linear storytelling (Ukadike).

Touki Bouki follows the journey of a couple, Mory and Anta, through Dakar in pursuit of their dream of living in Paris. They do not have the money nor the status to legally travel North, so they engage on a series of illegal activities on their way from the margins of Dakar’s shantytowns to the city’s harbor. The film ends with Mory’s decision to stay behind while Anta embarks on the cruise ship enroute to Paris. The film recreates the complicated relationship between the former colonizer’s actual (and absent) space (Paris) and the perception thereof as desirable: “[Mory and Anta’s] dream is to go to Paris, and in this they stand for all disaffected, unemployed Africans who yearn for the life of luxury the metropolis promises” (Livia 399). The film furthermore is a very fitting example of how cinema not only represents and thus creates these dreams, but circulates them globally through its own distribution.

In an interview with Ukadike, Mambéty explains: “When a story ends – or ‘falls into the ocean,’ as we say – it creates dreams. It has energy and direction” (Ukadike).

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2 Especially Western critics praised the film’s avant-garde character and infusion with features not commonly associated with African filmmaking at the time. Mambéty himself, however, dismisses the concern with aesthetics and discussion of which film traditions might have influenced his work. He considers his films an expression of himself (Ukadike).
“Questioning African Cinema” 126). Mambéty thus expresses his awareness of his film’s potential to create the very dreams of its protagonists in the viewer, but although he does not reject the descriptor “didactic” often associated with postcolonial African cinema, he does not want to prescribe the message with which his audience will leave after the film ends (Ukadike). *Touki Bouki*, however, puts a fascinating spin on young people’s postcolonial dreams of life abroad by complicating the concept of space in the African context. Throughout Anta and Mory’s journey through Dakar, a paradisiacal, but absent, Paris is evoked through Josephine Baker’s 1949 version of “Paris, Paris, Paris,” which is repeated over and over again. Dovey argues that the “fact that Baker’s voice, beckoning the characters to ‘Paris,’ is repeated numerous times in the film reinforces [the]figuring of exile as an ironic loop, a one-way conversation, a vicious circle: it comes back at one, allowing circular or vertical . . . movement, but not horizontal escape” (70).

The couple’s travels and dreams remain mapped onto Dakar while Paris is evoked only through music and a postcolonial history that remains localized and does not suggest any possibility of being a genuine destination for the two. *Touki Bouki* represents the desire to migrate as the result of the postcolonial condition in which France has left its imprint on the former colony. Although Anta in the end makes it onto the cruise ship towards Paris, the film remains localized by emphasizing her travels from the periphery of Dakar to the harbor and ending with Mory who staying behind. Furthermore, the film

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3 Ironically, the pursuit of these dreams in contemporary clandestine migrant films often ends in “a fall into the sea,” which I will discuss further in the next chapter.

4 Dovey problematizes the film’s portrayal by highlighting the history and identity of Josephine Baker, thereby evoking Baker’s role as first African-American actress and her identification with African stereotypes to benefit from the exoticization of her person to further her career.

5 While we know that Anta is on the cruise ship headed to Paris, we never get a sense of the actual geographical space (and neither does she as far as we know).
“ironizes the dreamworld Paris, where they hope to go” and the postcolonial hierarchies remain intact throughout the film (Ukadike 173).

The protagonists’ journey through a Europeanized Dakar towards the promised land, which in the end remains obscure because we do not actually get to see it, remains fragmented and infused with images of animal slaughter and death. The closest the film comes to actually visualizing Paris is the European part of Dakar and the protagonists’ strategy of reaching Paris through all things Western, such as clothes, cars, and most importantly the cruise ship that Anta finally boards and from which Mory flees in the end. Through the localized visualization of what it takes to reach the elusive and seductive land of the former colonizer, Mambéty highlights the postcolonial concern of West African nations: “Anta and Mory do not dream of building castles in Africa; they dream of finding some sort of Atlantis overseas” (Mambéty qtd. in Grayson 136). The space Dakar stands in for both the African space and the French space and represents the troubled history that has played out here.

Mambéty consciously and openly presents a commentary on the postcolonial reality in the form of presenting the geographic space that remains obscure and unreachable. The shift of African postcolonial migration associated with contemporary migration in a neocolonial presence rather than a postcolonial history is also reflected in contemporary migration films that are more concerned with a contemporary economic world order as the trigger of imaginations rather than a colonial past. While *Touki Bouki* certainly problematizes the allure of France (and by association the West), the implications of this allure are situated within the postcolonial condition in Senegal rather than transcontinental border crossings themselves. Ousmane Sembène’s 1966 film *La
*Noire de* . . . (*Black Girl, France/Senegal*), which is set in both Senegal and France, offers a similar representations of France’s appeal and allure that has embedded itself deep into the fabric of Senegalese society. In the film, the Senegalese nanny Douanna works for a French couple in Dakar. After Senegal regains independence, Douanna’s employers decide to return to France. They ask Douanna to join them in France and she is elated, dreaming of a wonderful life in the prosperous North. However, her reality becomes a small apartment which she hardly ever leaves and a tension-filled relationship with her employers. In a moment of resistance, Douanna rejects her subservient role by killing herself. In *La Noire de* . . ., the postcolonial condition and resulting relationship between the French employers and the Senegalese Nanny Douanna supercede the significance of the actual transnational migration experience. Douanna’s French experience is evoked through her excited anticipation in Dakar and her realization of a glum reality in France, but the film de-emphasizes the transitional space between the two locations.

Although there clearly has been a shift from postcolonial African films about the allure of the former colony to contemporary productions about North-bound migration, some similarities remain. What these films have in common is their treatment of the imagination that triggers the desire to cross borders. Postcolonial imaginations might be based on different historical immediacies, but after all the pull of the global North remains intact, albeit within different global and social realities. In more recent cinema of unauthorized migration, filmmakers represent the migration experience as the result of imaginations born out of globally circulating images and contemporary realities of unequal global mobility. This is especially relevant in the context of African migration
because the limited mobility of African citizens mirrors to some extent the replacement of African nationals during the Atlantic slave trade, at least in terms of who controls movement. The circulation of earlier African films about migration, such as the aforementioned *Touki Bouki* and *La Noire de . . .* was, and to some degree still is, tied to the complex relationship between Senegalese filmmakers and Western financiers and distributors. Moreover, the destination France (or Paris) has not been selected based on a geographical preference, but rather the infusion of the homeland with a colonial past and postcolonial present in which France, even after independence, constitutes a desirable space. In this sense the filmmakers suggest that colonization left behind a legacy in which the minds remain colonized by France as long as it lingers in the imagination as destination worth leaving family and home for. However, in contemporary cinema, the destination is not so much selected based on an ideoscape of historical power relations. Rather, the selection of a host nation state depends on whether it is reachable through clandestine travel and whether it offers opportunity.

In the early days of African cinema, filmmakers were faced with the task of representing African issues from their point of view after a plethora of films made by Westerners about Africans. Cinema became a way for Africans to tell their own stories rather than allowing the stories that were told about them to stand unchallenged. In fact, Sandra Grayson reports that “Mambety (sic) believed that the role of the filmmaker was that of a griot—more than a storyteller, the griot is ‘a messenger of one’s time, a visionary and the creator of the future’” (136). In the Belgian film *Les noms n’habitent nulle part* (*Names Live Nowhere*, Belgium, 1995), directed by Dominique Loreau, a griot, performed by Burkinabé griot Sotigui Kouyaté, travels between the Senegal and
France to tell the stories of people who have followed the beckoning call of Northern prosperity. The griot follows two Senegalese migrants to Brussels and visits their families in the Senegalese village to tell their story, thus serving as the connector between the two countries in the context of the men’s migration experience. In Loreau’s film, the griot does indeed act as “a visionary of one’s time” by telling the stories of contemporary Senegalese expatriates in Brussels who send news, letters, and gifts home, and of others who disappear without a trace. Letters, remittances, and news of opportunity create the migration desires of those left behind as they shape, once again, the collective imagination of a prosperous and accessible North (accessible because people they know have made it there).

The griot narrates that “a lot of folks dream about the West” and asks “how do we tell the stories of those who left?” As the film switches back and forth between the Senegalese village and the urban landscape of Brussels, it follows two Senegalese men who live in Brussels and find themselves alienated from both their home and their host culture. The traveling griot who delivers the messages back and forth refers to himself as the “librarian of Africa” and in the film sets out to reconnect the homeland and exile. He therefore bridges the gap that otherwise leaves room for flawed news and exaggerated reports of the prosperous new life in the diaspora. But this film also highlights how absence of news and the lack of letters or other forms of correspondence and contact to bridge the gap of absence and distance also create imaginations. Someone who disappears is rather assumed successful than dead although in the case

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Kouyaté was born in Mali, but grew up in Burkina Faso, which is why some sources refer to him as Malian and others as Burkinabé. Kouyaté refers to himself as “Burkinabé by adoption” (Guttman).
of a migrant dying while crossing the sea, it is highly likely that his/her family would
never know as a result of his official non-existence.

The film’s griot Sotigui Kouyaté comes from a family line of griots, but he also
established a remarkable career as an actor. Shortly before his death at age 74 on April
17th, 2010, Kouyaté was awarded a Silver Bear for best actor at the Berlin Film Festival
for his performance in the 2009 film London River by French-Algerian director Rachid
Bouchareb (BBC News). He was also the subject of Mahamat-Saleh Haroun’s
documentary Sotigui Kouyate: A Modern Griot (Chad/France, 1996). Not only Kouyaté’s
background, but also his work transcended borders and continents and one of his main
concerns was the productive communication between Africa and the North. In 1997,
during a time when “France was deporting charter plane loads of Malian and
Senegalese immigrants every day,” he founded the Mandeka theatre in Mali (Kouyaté
quoted in Guttman 50). His reasons reflect on his concern about the desire of African
youth to migrate and the lack of opportunity in the North:

While [deportations were] happening, actors in Bamako were still asking me how
they could come to France, as if they were blind to how immigrants were being
treated. When I advised them not to go, they’d stare at me as if to say: ‘Look at
you, you’re doing alright over there, and so are your sons.’ The easiest way out in
the end was to say I couldn’t help anyone in coming to France. But I was ready to
do what I could by finding them jobs, courses or training. This is what I had in
mind when I founded the Mandeka–stopping young people from fleeing, helping
them to win respect through having a job and showing people what they could
do. (Kouyaté quoted in Guttman 50-51)

The establishment of a theatre to counteract the desire to leave the country and its
influence on the social fabric in Malian Bamako through an emphasis on local creativity
furthermore manifests the role of the griot as visionary and changer of the future.
Kouyaté’s role, both in film and in his real life, is to form the connection and be the channel of communication between the two spaces of the global South and North. Through selecting him as his film griot, director Loreau both acknowledges and addresses the lack of meaningful exchange between Africa and Europe in terms of economy, culture, social realities, and of course migration. Furthermore, by situating the griot in the location of Brussels, Loreau allows for a traveler who is not blinded by stereotypes and able to carry back the messages into the South that otherwise never get out or get distorted along the way. With the inclusion of a real-life griot, rather than letting an actor perform the part, Loreau furthermore acknowledges her limited access to the cultural context of her film. By doing so and leaving the voice of the film to the “librarian of Africa,” Loreau creates a multi-layered film which transcends not only nations and continents, but also the national filmmaker’s limitations when visualizing a transnational phenomenon.

The Transitional Desert Space by the Sea

By weaving the griot into her narrative, Loreau addresses the challenge of movement and mobility, both for people and for ideas and perceptions. Clandestine migration is characterized by the inability of a person to move across borders and this creates a third space in addition to what we call the “home” and the “host” country. The most secret part of the clandestine migrant experience remains the journey itself, during which transitional spaces are created and recreated. One filmmaker whose work addresses the significance of transitional spaces also reflects the shift of the transcontinental African migration paradigm in cinema is Malian director Abderrahmane Sissako. Born in Mauritania in 1961, raised in Mali, educated in filmmaking in the former
Soviet Union, and now settled in France, Sissako represents Naficy’s accented filmmaker who looks homeward from an exilic position. Sissako says about himself: “I am not a whole entity as such. I am a multiple. And this multiplicity is fragility. However this fragility becomes nearly a lightness. So I surf over things perhaps with more ease. By that I mean that I am not someone who is saddened by exile. I am not a victim. It is a choice” (Balseiro 5). If Sissako considers his own multiplicity both fragile and light, he has expertly infused this sense into his 2002 film *Heremakono: En attendant de bonheur* (*Heremakono: Waiting for Happiness*, France/Mauritania). Set in the desert right by the sea, presumably near the border between Mauritania and Western Sahara, the film conveys a sense of contrast that is geographically rare and aesthetically mesmerizing, especially in a film about people waiting for happiness and the association of this happiness with mobility. Sissako describes the film as following “the trajectory of those living in one place, be it Europe or Africa, but (mentally) inhabiting an imaginary elsewhere” (Balseiro 447).

In *Heremakono*, Sissako recreates multiple layers of mobility and migration through a multiplicity of characters. After a prolonged absence, protagonist Abdallah visits his hometown while on his way abroad. He stays with his mother and spends much of his time watching the street from a street-level window. Throughout the film, Abdallah moves among the town’s people without truly connecting with them. Among them are electrician Maata and his boy apprentice Khatra, a mother who teaches her daughter traditional songs, Chinese expatriate Tchu who sings sad and beautiful Chinese songs about exile to a woman at the local karaoke bar and sells trinkets on the

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7 Some critics identify the film’s setting as the Mauritanian city of Nouadhibou, but the film itself does not reveal this.
streets, men who prepare for sea travel to the North, a woman who went to Paris to inform her lover of their child’s death only to be rejected by him, and many more. The majority of the film revolves around the longings of people, for love, travel, a home, and redemption. The end remains ambiguous in that we don’t learn if and where the characters will travel. Abdallah unsuccessfully tries to cross a dune, Kathra fails to get on a train to leave the town after Maata dies, but then boldly walks into the desert instead. An immigrant who had prepared for the journey to the North is found dead at the beach. Heremakono moves back and forth between the characters and follows their interactions while there is no real plotline and the timeline remains ambiguous throughout. At one point we are told that two weeks have passed, but from what we can see on the screen, everything could happen on the same day. The film’s timelessness embodies the characters’ state of waiting and lack of control over their mobility, but also makes the dreams and desires appear timeless.

The film opens with sand and tumbleweed blowing in the desert wind, which gives us a sense of the beautiful, but inhospitable environment. The sand is very white and the sea is very blue and apart from the colorful garments worn by the townspeople, the contrast between sand and sea dominates the film’s color scheme. The scarceness of the landscape and earthiness of the colors paint an aesthetically minimalist picture which coincides with the seemingly minimalist lives of the town people. Moreover, Sissako emphasizes the isolation through his consistent focus on the sea, the vast desert space, and the seemingly unconquerable dunes. Just as much as it is a space through which people pass on their way elsewhere, it is a place in which the same people get trapped and have to wait for the next chance to move on. The sometimes
overly slow pace of *Heremakono* underscores the challenge of waiting for new opportunities and the almost constant diegetic sound of the wind conveys, despite all slowness, a sense of urgency through which people muster the courage and money to embark on journeys to largely unknown destinations. Sissako has described the setting of his film as a space through which people move from one place to the next, or a place of transit. He notes that the film is about people “who have to a certain extent already left, without having actually yet moved” (quoted in Smith).

*Heremakono* complicates border crossings further by including an intercontinental border. Transcontinental migration narratives often focus on the move between continents, but rarely include the border crossings within the African continent. The inclusion of a desert border post in *Heremakono* points to the often neglected internal border crossings, which result in the occurrence of “inner-continental contact zones.” The film’s setting then becomes an aesthetic vision of a multi-layered transition zone, which successfully complicates the dichotomy of “here” and “there” but focusing on the “in-between.” Moreover, through the multiplicity of migration experiences of the film’s characters alongside the settled town people, the film further complicates the “in-between” by layering different motives, strategies, dreams, desires, successes, and failures.

The film’s obvious immigration focus suggests that happiness lies in the North. The desert sand stands in stark contrast to the vastness of the sea and emphasizes the reality of making a living in this challenging global space while pointing at what seems to be the only way out of West Africa, the crossing of a treacherous desert or a seemingly endless sea: “Colossal sand dunes around the periphery of the town and abandoned
ships on the ocean horizon evoke far-off heavens” (Gonzalez). Dovey argues that the film presents the imagination of leaving as something limiting and suffocating: “The smothering Saharan sand is an apt visual metaphor for the way in which the villagers are sinking in ennui, waiting for an easier or better life” (63). Dovey fails to notice, however, that the film includes characters who carry on plenty of purposeful activity and social interaction. Sissako seems careful to infuse an appreciation of the local through positive and inspired social interactions and character who seem content in this space. This emphasizes that not the place itself puts people in limbo, but that the diasporic “in-betweeness” of rootless characters creates a place of ennui and waiting alongside the townspeople whose lives are rooted here. This further suggests that exile does not begin with the journey itself, but starts before departure. In the film’s location, exile is ever-present even if the locale never changes except for very brief flashback scenes.

The aforementioned state of “diasporic in-betweeness” is most clearly represented through the character Abdallah whose stay in his hometown constitutes a stop-over on his way to the North. He remains distant from the people around him, continues to wear Western clothes, and can only communicate in French because he apparently has forgotten his native Hassanya (or has never learned it). He stays inside to watch the street scenery through a window with a shape and size reminiscent of a television set, which puts him in the position of the spectator rather than a member of the community. In one scene he watches a village girl play music while standing half-hidden behind a piece of clothes hanging from the wash line as if watching her on a stage of sorts. Similarly, he watches a French game show on television and seems
equally removed from the on-goings on screen, signifying that he remains equally distanced from the space to which he desires to travel.

Abdallah’s alienation is not only emphasized through his marginalized positioning in individual frames, but also through his direct encounters with people. In one scene, electrician apprentice Kathra tries to teach him Hassanya, but Abdallah fails to correctly pronounce the words, which signifies that his internal change is beyond recollection of what he has just forgotten. Abdallah’s inability to remember the words already represents his alienation from the community, but his failure at correctly pronouncing the words signifies the permanent loss of familiarity that he once shared with his community through language. The natural ability to pronounce once native language is lost to Abdallah and while words can be re-memorized, native pronunciation remains lost forever. Instead of communicating with the townspeople, including his own mother, in Hassanya, Abdallah must rely on French as the language of communication. His former and future absence has caused internal changes that cannot be reversed. Abdullah’s past and future remain unknown and we only witness his awkward and painfully self-conscious navigation of his hometown. His isolation never subsides and the film culminates into his unsuccessful departure. It is therefore not just Abdallah’s prior absence from the town that causes his marginalized and alienated position and lack of ability to connect with people, but rather the future travel that removes him from his immediate surroundings.

Throughout the film Abdallah remains in the limbo state caught between the transitional space that is no longer his own and the mysterious and absent place in the North. When it is time for him to leave his hometown and continue his journey into the
North, the taxi in which he had arrived earlier in the film leaves without him. Instead of continuing his trip by car, Abdallah tries to climb one of the dunes that form the desert barrier surrounding the town, which symbolically remains his only path towards the North. The camera focuses on his dress shoes which not only seem out of place, but also highly impractical, emphasized by the easy climb by a stranger wearing the local sandals. For all the viewer knows in the end, Abdallah still struggles to overcome the dune and remains trapped in limbo: “[if] the film’s Mauritanian port city becomes a desert purgatory between the North and the South then its rootless characters are not unlike ghosts suffocated by their geographic not-being” (Gonzalez). I understand Gonzalez’ purgatory to be a state of limbo between two spaces, which the film’s setting clearly constitutes for Abdallah. At any stage, even before exile itself, clandestine migration positions the individual in an in-between state, which Sissako represents by putting Abdallah into his hometown he is alienated from, but also by never revealing where he will go and by aesthetically emphasizing the peculiarity of this geographical location where desert and sea meet.

Sissako carefully places the theme of migration throughout the film, but only once does he leave the Mauritanian setting. Through the character Nana, a town resident whom Abdallah meets and who tells him her story, the film incorporates another story of North-bound migration. When Abdallah meets her, Nana makes a living through meeting men and entering relationships. She tells Abdallah that in a former life, she had a daughter with a lover, Vincent, who left to go to Paris. After a serious illness, Nana’s

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daughter died and Nana traveled to Paris to inform Vincent. In Paris, Vincent made it clear that Vincent did not want her there and she is forced to return to Mauritania where she meets men and functions as an escort of sorts. Nana’s story is told through her voiceover and flashback scenes.

When Nana begins telling her story, the camera captures a very blue sky with a few white clouds as if to emphasize the vividness of colors in this African space. In voiceover, Nana continues to say that upon the death of her daughter, she traveled to Paris to inform the father: “It is because of [my daughter] that I traveled to Paris the first time [because] some things can only be said face to face.” Nana begins to describe her experience in Paris and the scene cuts to a Parisian grey urban setting where we see her walking along a fence. The picture quality is now grainy and the editing choppy, as opposed to the drawn out long shots in the Africa space. The contrast between the vivid and bright colors of the film so far and the dreary grayness of Paris is profound and emphasizes the distinction between the African and the French setting in terms of aesthetics. In recreating the Northern space as grey, gritty, and undesirable, Sissako complicates the trope of “far-away heavens.”

In the flashback scene, Nana stops at the fence and looks down onto the train tracks through a fence as her voice-over says: “But he didn’t want me there.” Here the scene cuts back to the very blue African sky in which steam is now rising from a train that slowly moves into the frame. Nana’s voiceover tells of her trip through Spain and her arrival in Perpignan in Southern France from where Vincent picked her up to take her to Paris. Her route suggests that she crossed the water to get there, but we never

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9 As I will show in the following, many clandestine migration films visually recreate the host space as undesirable.
know for sure. From the African train, signifying Nana’s journey, the scene cuts to an interior shot of what appears to be a Parisian hotel room. The walls and the door are grayish and dirty and a dress hangs beside the door. Nana lies on the bed with food in front of her, smoking a cigarette and looking solemn. In a close-up shot Vincent’s hand appears and takes the cigarette from her as her voice-over narrates: “He told me: Why did you come?” We also learn from her voice-over that Vincent set her up in the hotel room and paid for it for a week. He sits on the bed, his head cut off by the frame, with Nana lying down behind him and both are silent. Nana’s earlier decision to speak to him face to face is nullified by the invisibility of this face and the silence between the two. The characters’ position in the frame and the Vincent’s invisible face underscores the distinct separation between the former lovers and parents. It is obvious that the death of their child cannot recreate their former relationship. At the end of this sequence, Nana again walks along the fence and looks down onto the train tracks. After a few seconds, the scene cuts back to the desert setting where Chinese vendor Tchu, one of Nana’s men, walks along the water on the bright white beach singing what could be one of the songs we have witnessed him sing to her at the karaoke bar in an earlier scene. Nana’s voiceover explains: “I loved Vincent a lot then.”

The two settings and two lovers express Nana’s vulnerable position in the transitional space by the sea. She has been to France, but the trip left her abandoned by Vincent who was the only connection to her dead daughter, but also, as far as we know, the only connection to the exilic space. Abdallah watches when Nana is introduced to a stranger and agrees to have tea with him. The exchange takes place behind flowing fabric as if hidden by a curtain, suggesting that much of Nana’s life
remains a mystery to him, just as it does to us. We know that she has been to Paris more than once, but we never learn about the other time or times. The obscurity around Nana seems emblematic of this transitional space in which people come and go and where exile is so ever-present that no real roots can form as long as the characters long to go elsewhere. The only characters who do not seem out of place are the ones, like Abdallah’s mother, who remain outside of the migration narrative and who “localize” the place by wearing traditional clothing, making music, and having steady employment.10

With Kathra, electrician Maata’s apprentice, Heremakono presents one character who navigates the space freely. Kathra initially wears traditional clothing, but dreams of owning a blue overall, which is both a symbol of his profession and of Western influence. Kathra’s effortless transition between a multiplicity of spaces and people, traditional and modern, old and young, personifies the necessity of roots in one place in order to bring about change and in order to move on to another. This uprootedness that Kathra’s character counteracts is consistently captured through blowing and shifting sand, tumbleweeds, and the loss of a radio that Maaka, a local man, buried in the sand. Radios commonly appear in migration films as a connecting device between two spaces. The loss of the radio in the desert sand therefore signifies the non-existent global exchange reinforcing imaginations. The significance of the radio comes full circle in the end when Kathra finds the radio and consequently comes into possession of the device that most of all represents communication across distance. Throughout the film, Kathra connects with people, among them migrant Abdallah. During a significant moment, Kathra teaches Abdallah Hassanya words. While doing so, Abdallah is in the

10 It is significant that Kathra’s desire to wear a blue overall is linked to his desire to be an electrician because a profession “roots” the characters.
room at the window while Khatra is half outside and half inside the room. The window is consistently presented as a divider between Abdallah, the observer and the townspeople, but Kathra is able to bridge the divide.

As another signifier of the migration narrative, Sissako uses Paris as the default stand-in for North-bound travel. At the local photographer’s, two men, one of them named Michael, pose in front a wall painting of the Eiffel tower. The picture, to them, represents a salute to their upcoming travels across the water into the North. Two weeks later, Michael's friend Maaka and another man sit by the sea and watch the water, pondering where Michael could be at this time, whether he is in Tangier or already in Spain. Several scenes later, a bloated body lies on the sand and Maaka watches as police officers take pictures and search the body. At first we see the body in close-up, but a subsequent long shot once again reinforces the contrast between the blue sea with the white beach and the out of place ugliness of a dead body. The long shot also reveals that a boat is anchored in the distance, as if to mock the migrant who tries to reach what it represents. The body search reveals the photographs of Michael in front of the painted Eiffel tower. Maaka is questioned by the police, but tells them that he does not know who the dead man is. He further tells the officers that it is the only dead body that has washed ashore. The divide between Maaka and the officers’ reality becomes obvious when the officers ask him about the water jugs in the corner.\footnote{The encounter between the Arabic officers and Maaka further emphasizes that the town has been a transitional space and contact zone between North and Subsaharan Africa for a long time. This adds yet another layer to the film’s concern with multi-layered contact zones.} Maaka painstakingly explains for what each one is used and how long they last. His elaborate explanation seems random and out of place, but it serves to emphasize the disconnect
between the official side of this space, the police, and the local people and the prospective migrants for whom the space is a starting point on their clandestine journey.

The Mediterranean, as well as the Atlantic Ocean off the West African coast, have become emblematic of clandestine migration and also play a significant role in migration cinema.\(^\text{12}\) Throughout the film, whenever the camera is directed at the sea, large ships appear in the distance. Before Michael's departure, he, Tchu, and Maaka are gathered by the sea. Tchu hands out presents for the departing. The scene cuts to the sea where in the distance we see a large ship. Far in the distance, the ship seems out of reach, in contrast to the closer small boat which constitutes the migrants’ only hope to cross the water. The positioning of the large ship at the horizon and the small boat in the foreground suggests a demarcating line between the two that seems impossible to cross:

Clandestine immigrants, cruising tourists, armed forces, fishermen, sailors, submarine and rig engineers, cross the Mediterranean waters every day without communicating and often without even noticing each other, regimented in their own identities and constricted within their predetermined route. ("Multiplicity")

This constriction of routes and subsequent alienation in the sea travel space is especially important for clandestine migrants whose arrival depends on their invisibility amidst the other sea traveler. Just like places of transitions and travel such as airplanes (and airspace), hotels, train stations, and others, boats and ships can be non-spaces in which identities remain veiled under the cloak of a limbo space that denotes transit and therefore rootlessness (even if temporary).\(^\text{13}\)

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\(^{12}\) The 2009 film *Sin Nombre (Without Name*, Mexico/USA) by Cary Fukunaga includes a cathartic scene involving the crossing of the Rio Grande. A film emphasizing the journey across the Caribbean is the 2005 Spanish production *90 Millas* by Francisco Rodríguez Gordillo.

\(^{13}\) For a more detailed discussion of non-places, see chapter 3.
The separateness of large ships and fishing boats does not allow for meeting points that take place "when the paths of these travelers accidentally intersect, when a short circuit in the Solid Sea connects different cultures and identities and puts different sea depths in contact with one another " ("Multiplicity"). These dramatic effects seldom work in the favor of clandestine immigrants because they are preceded by detection. Interestingly, in a later part of the film, and after we have witnessed several migration stories gone wrong, Sissako reverses the way he juxtaposes the ships and fishing boats. When the ships reappear, they seem decrepit and abandoned, suggesting that the formerly desirable destination has become a place of death and abandonment. At the end of the film, after we have learned of Michael's fate, the ships that initially were on the horizon have ended up on the beach as wrecks, reminiscent of the bloated body that was found in the same location earlier. Moreover, this is the only time that we see the beach from the sea. This perspective reveals the actual, pitiful, condition of the ships, which cannot be made out from a distance. As symbols of the North, the ships now illustrate neglect, alienation, and displacement.

*Heremakono* paints a complex picture of mobility, border crossings, and a form of exile that already exists internally, but never truly becomes a geographical space (at least not permanently). Most importantly, Sissako succeeds in recreating the concept of exile as a state that is as much determined by the destination, even if the journey has not yet been made, as by the current location. Abdallah’s limbo state appears to be the result of a rootlessness which is grounded in both his current in-between state and location and his desire to leave. His only true connection to his hometown is his mother, otherwise he remains a stranger. The film emphasizes the human side of imagining and
waiting on the one side, and purposefully creating a home space on the other. Abdallah might be lost and alienated in his hometown, but he meets people who seem to belong. With Khatra, *Heremakono* even offers the possibility of a successful transition into a space beyond the dunes and the sea.

After independence and in an attempt to correct colonial imaginations of backward and primitive Africans, postcolonial African filmmakers have created remarkable films in which they expose the North as alienating, corrupt, and exclusive. As an African filmmaker, Sissako’s continues the tradition of a discourse in which Africans themselves correct the way the North has imagined them. *Heremakono* combines the fascinating geographical particularities of the West African coast with a migration narrative that situates itself at the crossroad between the postcolonial narratives brought forth by Mambéty and Sembène and the stories and realities of contemporary subaltern migration movements. Furthermore, Sissako’s use of techniques that Naficy attributes to accented filmmakers, such as non-linear storytelling, timelessness in a transitional space, and a multiplicity of border crossings, both internal and external, emphasize that exile is a state of multiplicity in which the migrant is pulled into many directions, none of which allows for genuine roots. In addition, *Heremakono* explicitly evokes images that appear and reappear in narratives of clandestine migration, such as characters waiting for the opportunity to migrate, and the dead body on the beach. As an accented filmmaker, Sissako therefore not only evokes migration tropes, but significantly incorporates markers of cinematic clandestine migration that, as I will show in the following, consistently appear in similarly themed films.
Into the Subaltern Diaspora: Cinematic Border Crossings

The significance of the sea as both escape route and death trap that Sissako recreated in *Heremakono* also appears in Mohammed Soudani’s 1997 film *Waalo Fendo- Là où la terre gèle* (Waalo Fendo – Where the Earth freezes, Switzerland). Naficy maintains that “accented cinema not only constitutes a transnational cinema and identity, but also is a constitutive part of the national cinemas and national identities” (Naficy 34). In the case of Sissako and Soudani, both of whom are accented filmmakers now based in France and Switzerland, respectively, personal exilic journeys made their way into the films through their specific treatment of space and place. Like Sissako did with *Heremakono*, Soudani recreated migration narratives that are both emblematic for accented cinema, but also include features that consistently appear in clandestine migration cinema.

Mohammed Soudani was born in El-Asnam in Algeria in 1949 and immigrated to Switzerland in 1972. He has made a number of films both as director and cinematographer, many of which are concerned with the relationship between Africa and Europe. Among these films are *Guerre sans images* (2002), a documentary about contemporary Algeria, *Roulette* (2007) about the friendship between a Swiss citizen and an Albanian asylum seeker, and the 2009 film *Taxiphone* about a young Swiss couple whose car breaks down as they travel through the Sahara desert. In *Waalo Fendo*, Soudani portrays the immigrant experience of undocumented Senegalese workers in both Senegal and Italy. The circumstances of production reflect on the multicultural background of the filmmaker in that it involves both Swiss Amka Films as well the Ivory
Coast-based station Television Ivorienne. In 1998, Soudani was awarded the Swiss Film Prize for *Waalo Fendo*.

*Waalo Fendo* tells the story of Demba who leaves his Senegalese village to follow his older brother Yaro to Italy to help him earn more money in the Sicilian tomato harvest. The narrative moves back and forth between the Senegalese village and Italy where Demba and Yaro sell bags, necklaces, lighters, and similar items. The brothers work as harvest laborers and street vendors until Yaro accidentally gets killed in a drug-related shooting. Demba tells their story in retrospect, beginning and ending with his brother’s death. The film is self-consciously edited to be uneven and fragmented and the viewer is forced to put the pieces together, which signifies the fragmentation of globally circulating images that form distorted imaginations. *Waalo Fendo* begins with a long shot of a distant shoreline visible only as a string of lights in the darkness as if to suggest a far off place of opportunity (similar to the lights on the ships in *Heremakono*).

After a few seconds, the scene cuts to a pair of hands in close-up, holding necklaces and following a brief conversation in Wolof between Yaro and another street vendor, we see the characters driving in a car. During a stop at a gas station, Yaro gets shot by someone from a passing car. At this point music sets in for the first time and as the opening credits appear, we see an overhead shot what appears to be a six-lane highway crowded with cars moving in the darkness. As the music fades, the sequence cuts to a low angle shot looking up a tree, which turns out to be the perspective of a young boy lying underneath the tree. The juxtaposition of the extremely crowded

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highway lanes and the tranquil image of the tree and the boy, who we now see getting up and washing off in the river in a rural landscape, early on emphasizes the dichotomy that *Waalo Fendo* recreates throughout between the spaces Senegal and Italy in terms of mutual perception and imagination.

*Waalo Fendo*’s distinctive style, including the inclusion of more than one space (Senegal and Italy, city and country), different narrators and different perspectives, and handheld cameras constitute the stylistic devices that Naficy attributes to accented cinema. Especially the juxtaposition of different narrators who report directly to the camera reflects on the very nature of accented cinema because “every story is both a private story of an individual and a social and public story of exile and diaspora” (Naficy). Demba initially narrates the events in voiceover and begins by saying that he wants to tell the story of his brother, but also of “all those young people from the villages in the south who go to Europe to work . . . with the hope that in Europe, they will earn a fortune in a short time. And that the family is provided for on their return.” During Demba’s narration, the handheld camera moves through a rural village like a spectator who walks among the people and observes their behavior.

We witness women pounding food with mortar and pestle, a woman with her baby on her back carries a bucket past mud huts to the well, which is surrounded by other women, and a young boy tending to a goat. The shaky camera and amateurish picture quality sets the village scenes apart from the rest of the film. They appear as if an outside spectator records traditional village life, but the indifference of the people who are being recorded suggest that the footage is recorded by a villager. Through its juxtaposition with Demba’s voiceover about the hopes that lie in Europe, the film makes
a point of separating the two locations as one space of stagnation, in which opportunities outside of the traditional ways are rare, and another space of opportunity and progress. However, a sudden cut to two men waiting at what appears to be a train station in Italy presents another contrast. The busy village scene with its vivid colors and purposeful activity is replaced by the reality of migration, which involves waiting and dependence, as well the familiar symbols of transit, such as trucks and trains that we have already seen in Heremakono. Waalo Fendo, however, expands the waiting trope by applying it to both the home setting and life in the diaspora. The wait for opportunity characterizes the preparation for life in the diaspora and that life itself because the undocumented characters have very limited access to the means necessary to travel abroad and build a life there.

In Waalo Fendo, the village’s apparent poverty falls in line with the dichotomy of prosperous North and abject South. When Yaro writes his mothers and asks for Demba to join him in Italy for the tomato harvest to be able to raise more money, the village elders discuss his letter: “Yaro has written to help the village. Demba, his younger brother, should come to Milan to work. Demba shall go, but we need money. Who else will pay for the journey?” The village community makes arrangements for the journey to Dakar in the hope to offset poverty by sending men abroad to work. The elders discuss the failure of the authorities to build a well and the consequential death of the animals and threat to the harvest. While they lament the loss of young men who go abroad, one of them concludes after describing the local economic difficulties, “we have no choice.”

In the context of illegal migration, the imagination of opportunity pairs up with an imagination of successful journeys. Demba considers Yaro and his friend Theo lucky for
being able to cross the Italian border and their success fuels his determination to attempt the same journey. The film, however, intercuts his narration about Yaro’s successful entry into the North with actual news footage showing border patrols waiting at the shore at night, a boat loaded with people racing through the water followed by a bright light to indicate its detection. People go ashore, are searched by border patrol and marked. A man sits down with his head in his hands, to then look back at the empty boat on the beach. This is followed by footage of strewn luggage in the sand and in the water, again followed by a sudden cut to several men in uniform with batons and shields beating African immigrants. Extremely sinister and threatening music underscores this grainy and choppy montage of news footage. As the camera cuts back to Demba who describes how lucky Yaro and Demba were when crossing the border, we get the sense that Demba does not himself have access to the footage, which once again underscores the barrier between imagination and reality.

In the last, and perhaps most disturbing scene in its resemblance to the assembly of slaves before the Middle Passage, men walk in a straight line, probably to be deported. The reference to slavery reinforces the similarities of mobility constriction in the different African diasporas. While slaves were captured and forced to leave one space to enter another, the undocumented African immigrant in the modern subaltern diaspora attempts to leave one space, but is denied access to the next. Moreover, as the slavery reference in the film suggests, once the undocumented immigrant is discovered, s/he loses control over his/her mobility entirely. In both cases, the ability to navigate between global spaces and across the demarcation line between North and South is entirely controlled by the North.
Demba’s own journey takes him on a train through the dry West African landscape to Dakar. Shortly after he arrives at the train station and has met the man who will take him further, an overhead shot of the city’s port emphasizes the significance of the West African coast as a starting point for the water crossing, similar to the significance of the port city in Heremakono. Shortly after Demba is told that he cannot leave right away, the film cuts to a boat full of travelers and then to fishing boats on the water and the activity along the shore of the city. A local musician underscores the sequences with a song in Wolof about a traveler who “went everywhere and has seen a lot.” He continues: “His experiences are not written down anywhere. He must be respected. Why stop emigration? I don’t understand.” The song lyrics paint a picture of respect for the emigrants and the potential of their journey to bring back knowledge. This, however, stands in contrast to the experience of Yaro who gets killed in the diaspora and never returns. As in Heremakono, characters in Waalo Fendo never truly arrive anywhere because they can never take root. All three films I have discussed so far in some form emphasize the trope of the disappearing subaltern migrant.

As Demba is waiting, a local fisherman tells us, as if interviewed for the film, that fishing has become difficult. He significantly adds: “We have lost everything. Even the fish are immigrating (sic).” The film thus openly criticizes the Western influence on the African local that does not only pull away the young people through creating alluring images of opportunity, but also creates the reason they have to emigrate through the destruction of their local infrastructure. The relationship between Senegal and the former colonizer France, which has been so predominant in earlier films set in Senegal,

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15 Within the context of his speech, it appears as if the correct translation is “emigrating.”
appears nowhere in *Waalo Fendo*. Instead, imaginations of the global North are not based on preconceptions or imagination of particular nation states, but on a collective imagination of a space of opportunity and are linked to economy rather than political or national entity. Interestingly, Soudani makes a clear effort to recreate the African space as beautiful and desirable. When Demba’s off-screen voice informs us that he is now ready to leave, a panning shot captures the Dakar harbor. Upon his actual departure, we get to see a beautiful Dakar shoreline from Demba’s perspective who is now on a small boat headed to Italy.

When Yaro and his friend Theo set out to Europe, they hope to find “a land of money,” which in the collective imagination is the land “where the earth freezes” (or “waalo fendo” in Wolof). The choice of nation state is based on the network (Yaro is already there) and on the question of how difficult it is to cross the border rather than a concrete imagination of the country itself. Before Demba leaves the village to follow his brother Yaro to Italy, a man gives him a letter: “You are going to Waalo Fendo. Take this letter to my son. Tell him we await news from him. Tell him that we miss him.” The letter, however, has no address and Demba tells the viewer: “He thinks I am visiting his son. For him Waalo Fendo . . . is like a big market where the Africans meet.” This collective imagination is fed by circulating symbols of Western prosperity. These can be letters that follow Yaro’s advice for Demba in Waalo Fendo: “This land is called the great land. When we write to our families we never tell the truth. That’s a rule.” The circulation of the illusion is meant to maintain the collective imagination in the home country, but also takes the migrant hostage because s/he cannot return before s/he has reaped the benefits of the respective country’s supposed prosperity.
The fare for the boat trip from Dakar to Italy is provided by Yaro who sent the money to a merchant in Dakar with the request to arrange for Demba’s ticket. This collaborative effort represents the complex global networks in which diasporic pockets connect to move not only goods and money, but also people and labor. Remittances do not only assist in the survival of the village, but maintain the movement of laborers and therefore keep the network alive. To apply Spivak’s concept of the “detritus of globality,” the Senegalese men who migrate out of Senegal to Italy are the seeds through which the global South attempts to spread itself in the North. The community imagines that through sending the men, money and goods will go back to the village. By “planting” Yaro in Italy it has become possible to keep up the flow of remittances and using this connection for further labor exchange.16 This community sentiment also emphasizes the importance of media flows (in this case through letters, but also through storyteller Demba) that create imaginations, for example of the opportunity to participate in Northern prosperity for the survival of the community. This imagination is also informed by the laborscape, the global flow of local laborers represented by Yaro and again communicated through his letter. The community’s imagination of hope for the local through entering the global therefore allows the move “from shared imagination to collective action” (Appadurai 8). And with this collective action as well as the collective expectation (as another form of imagination), the migrant might become physically detached from his home locale, but remains attached to the global economic divide through the duty of supporting the community.

16The significance of “planting” and “harvesting” in the undocumented migrant experience carries over to the labor that the protagonists perform abroad (see chapter 3).
In the case of Demba, and in many African migrants, looking for opportunity is the consequence of local agency and action rather than just an individual attempt of realizing an imagination. And because of the village’s expectation and involvement in planning the journey, the migrant remains tightly connected with the home community even in the diaspora (if not directly, then in the collective imagination of his duty to the village). The duty towards the village and sense of responsibility follows the migrant into exile: “Tragedy at home, which often drives people out of their countries, looms large, even larger, in exile” (Naficy 85). This is especially important because the lack of communication between the two spaces with regards to the difficult circumstances of living abroad does not allow for the collective imagination to change. If such communication were possible, the village elders might not approve of “sacrificing” the young men.

Isabel Santaollala describes *Las Cartas de Alou* (*Letters from Alou*, Spain 1990) by award-winning Basque filmmaker Montxo Armendáriz as following “road-movie conventions to narrate the odyssey of a Senegalese young man on a journey from southern to northern Spain,” (4) while Tabea Linhard firmly situates *Las Cartas de Alou* in the tradition of Spanish realist cinema. The film was made at a time during which Spanish cinema frequently presented “reflections on and criticism of right-wing violence and various forms of racism” (Santaollala 113). Furthermore, although Armendáriz’ role as an icon of contemporary Spanish filmmaking does not technically make him an accented filmmaker, his Basque identity does seem to place him into an exile of sorts, even if “only” internally.
The film follows Alou’s (played by Gambian actor Mulie Jarju) clandestine journey from Senegal into and through Spain in search of employment. After crossing the Mediterranean in a small boat with other undocumented immigrants, Alou arrives in Spain and searches for work. He works on cucumber and pear farms, in a sweatshop, and as a scrap metal collector. During his endeavors he meets Carmen, the daughter of a local bar owner and they begin a relationship against the will of her father. Alou becomes increasingly frustrated with the uncertainty and racism he experiences in Spain, especially after the accidental death of his friend with whom he lived in an almost empty and unheated apartment. He unsuccessfully tries to obtain legal status, but eventually gets arrested during a routine identity check. Along with other clandestines, Alou is flown back to Senegal. In the last scene of the film, Alou is back at the beach to once again get into a boat and make his way back to Spain (whether he arrives there or not is not revealed).

Las Cartas de Alou features the same trope of clandestine sea travel we have seen in Heremakono and Waalo Fendo. The film begins with an overhead short of dark calm water. After of few seconds of diegetic sound, a flute begins to play until a boat appears, at which point the music stops and all we can hear is the sound of the water. The flute music is somber at first, but as more instruments join in, the music becomes more cheerful; however, an underlying menacing sound remains which does not allow for the otherwise enjoyable music to have a truly cheerful effect. The ambiguity of the music along with the images of a calm but dark sea points to the ambiguity of the immigration experience and suggests the ever-present mix of opportunity and danger. When the music stops upon the arrival of what appears to be a commercial fishing boat,
the films seems to turn away from the emotional side of the migrant experience and instead emphasizes the stark realism of wide open water that needs to be crossed.

As the scene cuts to the deck of the boat, men prepare to launch what appears to be a small inflatable rescue boat with a motor. The mood is hectic as one of the men rushes down a ladder and opens a door to hurry another group of men to the deck of the boat. At this point begins the voiceover of Alou reading his letter to a friend in which he tells of his decision to leave Senegal: “I will leave for the country others went to and where they became lucky.” The hopefulness and optimism of this narration stands vis-á-vis the darkness of the night from which the migrants enter a small boat. As the camera points down onto the rescue boat, the sea seems calm. However, as soon as Alou has entered the boat, the sea is no longer calm and at this point his narration stops, suggesting that the imagination of the country of opportunity is now infused with the real physical danger of the trip across the Mediterranean Sea. The boat departs and immediately the passengers are drenched in sea water. As the sea conditions become increasingly rough, one of the men falls overboard and despite protest, the smuggler does not stop the boat and the last we get to see of the man is a bag floating on the water. The man vanishes from sight immediately not only in the eyes of the onlookers in the boat. The boat arrives at the beach at dawn and the men hurry away from the beach. The film then cuts to a tent where Alou is drying his clothes.

Crossing the Mediterranean at night serves the purpose of avoiding coast patrols, but the darkness of the film’s beginnings also represents the obscurity of this limbo space the emigrants find themselves in. The boat becomes part of the obscure invisible as it crosses the water in the dark with people who officially cease to exist once
they leave their home country (because their identity is linked to papers that will not grant entrance into the target country). The true danger, however, poses the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea, this dangerous physical border to land on the shores of Spain. The arrival on the beach contrasts the darkness and obscurity of the boat trip in rough water at night with the sunrise and the calm sea. However, when the men leave the boat and run towards the protection of the dunes away from the empty beach, the screen becomes darker again.

The golden colors of the rising sun only appear right when the boat reaches the shore as if to signify the arrival “in the promised land.” As soon as the travelers step on the beach, however, they head towards the obscurity of an undocumented existence, represented by the lack of light on their way away from the beach and into Spain. However, Las Cartas de Alou paints a surprisingly hopeful picture of border crossings. Not only is the man who fell overboard alive and well as it turns out, Alou also meets him again unexpectedly. But although Armendáriz does not tie his protagonist to the boating accident, it still evokes the dangers of border crossings and Linhard’s observation that “a shipwreck initiates the traumatic cycle that current literary representations of immigration in Spain [cannot] escape” (417).

While Cartas de Alou emphasizes the individual immigrant’s arrival in the obscurity of the imagined, but ultimately unknown, Waalo Fendo paints a more ambiguous picture. The protagonists of both films arrive safely in Spain and Italy, respectively, but only Cartas de Alou allows the imagination of a possible safe arrival to survive. The film ends with Alou’s second crossing of the Mediterranean after his deportation from Spain, which further upholds this imagination. In contrast to the first
journey, which takes place at night, Alou’s second trip to Spain begins in the daylight across sparkling water and with the company of a friend. *Waalo Fendo* does not allow the safe arrival of its protagonist to uphold the imagination of easy border crossings, which is emphasized by Soudani’s inclusion of actual news material. Not only does the insertion of pictures of arrested immigrants and shipwrecked objects present an alternative outcome, but the choice of using actual news footage blurs boundaries of what is fictional and what is not.

Moreover, both *Waalo Fendo* and *Cartas de Alou* subvert the common appearance of luggage in accented cinema by tying it to the danger and loss of clandestine migration experience. Naficy describes the suitcase as a “key symbol of exilic subjectivity” because it “connotes wanderlust, freedom to roam, and a provisional life; and it symbolizes profound deprivation and diminution of one’s possibilities in the world” (261). The significance of the suitcase in accented cinema lies in its transitional and temporary use. In many clandestine migrant films, including *Waalo Fendo* and *Las Cartas de Alou*, however, the suitcase becomes a symbol of death through images of abandoned suitcases and bags on beaches and in waters. Naficy attributes to the suitcase provisionality, improvisation, and displacement, all of which, he argues, may “become sources of new rootedness and identity” (262). For clandestine migration cinema, however, suitcases often represent the opposite, namely the uprootedness from both the home and the diaspora. Moreover, in the abovementioned two films, bags and suitcases symbolize the ultimate rootlessness of death, but also convey that their content is all that is left from its owner. The secrecy of clandestine border crossings erases real identities, which in the case of the migrant’s death completely disconnects
him/her from his/her family – they might never learn what happened.

The letters in *Waalo Fendo* and *Las Cartas de Alou* signify the connection between the exile and the home community and by “addressing someone in an epistle, an illusion of presence is created that hovers in the text’s interstices” (Naficy 5). The letters serve as the media that feed the imagination and uphold the image of the North as being a space of opportunity because, as in the case of Yaro, the success of the migrant is measured against the imagination, not the reality. This forces the migrant to recreate the imagination in letters in order to not be deemed a failure. In the case of Alou, letters he narrates later in the film, both to his parents and his friends in Senegal and Spain, communicate the frustrations he experiences as an undocumented immigrant. Therefore letter writing serves as a more direct sociopolitical message against discrimination and racism. Alou writes his letter in Wolof which the film translates by means of Spanish and French subtitles, thus emphasizing the significance of letters as connecting devices in a multinational global network. In both cases, however, the presence of letters links the displaced character and his/her home and represent “the desire to be with another and reimagine an elsewhere and other times” (Naficy 101). Alou’s letter writing voiceover consistently accompanies difficult situations he finds himself in, which emphasizes the disconnect between what his family imagines his life to be and the on-screen reality.

Letter writing is also, as Naficy points out, a common cinematic device in what he calls “accented cinema,” but he makes a crucial distinction: “In accented film . . . epistololarity appears to be less a function of plot formation and character motivation than an expression and inscription of exilic displacement, split subjectivities, and
multifocalism” (103). Despite the fact that Armendáriz is not technically an accented filmmaker, Alou’s letters seem to express the division and multiple perspectives of the migrants. This first letter in Las Cartas de Alou expresses the multifocal imagination of the prospective migrant and serves to inform the non-diegetic friend, and therefore the viewer, of the reasons why Alou has chosen to migrate: to find better work. Alou furthermore informs the addressee of his parents’ reaction to his plans and his mother’s concern that if she wanted to speak to him, she would not know how to reach him, to which he does not respond.

The film implies that with his border crossings into the North comes a detachment from the family and the possibility that the letter that he writes to his friend will never be delivered, but serves as a representation of what Naficy labels split subjectivities. Alou is aware that with his migration, he does not only cross economical and geographical borders, but also cultural and personal ones and the unpredictability of his plans put the family unity at risk. In his imagination, the host country, in this case Spain, is not only a place of promise, but also a space that detaches him from the locale he is leaving behind, which signifies that the imagination of migrants does not only include hope and desire, but also an awareness of loss and alienation. The same awareness is presented in Waalo Fendo shortly before Demba goes on the boat that is to take him to Italy. The merchant who has arranged his journey on Yaro’s orders tells him: “In Europe you are on your own. Never forget your family and your friends.”

Although Soudani is an accented filmmaker while Armendáriz is not, their films share a number of features that are directly related to the theme of undocumented migration. The representation of dangerous sea travel both reflects on the anxieties of
the nation state in which the film was made, as is the case with *Las Cartas de Alou*; in *Waalo Fendo*, however, Soudani also recreates the social anxieties of the nation state Italy in which the film is set, rather than those of the country of production (Switzerland). While there are certainly overlaps in Italian and Swiss public opinion with regards to immigration, *Waalo Fendo* does reflect on the particularly Italian “problem” of dealing with clandestine sea travelers.
CHAPTER 3
THE CINEMATIC CREATION AND NEGOTIATION OF CLANDESTINE LABORSCAPES

The Significance of Undocumented Labor in International Cinema

In the previous chapter I have discussed the creation and development of imaginations that trigger the desire to overcome the distance between two nation states, as well as representations of these border crossings. Once the migrant has entered the host country, the concept of “arrival” becomes complicated because arriving implies that the journey has come to an end. In many transit films, however, the journey continues within the borders of the target country and the same can be said about clandestine transit cinema. Imaginations are at the heart of global migration flows, but just like these flows themselves, imaginations constantly shift and adjust to the multiple realities within the diaspora. In this chapter, I emphasize creation and negotiation of spaces of undocumented labor as a central theme in clandestine migration cinema. Furthermore, I argue that instead of unifying within ethnoscapes, illegal immigrants often settle in subaltern, or illegal, laborscapes. The latter exemplifies Karl Deutsch’s interpretation of what creates a unified group based on nationality: “The essential aspect of the unity of a people is . . . the complimentary or relative efficiency of communication among individuals – something that is in some ways similar to mutual rapport, but on a larger scale” (quoted in Schlesinger 19). The common experience of uprooted people trying to survive through work characterizes the cinematic spaces. The undocumented transnational experience can be communicated clearly among the constituents of the laborscape because of the common experience, but not outward for fear of detection.
Border crossings within the nation state take on the form of crossing from the urban into the rural space or vice versa, stepping from legality into illegality in terms of immigration documents, crossing racial divides, gender boundaries, and class lines. Additionally, border crossings take place internally as the migrant moves from hopeful to hopeless, from being supported to being abandoned, from a positive attitude towards the nation state to a negative one or vice versa. Here I attempt to outline the spaces, both external and internal, that undocumented migrants cross, willingly and unwillingly, once they have reached the target country with a special emphasis on the role of labor and its relationship with survival. Based on Appadurai’s –scapes which I have discussed in the introduction, I argue in favor of a “subalterm laborscape,” which addresses the identification of the undocumented immigrant with other illegals rather than people who share their national, ethnic, and cultural background and constitute an ethnoscape. The subalterm laborscape is invisible and created by the diasporic identification of being an illegal laborer and the collective imagination of being able “to make it” (or the collective shame of going back with nothing).

More specifically, “deterritorialization, in general, is one of the central forces of the modern world because it brings laboring populations into the lower-class sectors and spaces of relatively wealthy societies” (Appadurai 37). The cinematic representation of the subalterm diaspora discovers the dynamics within a truly transnational collective which is unified by the experience of having fallen out of the focus of global navigation. This includes the common experience of uprooted people who try to survive similar situations and navigate through a diasporic landscape in which they form bonds through their shared experience of being clandestine immigrants in search of work. This makes
these bonds transnational and complicates Appadurai’s concept of diasporic cultural landscapes by adding to them a political identification overruling a cultural sense of belonging. The ideology and politics of the respective nation-state therefore create the subaltern diaspora that does not allow undocumented immigrants to be visible and that does not attempt an identification of undocumented laborers that goes beyond their immigration status. On the other hand, within the subaltern diaspora, the clandestine actors carve out spaces of agency and vision.

In addition, my concern with imaginations continues because as the migrant meets his/her personal diasporic reality, the imagination becomes redefined, negotiated, abandoned, and revised. The creation of clandestine landscapes within the subaltern labor diaspora remains inextricably linked to the imagination of the migrant and its constant revision. Diasporic spaces are only to a certain degree dictated by the limitations imposed on the migrant by the target country’s immigration policies. The lack of documents closes certain avenues, but it also opens up new ones that are realized through individual and collective agency and the refusal to abide by the policies and leave the subaltern diaspora. Individual migrants are not passively led through the subaltern diaspora based on the channels that are opened up for them; instead, their imagination and subsequent determination initiates the negotiation of spaces. Furthermore, individual negotiating links self-identification with a collective through the common experience of being considered illegal workers. The collective assists and protects, and its absence leads to isolation from the collective and forecloses avenues.
Exploitation and Resistance in The Rural Laborscape

Most of the films included in this dissertation are set in urban centers and the majority of this chapter is indeed concerned with the city. Rural farm labor, however, makes up important parts of both Waalo Fendo and Las Cartas de Alou and they bear quite striking similarities. Therefore I return briefly to these two films to discuss how they visualize the rural laborscape. I argue that the rural laborscape gains significance because the farmwork that the migrants engage in on-screen could be interpreted as a visual representation of Spivak’s concept of how the Global South spreads and plants the seeds in the North, the fruit of which will return to the South. Furthermore, both films tie this space to moments of resistance and especially in the case of Waalo Fendo, this resistance is reminiscent of worker strikes in Europe, such as the 2002 sit-in protest in Seville during which workers of local Strawberry farms protested work conditions and demanded work permits.

Alou’s labor experiences in Las Cartas de Alou are almost equally divided between urban and rural laborscapes and initially, his experience with migrant harvest labor is surprisingly positive. After arriving at the Spanish beach following his boat journey across the Mediterranean, Alou finds himself in a tent city by the shore. A truck comes by, apparently to pick up workers, and the men on the flatbed beckon Alou to join him. Alou runs after the truck and jumps aboard without any knowledge about who the people are and where they are taken. The obscurity of the truck’s destination, however, turns out to work in favor of Alou, who next we see harvesting cucumbers under a tarp along with other migrant workers. After having worked that day, he asks for a job and continues as a laborer on the farm. His comparatively positive experience, however, is
subtly subverted through the tasks he is asked to perform. After picking pears on the first day and after becoming “officially” employed, we watch him walk along the plots with a canister on his back. The already mentally and physically challenging task of harvesting now becomes extended to include the straight-out harmful and damaging labor of spraying pesticides, signifying both the exploitation of the migrant worker, but more importantly suggesting that Alou’s positive attitude is likely to become slowly poisoned by the demands and challenges of the undocumented laborscape, which expresses itself at a later part in the film during which Alou challenges authority and loses his job. The film never reveals the reason for the conflict, but when one of the plantation supervisors, Alou loses the complacency that has dominated his general attitude towards rural labor until this point and unexpectedly throws a pear at the man. While his opponent recovers from the attack, Alou’s friends rush him off the plantation. Alou’s anger in this scene seems unexpected, but it turns out to be only the beginning of his growing frustration and vulnerability.

_Waalo Fendo’s_ representation of the rural laborscape, like the news footage of chained immigrants I discussed earlier, very openly references slavery and thus visually and narratively infuses the Atlantic Slave Trade into its representation of contemporary undocumented labor. Yaro, Theo, and Demba work on a tomato farm in Sicily. At this point in the film, Theo functions as narrator and, like Demba has done before, directly addresses the viewer by speaking to the camera. He explains that Yaro and his co-worker Brahim plan a strike on the plantation to pressure the owner into paying them for Sunday work. Following the depiction of a tension-filled day before the strike starts, the film incorporates footage of a slave castle and via voice-over, a French-speaking guide
explains the practices of evaluating the worth of prospective slaves who are about to start the middle passage. He continues: “When you had passed the door to the sea, the door to the journey of no return, this mean ‘Adieu Africa.’" The slave castle footage is followed by a close-up of Yaro looking into the distance, which establishes the connection between historical slave labor and contemporary subaltern labor and the alienation and exploitation of both slaves and contemporary undocumented workers in the global North. Additionally, this scene once again emphasizes the role of the sea by cutting back and forth between the historical structures and the ocean, culminating into a shot during which the handheld camera moves through the passage that took the slaves to the boats to be taken to the slave ship. Especially the images of the sea remind us of the ones we have seen prior to Demba’s departure, suggesting that the clandestine crossing of the seas resembles the Middle Passage and that both lead to different kinds of slavery. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the guide’s narration in French, despite the slave castle’s location in English-speaking Ghana, and Theo’s recollection of events in Wolof highlights the internal conflict of the Senegalese migrant whose exposure to the global North did not start with his physical journey, but remains embedded in his identity as a Senegalese with a still present colonial past.

Following the cutaway scene of the Ghanaian slave castle, we find ourselves back on the Italian tomato plantation where a pondering Yaro looks desolate and deep in thought, to suddenly look up as the urgent sound of drums appears. The next frame shows hand squeezing tomatoes instead of picking them, indicating the workers’ resistance against further enriching bosses by destroying the value they have formerly generated. From the destruction of single tomatoes the film moves on to a figure
tumbling over crates of harvested tomatoes. The workers assemble on the path amid the fields and walk menacingly towards the camera, which gives us the perspective of who presumably is the plantation owner. The workers walk past and ignore their boss who is left looking at the destruction on the plantation. Along with the worker mutiny we get a glimpse of the mutual dependence because the walk-off and subsequent emptiness of the farm reveals that not a single worker had legal papers and was adequately paid. But more importantly, Soudani creates a labor situation in which the undocumented worker refuses dependence and exploitation and navigates the subaltern labscape based on agency and vision as Appadurai proposes, rather than being consistently victimized.

Nigerian émigré filmmaker Femi Agbayewa includes a similar reference to slavery in his 2008 film God’s Own Country (Nigeria/USA). Nigerian immigrant Ike has just arrived in New York and works, without papers, in a restaurant kitchen. After being attacked by his manager for working too slowly, Ike quits and walks off the job, only to find out immediately after that he needs to raise money for a family emergency. After learning that his sister needs money to treat an illness, he realizes that he might have to turn to crime to survive and the film immediately cuts to a rural scene in Nigeria. Ike’s voice narrates in voice-over: “Badagry, slave beach. This is the path that the slaves used to walk until they reached the point of no return. . . . They will lose their memory. Mindless and trapped in their physical body in a never-ending quest for survival.”¹ Agbayewa uses the reference to underscore Ike’s lack of choice whether or not he wants to engage in criminal activity and ultimately suggests that the limited opportunities

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¹ Badagry is a coastal town in Southwest Nigeria which functioned as slave port during the Atlantic Slave Trade.
and profound pressures within the Northern laborscape leaves him “mindless and trapped” in his own body because he becomes an instrument to be exploited for cheap labor or criminal activity. Although Agbayewa does not tie the slave reference to rural labor, but to undocumented labor in general, his commentary about dependence and exploitation in the subaltern diaspora clearly resembles that of Mohammed Soudani in *Waalo Fendo*. The cinematic portraits of undocumented harvest labor visualize the difficult conditions and exploitation practices undocumented laborers suffer under, but in contrast to the cinematic urban laborscapes, they offer room for resistance and agency.

It is furthermore significant that after these incidents, both Alou and Yaro return to the city where a greater variety of opportunities leave more choice.

**Mapping the Subaltern Laborscape of Hospitality**

In cinema of clandestine transit, the globalized city becomes a cinematic manifestation of transnational movements of money, labor, goods, media, and people. The actual city space with its buildings, streets, sidewalks, cars, and other signifiers of urbanity is a site in which social actors “negotiate the relationship between the local and the global” (Mennel 201). The diasporic space consists of the local and the transnational within global -scapes or pockets and the nature of their interplay is dependent on the nature, purpose, and form of the respective community. These diasporic pockets are created through what Arjun Appadurai describes as “a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility” (Appadurai 31). But cities are not only significant in their cinematic representation. Globalized urban centers constitute the space in which immigrants, undocumented or not, can situate themselves

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2 I will discuss this film in more detail in chapter five.
and benefit from anonymity and existing networks. Ironically, the migrants in cinemas of transit move through places of mobility such as airports, train stations, and hotels.

Naficy calls these locales chronotopes of transit and I maintain that they are not specific to accented cinema, but make up a large part of migrant cinema. These spaces of transit are largely associated with the urban setting and cities often become cosmopolitan and multicultural centers rather than national urban spaces. In the case of Stephen Frears’ 2003 film *Dirty Pretty Things*, for example, Leila Amine observes that “identities in Frears’ film have global, rather than national perimeters. The local map of London is reconfigured through Okwe’s transnational experiences into a world map” (Amine 82). These global parameters are in all clandestine transit films because all films were made about protagonists who are ultimately victimized by a global world order that actively restricts their mobility and exploits their need for economic survival. However, by not submitting to the restrictions of global mobility, clandestine migrants become active part of the globalized city through participation in social and labor networks. On the flip side, unauthorized migration could not take place without global urban centers that form both the destinations as well as the cities migrants pass through. The cities of Dakar and Tripoli, for example, have become popular destinations for those wishing to cross the water to the Canary Islands and Lampedusa, respectively.

Acclaimed British filmmaker Stephen Frears is well-known for taking on social issues in his films, such as immigration and homosexuality in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), and for the social realism in his films. Frears’ 2002 film *Dirty Pretty Things* “skews our usual definitions of home and belonging, host and guest, health and the power to circulate” (Rosello 17). *Dirty Pretty Thing* is probably the best-known cinematic
example of the significance of labor for unauthorized workers. The film’s multicultural London citiscape in which foreign workers try to make a living “allegorizes the plight of the migrant worker in the global city as a struggle not to be consumed by the excessive demands of capitalism in the age of globalization” (Davis 48). The film’s main setting is the hotel Baltic in London with a work force that largely consists of undocumented workers. Two of these workers, the Turkish maid Senay and the Nigerian night porter Okwe, involuntarily become involved in the illegal trafficking of human organs, a scheme operated by hotel manager Senor Sneaky, that are taken from undocumented immigrants in exchange for legal papers and European passports. After a series of traumatizing events during which Senay is forced to leave her job, is harassed by immigration officers, and forced to perform oral sex on her new employer in order to keep her job, she decides to give up her kidney in exchange for an Italian passport that will grant her entry into the United States and possibly a new life in New York City. Through Okwe’s intervention, however, the two manage to take Senor Sneaky’s kidney and set off to the airport from where Senay boards a plane to New York City with a new Italian passport while Okwe returns to Nigeria, also with a new identity to be reunited with his daughter.

Dirty Pretty Things visualizes the labor machinery that operates in London’s underbelly: “the film represents the underside of cosmopolitan London familiar from glossy tourist representations” (Gibson 388). The theme of hospitality and tourism remain ever-present in Dirty Pretty Things, but only because clandestine labor often constitutes a vital part of an industry of mobility which provides the global traveller with transportation, accommodation, and other services. Places like hotels and airports
become symbols of mobility and often the workplace for those who are the least global, including the working poor and undocumented immigrants who are easy to hide behind closed doors. Mark Auge’s concept of non-places comes to mind, which he describes as “nodal points in the circulation of goods, people, capital, and information” (Sharma 129). Non-places include places of transit such as airports and chain hotels, but also hospitals, gated communities and refugee camps, and are characterized by their sameness across a great variety of local settings. The uniformity of non-places seems to render participants equal in the way they navigate these spaces through movement and consumption (with some variations between the common traveller and the one who is a bit more privileged and has access to the Lufthansa VIP lounge). The sense of sameness is reinforced by the conceptual detachment of the non-place from its surroundings. Sarah Sharma, however, has pointed to a significant neglect within this discourse and emphasizes what lies beneath the non-places, namely the workers behind the scenes.

Labor forces uphold access to the amenities that the travelers expect and these labor forces are not uniform around the world. Sharma points out that while the structures and services are indeed uniform in the non-places around the world, the labor force remains local and locally recognizable:

If one’s eyes focus upon the laborer of non-place, then suddenly a locality to the non-place will emerge [...] who they are speaks to local flows of immigration, the raced constitution of classed formation, and the particular gendered divisions of labor that characterize the locality that the non-place shares. (Sharma 146)

Therefore, places of transit might exhibit sameness across localities, but they always stay connected to the local even if it is not always immediately recognizable. Sharma thus objects to the notion that non-places are “homogenous and sterile” because they
can never be merely places of transit or passing through and as such cannot be places of equality based on a similar experience of uniformity. On the contrary, non-places, especially those that are part of modern travel such as airports and hotel chains, can become examples of restricted mobility and inequality. Furthermore, the multiplicity of this work force, both in terms of cultural or ethnic background and in the type of work that is being performed, highlights the complicated and unequal nature of global transit through which non-places come to be. The non-place is not merely a place of transit for people because not everyone smoothly passes through passport control. Some travelers might be taken into the airport’s detention center outside of the glossy picture of global travel and never have access to the places of consumption in the passenger lounge (Sharma).

Additionally, not all passengers voluntarily pass through the non-space. Airports, for example, can also be places through which people are removed from one nation state without having any part in the decision where they will be moved to. Through this perspective, the non-place becomes a space that is characterized by both the passing through of travelers or consumers as well as the non-mobility of those who either work to maintain the non-place and its services and those who do not have access to the sort of mobility that leads to passing through the non-place. Many workers ironically never experience the degree of mobility of those to whom they attend on a daily basis. The underlying and often invisible machinery that keeps services and processes running can only be erased as long as we concentrate on the privileged constituents of places of transit. The Baltic Hotel in *Dirty Pretty Things* is an example of the non-place’s localization because the workforce is situated in London and cannot become part of the
privileged travelers who they serve. But Frears adds another layer in that he chooses a hotel to be the place of employment for people who have little control over their mobility and who are not altogether welcome in London.

Initially the film focuses on Okwe’s work routine, which involves his night shift at the hotel’s front desk and the day shift as a taxi driver, only interrupted by a few hours of sleep at Senay’s apartment. At the opening of the film, we meet Okwe at the airport looking for passengers. We are immediately introduced to the role he takes on when he tells potential passengers whose pick-up never showed: “I am here to rescue those who have been let down by the system.” Throughout the film, Okwe does indeed come to the rescue of many who do not otherwise have access to help: he treats the owner of the cab agency and his undocumented colleagues for STDs and a Somali immigrant for complications from the botched surgery to remove his kidney. Okwe personifies the dilemma of the undocumented worker who not only has to hide his real identity (to escape political and criminal persecution in Nigeria), but also has no chance to work in his learned profession. Okwe could never be a doctor in a London hospital, but he services the unwelcoming host country by curing its constituents from diseases, welcoming visitors at the Baltic Hotel, and giving them rides through the metropolis. Okwe’s undocumented status leads to a severe fragmentation of his working life because, firstly, his options are limited and secondly, in order to be employed in his primary jobs (night porter and taxi driver), he must give in to the additional demands of his employers. The vulnerability of its workers constitutes a vital part of the subaltern laborscape.
The significance of Okwe’s labor for the cosmopolitan urban center stands in stark contrast to what the city offers him. He has to work two jobs to survive and lives in constant fear of being detected and deported. The person behind his job profiles does not interest to anyone. Ironically, this transcends to the film’s audience which also never learns of Okwe’s life before his London life. We watch Okwe as night porter, taxi driver, and doctor, but the person behind these professions remains a mystery. The film reveals the bare minimum of Okwe’s past to allow us to make sense of why he is an undocumented worker although he is a doctor. Through his conversations with Senay, we learn that his wife died in an accident, that he is sought for her death and that he has a 7-year old daughter. Frears makes the clandestine worker physically visible through the camera, but Okwe’s past and future remain a mystery, like those of so many clandestine migrants.

As Davis points out, the body in this film signifies its relation to exploitative global conditions and the lack of private agency:

The mission of the film’s central characters becomes finding a way to navigate the underground economy of immigrant labor while minimizing the fragmentation and commodification of their own and each other’s bodies for capital, whether it is through providing kidneys or sexual favors. (Davis 48)

Okwe’s reaction to Senay’s decision to sell her kidney reflects on the exploitation controlled by those who also control the subaltern laborscapes: “Because you are poor you will be gutted like an animal. They will cut you here, or they will cut you here. They will take what they want and leave the rest to rot” (Dirty Pretty Things). The immigrant body turns into a commodity to enrich members of the global North and the labor performed by the maid or night porter without papers is not the only sort of work expected of the clandestine migrant. The dependence on these jobs creates an
alternative “market,” namely one for forced labor in the form of organ supplier (Senay), organ remover (Okwe), doctor and surgeon (Okwe), and prostitute (Senay). The allusion to slavery in the context of “owning the immigrant body” furthermore plays out in the exchange between Okwe and the owner of the cab agency. He asks Okwe to come to a backroom with him and once there motions him to kneel. Only after Okwe has knelled we find out that attempts to inspect his boss’s genitals for a sexually transmitted disease. His position vis-à-vis his employer, however, represents a foreboding of Senay’s boss forcing her to perform oral sex on him later on in the film.

The undocumented workers in Dirty Pretty Things are confined within the space that exploits them, their skills, and their bodies because in order to survive without papers, they are dependent on the middlemen who employ them and constitute the “buffer zone” between the worker and the laws outside of the subaltern diasporic space. Amine furthermore observes that the middlemen are not necessarily white citizens of Britain. The hotel manager who runs the organ trafficking ring hails from Spain and Senay’s boss in the sweatshop has also immigrated to London at some point. The Baltic Hotel, or the main non-place in the film, represents a multicultural space within which mobility and citizenship are the main factors when it comes to opportunity and choice. Significantly, the organs are not sold for money by the immigrants, but for passports. Instead, the immigrants ask for a European passport that grants a stay in London or access to the USA without the need for a visa. The Baltic Hotel therefore provides an opportunity for the workforce to “move up” (or gain mobility), but only through the most

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3 Senay becomes the clandestine mirror of British prostitute Juliet, but her subaltern status denies her the choice that Juliet has a British citizen.
literal exploitation of the immigrant body. In giving up an organ, the clandestine come “legalized” immigrant will forever remain weakened.

Ironically, the investigation of the immigration officers who go after Senay does not include Okwe and it is likely that his visibility saves him from scrutiny. Michel Foucault’s discussion of the panopticon comes to mind, in which people are kept in line because they never know when they are being watched. Okwe benefits from the assumption that undocumented laborer occupy a space in which they must be physically hidden. The hotel rooms that need to be cleaned offer opportunity for invisibility and so does the sweatshop. The film on the one hand upholds this common association between invisibility and undocumented labor by only threatening the maid Senay and the sweatshop workers with immigration investigations. On the other hand, Okwe’s blatant visibility as both a taxi driver and night porter seems to keep him safe. The character Okwe cheats the system precisely by not hiding, but by beating it at its own game. He successfully steals medication and surgical equipment by posing as cleaning personnel because his “foreignness” is associated with such kind of work. Had he acted as the doctor that he is, he most likely would not have been successful. Dirty Pretty Things therefore complicates the concepts of visibility and invisibility that accompany the illegal migration discourse. During a brief conversation with a member of the organ ring who had expected to meet Señor Sneaky, but instead finds Okwe, Senay, and Juliet, the following conversation ensues:

“Why haven’t I seen you people before?”

“Because we are the people you do not see. We drive your cabs. We clean your rooms. And suck your cocks.”
The vulnerable position of the immigrant and fragility of the subaltern laborscape not only forces him/her to conceal his/her citizenship and/or lack of documents, but creates alternative identities that are exchangeable and malleable. When Okwe ends his taxi shifts, he hands his identification documents to the next driver. While doing so, he points at his colleague’s necklace (a cross) and says: “careful, now your name is Mohammed.” Amine observes that this name “does not refer to an original person, but is rather a fiction that hides several persons and denotes the driver’s status as interchangeable commodity” (79). Okwe’s real identity as a Nigerian (and Yoruba) doctor from Lagos with the name Olusegun Fadipe is not only useless in this environment of survival, it becomes a threat when Senor Sneaky discovers who he really is and uses the information to blackmail Okwe into performing the surgeries for the organ harvesting ring.

Rosello reinforces the important point that Okwe “does want to ‘go back’ to his homeland but in a way that does not correspond to usual narratives of returns to the native land,” which further complicates the migration narrative of the film. Clandestine labor is often tied to the wish to go home or go elsewhere and the general discourse of migration as a journey from a home to a destination seems oversimplified. Dirty Pretty Things features characters who find themselves in a limbo state similar to Abdallah in Heremakono, except that this time exile itself constitutes this condition. As long as clandestine migrants, or transients as Rosello insists, can only occupy laborscapes that they can hardly control, the limbo stage will remain in effect.

Okwe’s need for a new passport is not triggered by his desire to leave his home country, but to return to it and be reunited with his 7-year-old daughter. His attitude
towards the homeland is divided between the nation state run by corrupt officials on the one hand and the country of his roots, career, and family on the other hand. Naficy addresses the significance of nostalgia in accented cinema in terms of a tendency on part of filmmakers to present a romantic version of the homeland. In clandestine migration films, however, the relationship between the migrant and the homeland is more complicated because by crossing borders secretly, the migrant has to commit to not returning until s/he has reached the goal in host nation state since return is too risky. The subalterity of the characters fragments attitudes and perceptions of the homeland because they cannot go back and forth. According to Spivak, a migrant’s subalterity can only end when s/he possesses legal papers and therefore has access to civil rights and the cultural dominant.

Subalterity for immigrants resembles homelessness on multiple levels. The subaltern migrant does not have access to the privileges of being “at home,” or at least of having documented access. At the same time, s/he is far away from the homeland and cannot connect like a documented migrant can for fear of detection or inability to return. Linking undocumented migration to homelessness makes it all the more ironic that Okwe and Senay, with their undocumented labor, provide London visitors with a home away from home. *Dirty Pretty Things* further makes this connection by literally leaving Okwe homeless. He does not have a place to live and relies on Senay for brief naps on her couch after they have gone through the daily ritual of secretly exchanging the key.

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4 The same is true for Jean-Marie Téno’s film *Clando*, which I will discuss in chapter four.
Jean Luc and Jacques Dardenne’s 1996 film *La Promesse* (*The Promise*, Belgium) also addresses the issue of subaltern labor which provides hospitality and services to a host nation that does not even acknowledge the laborers’ existence. As filmmakers, Jean Luc and Jacques Dardenne are part of the European national cinemas of the 1990s in which films reflect on a European anxiety regarding immigrants and the illegal crossing of its borders. German immigration films, for example, often dealt with issues of racism and xenophobia (*Otomo*, which I will discuss in chapter four, is a good example), while Spanish and Italian migrant films tend to include water crossings and beach arrivals (*Waalo Fendo* and *Las Cartas de Alou*, but also *Bwana* by Imanol Uribe [Spain 1996]), reflecting on a national concern of clandestine immigrants “flooding” European shores.

The Dardenne films are characterized by gritty, urban industrial locations, mostly their hometown, including “a focus on the marginalized or declassé in society—black market employers, immigrants, the unemployed, young offenders, and teenage parents” (Bickerton 16). In the context of migration cinema, the Dardenne brothers are especially interesting because all of their films are distinctly localized and intimate. They never leave the boundaries of whichever industrial Belgian town is the setting and they are concerned with contemporary Belgian issues. With *La Promesse*, they comment on the exploitation of immigrant labor as well as issues of xenophobia and racism that concerned Belgians in the 1990s when *La Promesse* was made. In the film, teenager Igor and his father Roger run construction operations for which they mostly employ undocumented immigrants (whom they also provide with fake papers). Roger rents out rooms to and employs illegal laborers, sells fraudulent residence permits, is involved in
human trafficking, and overall makes a living off the dependency of people on a link to the legal world they cannot access by themselves. When Hamidou, a Senegalese worker, becomes severely injured after an accident, Igor promises him that he will look after his wife and child. Igor tries to help Hamidou and asks his father to call an ambulance, but Roger, afraid that his operations will be unveiled, refuses and lets Hamidou die. In an attempt to seek redemption and to honor his promise to her dying husband, Igor stays with Assita who does not know of her husband’s death and starts searching for him. The film ends with Igor revealing the truth to Assita.

*La Promesse* begins by introducing Igor as petty thief who steals a customer’s wallet before he is called away from work to join his father. The two ride a van past an industrial urban landscape of Eastern Belgium. In contrast to the vital and multicultural cityscape of London we occasionally get to see in *Dirty Pretty Things*, the setting of *La Promesse* only shows us a side of Belgium as the host nation that is uninviting and gritty. Furthermore, we are introduced to the significance of Belgium as a destination for immigrants early on. After collecting an incoming group of undocumented workers who entered the country hidden in a car transport, Roger points to the dreary cityscape and tells the migrants: “Belgium nice, very nice!,” to which Igor adds “a lot of money!” The film’s immigrants have either come to work or are in transit to another destination in Europe or North America and by supplying fraudulent residence permits and passports, as well as accommodation, Roger and Igor quite literally take on the role as hosts that the nation state Belgium refuses to be. Their premises constitute the laborscape in *La Promesse*, like the Baltic Hotel in *Dirty Pretty Things*, in which the global circulation of labor manifests through the assembly and disassembly of groups of workers who are
unified only by the common experience of performing unauthorized labor. The laborscape of providing visitors with accommodation and a home away from home in *Dirty Pretty Things* becomes a laborscape of providing literal homes for Belgian citizens in *La Promesse*.

Joseph Mai notes that: “Behind Roger hides a colossal system comprised of individuals, governments, and corporate players, including a shipping company and a prostitution ring” (Mai). Roger belongs to an apparatus that consumes and spits out dispensable human labor and preys on the imaginations and expectations of migrants. Roger furthermore represents the middlemen who keep the system working by functioning as the link between the unauthorized worker and the world outside. Furthermore, Roger and Igor function as the doormen for unauthorized immigrants through concealing their true identity in exchange for labor on their premises. However, in contrast to Señor Sneaky, Roger and Igor are neither deliberately abusive, nor do they appear to greatly benefit financially. The cordial relationship between Roger and Igor and the workers is limited by language barriers and clearly only for mutual benefit. Initially, Roger seems to personify the *La Promesse* version of Frears’ Señor Sneaky, but as the story unravels, Roger’s character moves beyond the singularity of the film’s villain and he begins to embody a more complex part of the subaltern labor system than Señor Sneaky. Roger and Igor work on the construction site alongside the immigrant workers, and the state of their apartment suggests that they themselves are part of the Belgian working class.
La Promesse not only adds layers to a normally vilified labor system, but also allows for the immigrant character to be flawed and therefore human. A common trope in migrant cinema is the hard working, exploited, and victimized immigrant. With Hamidou, the Dardenne brothers again resist the convention of the good immigrant and the bad employer that we see in Dirty Pretty Things and Waalo Fendo. In fact, La Promesse is quite remarkable in that it partially avoids the dichotomy of victimized immigrant and villainous exploitation system (with Assita's plight after her husband's death, the film reinstates this dichotomy). Prior to the arrival of his wife, Hamidou loses a lot of money by engaging in gambling and therefore fails to adequately care for his family. Instead of being able to participate in a laborscape of opportunity to better support himself and his kin, he finds his only escape in a practice that renders his immigration efforts useless because he loses his money almost as soon as he makes it. Hamidou is not the hardworking and money-saving immigrant whose only concern is the support of his family. In creating a flawed immigrant character, the filmmakers break away from the sanitized characterizations of immigrant workers like Yaro in Waalo Fendo and Okwe in Dirty Pretty Things, and therefore complicate the relationships within the subaltern labor system.

However, Hamidou ultimately suffers the consequences of being a commodity within this corrupt system that values humans only in terms of the revenue they potentially generate. When labor inspectors visit Roger's premises, Hamidou is on the scaffold and unable to hear the warning cries. Igor runs through the house, yelling to the workers to get out. The camera movements are shaky and the atmosphere frantic, reinforced by the diegetic sound of people running. Igor rushes up the stairs to warn
Hamidou. When Igor turns away from the window and runs down the stairs, he hears a noise, which is barely audible to the viewer, and turns around. All other sounds are gone now except for Igor’s pleading voice. Hamidou lies on the floor and Igor’s hands are visible on his chest. When Hamidou asks Igor to take care of his wife and child, the camera remains focused on Igor’s face. The extreme close-up of Igor and Hamidou’s faces during their exchange and the stillness around them underscores the intimacy of the moment. The workplace that has separated them based on their legal status and relationship as employer and employee now unites them forever as human beings. By promising Hamidou to look after his wife and child, Igor has begun his separation from Roger and the system that has turned Hamidou into a commodity.

The moment ends when Igor hears Roger’s voice calling for him. He drags Hamidou into a corner and runs to meet the labor inspectors. After convincing them that everything is in order at the site, Igor returns and tries to stop the bleeding in Hamidou’s leg. Roger appears and Igor asks his father to get the injured man to a hospital. Roger asks what they would tell the hospital and when it dawns on Igor that Roger does not intend to help Alou, the diegetic sound stops for a few seconds while the two look at each other through alternating close-ups of their faces. The complete silence and stillness of their faces emphasize the profundity of the moment, which ends when Roger gets up and runs past Igor. The frantic pace that preceded Hamidou’s’ fall has now returned and suggests that the focus is back on protecting the laborscape at the expense of the moment of humanity we just witnessed.
Roger removes the belt that stopped the bleeding, covers Hamidou with a tarp and a door, and tells Igor to cover the blood with sand. Ultimately Hamidou slowly gets killed by his vulnerable position as an undocumented laborer. He falls from the scaffold because he is in a hurry to hide from the labor inspectors and although he is still alive, Roger insists on covering his body with a tarp and a door and the blood with sand, all of which are parts of the construction site. In other words, Hamidou literally dies under the burden of being an illegal laborer. Furthermore, while he is dying, Assita appears chasing a chicken that lands on the door under which Hamidou lies. Roger distracts her and leads her away to keep her husband’s death a secret and therefore the laborscape safe.

Roger and Igor return to the site after dark and bury the now dead Hamidou in cement, one of the most typical components of construction sites. During the process, the camera remains removed from the characters and we watch the burial from a distance, as if watching something forbidden. In contrast to the intimacy of the faces in close-up during the accident and its immediate aftermath, the distance now seems to remove us from the characters, as if to emphasize the callousness of the act. Mai notes that “Hamidou goes from being cheap labor to being a corpse, a body at its most silent” (11). Silence and invisibility are at the core of the apparatus that exploits illegals and when the migrant cannot guarantee his silence and invisibility, the system will discard of the threat. This is possible because the ones in control of the undocumented laborscape are aware that illegals do not exist as long as they are not visible. In fact, when Hamidou’s wife Assita tries to report his disappearance at the police station, she is told that “he came . . . illegally. And on paper, illegal entries don’t exist.”

Furthermore, Hamidou’s burial site suggests that he has become a permanent part of the building’s
foundation, like the invisible workers who literally build the foundations of houses for Belgian citizens who will never know. *La Promesse* thus implies that the global North has built its foundation on the exploitation of the global South and continues a colonial legacy in a neo-colonial (capitalist) world order.

The trope of the exploitation of the immigrant body does not stop with Hamidou. On Roger’s insistence, again to keep the system safe from outside scrutiny, Hamidou’s wife Assita remains unaware of her husband’s death and is left in the belief that he ran away to evade the collection of his gambling debts. Roger sends her a fake telegraph stating that Hamidou will eventually meet up with her in Cologne. Roger offers to take her to Germany to supposedly be reunited with her husband, but Igor realizes that his father intends to sell her into an underground prostitution ring. While before Assita is only seen in her function as housewife and mother, and therefore primarily as part of the family unit rather than the illegal labor system, she, too, turns into a commodity. Just like the four Turks “provided” by Roger who are set up to be publicly arrested to appease a Belgian public demanding actions against illegal immigrants, Assita is about to be sold into a new system because that is where she can create revenue and poses no threat. Here again the immigrant becomes part of a deeper layer of exploitation, similar to giving an organ for a passport.

*La Promesse*, like *Dirty Pretty Things*, provides very limited insight into the characters’ history, background, and character. We learn very little about Hamidou’s and Assita’s past and their cultural background is only partially revealed through rather stereotypical images of traditional African religion Hamidou and Assita engage in. With their focus on the labor system, rather than the exploited workers therein, the Dardenne
brothers, like Stephen Frears, unveil an apparatus that otherwise defies scrutiny and visualize the profound vulnerability of undocumented workers. Furthermore, their cinematic interpretations of undocumented immigration obviously reflect on the anxieties and debates taking place within their respective nation states.

Street Vending in the European Urban Jungle

*Waalo Fendo* introduces the audience to the significance of undocumented labor early on through a conversation between Yaro and Theo. They select pieces of jewelry to sell on the street and agree that “in this country only one thing counts: selling.” The clandestine laborscape in *Waalo Fendo* takes the form of street vending, which in contrast to construction work and hospitality services forces the undocumented worker to move out in the open. Given the few opportunities to find work in Italy, Theo and Yaro do not have a choice other than to become part of an exploitative system within which the last link of the chain, the street vendor like Yaro and Theo, can barely survive because the middlemen who can safely navigate between the legal and the illegal laborscape are aware of their dependence. Yaro’s brother Demba narrates his observations: “I have never seen anything as despicable as the street trader. He imposed his rules on the immigrants and controlled the market.” During Demba’s stay in Dakar, we get to see several market scenes, in which the market is a place where people gather and interact, very much unlike the hurried and generic interactions in Italy. In another contrast, the market scenes in Dakar appear in bright sunlight and obvious warmth while *Waalo Fendo* situates the immigrant street vendors in a cityscape that is always cold and often rainy, or stark and dirty subway stations.
Significantly, the street scenes we encounter in *Las Cartas de Alou* are similarly gray and rainy, again suggesting that the immigrants are navigating a hostile and alienating environment. Alou has left the countryside to travel to Barcelona and see his friend who had promised him work. We see him waking up in a train or bus station, realizing that his bag was stolen. Trapped and without connections, he aimlessly wanders around a hostile cityscape. He is obviously cold and at some point it starts to rain. He does not approach anyone until he sees a man who he deems to be from Senegal. This encounter introduces him to street vending and his newfound friend teaches him the basic techniques of selling jewelry, lighters, batteries, and other small items on the street and in restaurants and bars. Alou’s initiation into the same street vending community as Yaro and Demba’s, albeit in a different country, takes place through “the seasoned” immigrant who has already immersed him/herself into the urban subaltern laborscape in the host country. Demba undergoes a similar street vending initiation period with his brother Yaro as his mentor. Alou’s new friend provides an opportunity for shelter and acts as a mentor for the rookie migrant, but he also benefits from Alou’s labor. Armendáriz recreates the laborscape of street vending through Alou’s pitiful first attempts that emphasize the degree of alienation of the immigrant who does not speak enough Spanish to sell items. We witness Alou’s slow immersion into the trade through watching him sell on the street, fleeing from police (which establishes the subalterity of this space) and his manipulation of drunken customers who pay significantly more than the item is worth.

The clandestine urban laborscape is clearly linked to a global capitalist economy. Undocumented migrants often work in sectors of hospitality, or non-places, like hotels
and transportation, but also engage in street vending that ironically provide Western citizens with merchandise such as necklaces and bags that look like they might be from the African countries of the seller. During the transaction, the Western customers therefore acquire fake “authentic” African items from an “authentic” seller whose identity remains concealed and is of no interest to the customer because in the capitalist global economy, culture is shared and distributed through consumer goods rather than human interaction. This is the same phenomenon of invisibility we have observed in Dirty Pretty Things and Okwe’s protective visibility from the official eye.

Apart from “undocumented legal employment,” such as street vending, Waalo Fendo also references illegal labor. Through killing off drug dealer Sam and Yaro’s condemnation of this kind of work, Waalo Fendo emphasizes that only legal work is acceptable. The film however, also reinforces the danger, frustration, and futility of undocumented labor through Demba’s narration:

The tragically ending lives only play a minor role in a more and more cruel world. Many tear up their residence permit. They have had enough of Europe and return to Africa. They have had enough of the police. Enough of humiliation. They have had enough of necklaces and the cold. The cold which makes the bones freeze and which I will never get used to.

Demba thus confirms, once again, that “in the age of neocolonialism a return home covered in richness is only a nostalgic projection” (Linhard 416).

**Subalterity, Illegality, and Urban Crime**

While the great majority of films I have examined are concerned with labor that might require proper documentation papers, but is otherwise legal in the respective nation state, some address the “double-illegality” of undocumented workers who, like Waalo Fendo’s Sam, make a living in crime. The two films included in the following
discussion of undocumented immigrants and illegal labor were both made by accented filmmakers who live and work in the global North, Germany and the United States, respectively, and whose films express the concern with the exilic condition proposed by Naficy, especially with regards to alienation and loneliness: “Loneliness is an inevitable outcome of transnationality, and it finds its way into the desolate structures of feelings and lonely diegetic characters” (55).

Kurdish-German filmmaker Yüksel Yavuz was born in Eastern Turkey in 1964 and moved to Germany at the age of 16. Today Yavuz lives and works in Hamburg and has become one of the most critically acclaimed diasporic filmmakers in Germany. His 2002 film Kleine Freiheit (A Little Bit of Freedom, Germany) features Baran and Chenor who both reside in Germany without proper immigration papers. Baran came to Germany as a Kurdish asylum seeker after the murder of his parents and evaded deportation when his immigration status expired. Chenor similarly lacks legal resident status and finances his life and dream to travel to Australia through drug deals. The two form a close friendship, but upon the appearance of a man who Baran identifies as the man who caused the death of his parents, his quest for revenge takes its toll on his life, the Kurdish community, and his friendship with Chenor. Chenor attempts to come to his rescue and although the conflict is ultimately resolved, Baran and Chenor are arrested in the end.

Significantly, Baran and Chenor bond during a moment that includes multiple references to mobility. When they first meet, Chenor is listening intently to the travel stories of a mutual friend and former captain. The fragmentation and alienation of the immigrant identity becomes obvious when the captain describes his journey along the
West African coast. His mentioning of Africa is met with little reaction from Chenor who only becomes excited upon hearing that the captain has been to Australia. Chenor’s alienation from his homeland could not be any more obvious. Baran joins them, but remains silent until Chenor compliments him on his bike. During his encounter, we learn of the significance of mobility in the film through Chenor’s intense desire to travel and Baran’s bike, which takes not only Baran, but also the viewer on rides around the city. However, the film immediately subverts the impression that the characters are in fact mobile. A police car appears on the scene and Chenor and Baran get up and casually walk away as not to be identified.

The mobility trope in this scene also suggests that their status not only severely limits their mobility, but that it also does not allow them to linger anywhere. Therefore, ironically, the lack of global mobility and the condition of being confined necessitates greater mobility within the confined space: “Throughout the film, Baran and Chenor anxiously alter their routes, or keep out of sight to avoid the attention of police officers” (Kraenzle 99). With their arrest, which happens during a moment of lingering and enjoying each other’s company, thus losing sight of the dangers, Yavuz reinforces the banality of the situation. Chenor and Baran do not get arrested because they get caught working without documents or dealing with drugs, but rather because of a moment during which their invisibility is compromised: “Finally, plainclothes policemen spot Baran and Chenor sitting in the public square, and, suspecting them of dealing drugs, ask to see identity papers” (Kraenzle 99). The lack of papers then becomes a crime of just existing in the wrong space and failing to navigate the safe routes, even if only for a brief moment.
Through rapid montage sequences, the film establishes the “glocality” of the neighborhood that is both home and prison to the undocumented protagonists. The sequences mapped onto Baran’s bike rides through the neighborhood “conveys a gripping cross-section of the neighborhood by super-imposing shots of city traffic with shots of . . . various locations . . . ranging from a Turkish bakery to a construction site and a brothel” (Göktürk 1). Baran’s workplace is a Turkish restaurant in which the overlap of the dominant and the subaltern laborscape once again manifests. Yavuz connects Baran’s laborscape with his need to stay mobile and therefore undetectable, which becomes most obvious when we race through the city streets as if we were on the bike with Baran. The location of the restaurant in Hamburg’s red light district St. Pauli suggests its proximity to the margins and Baran’s task of navigating the neighborhood puts him right between the dominant space of the legally existing restaurant and the marginalized population it serves. This becomes especially obvious when we learn that Baran regularly provides the homeless captain with food.

Baran’s workplace furthermore illustrates the overlap of ethnoscape and laborscape and it is precisely this overlap that allows Baran to move between the two laborscapes with relative ease. Through his affiliation with the ethnoscape, the Kurdish community that looks out for their own, Baran gains access to a legal laborscape and is at least not dependent on illegal activities for survival. At this point the film also sets up its engagement with illegal urban labor. As Chenor and Baran walk away from the police after their first meeting, they run into two African men who are clearly marked as “thugs” and turn out to be Chenor’s drug acquaintances. Incidentally, Baran discovers Chenor’s drug activities through accidentally videotaping a deal and confronts Chenor. Chenor
tries to make him understand that he only deals drugs because he needs the money to leave the space that does not allow him to make money another way.

The film does not grant Chenor the privilege of belonging to an ethnoscape situated within the dominant culture, which keeps him significantly more marginalized than Baran who can at least count on support from his diasporic community. For reasons that are never explained, Chenor does not seem to have any contact with anyone in Hamburg’s sizable African community, which also has a rather large presence in the St.Pauli neighborhood. The only “African ethnoscape” the film allows for are the drug dealers, whose identities are characterized by language and demeanors associated with thugs, including brutality, and recklessness. Besides Chenor and an African kitchen worker at the Turkish restaurant, all Africans are clearly marked as immigrants through language (they speak West African French) and as criminals through their involvement in drug dealing. Chenor is obviously alienated from the dominant culture due to his skin color and sexual orientation, but he also remains on the periphery of this illegal laborscape. Whenever an African dealer addresses him in French, he responds in German although he clearly understands what is being said to him. Through his choice of language, he separates himself from the people he otherwise depends on for survival. Baran, on the other hand, effortlessly moves back and forth between Turkish and German because his ethnoscape allows for identification with his Kurdish origin. For Chenor, the affiliation with the dominant culture is preferable to a deeper engagement with the only African community he apparently knows. However, he still remains marginalized in both spaces.
In the aforementioned film *God’s Own Country* by Femi Agbeyewa, Ike leaves Nigeria hoping for a better life. Upon arrival in New York City, he looks for his uncle who allegedly owns a hotel in the city. However, as soon as Ike arrives at the hotel, he finds out that his uncle is not the owner of the hotel, but instead works as a dish washer in the hotel kitchen. After taking residence with his uncle, Ike unsuccessfully looks for work as a lawyer, his trained profession. After several rejections, Ike begins to work in the same hotel kitchen as his uncle, along with several other immigrants who are also overqualified for the job, but are unable to find work that matches their credentials. After a quarrel with his boss who insists that the workers do not use the front door, Ike quits his job. Shortly after, Ike learns that his sister in Nigeria is very ill and needs a significant amount of money for treatment. Unable to find legal work that could pay enough to help her, Ike participates in credit card fraud, but soon becomes the victim of a scam himself. He confronts the scammer and after shooting one of them, is able to retrieve the money which he sends to his ill sister in a blood-smeared envelope.

The film begins with images of a Nigerian cityscape. Filmed from a car with a handheld camera, the focus of this introductory shot is the street that presumably is part of the way to the next destination (the United States). The diegetic street sound creates the immediacy and familiarity that we associate with Nollywood. As the scene accelerates into rapid speed, the street images become blurred and eventually the screen fades to black before we see a landing aircraft. While Ike moves into the picture on the upcoming escalator and walks through the airport, his off-screen voice informs us of the reasons behind his journey (a promise to his dying mother). The cityscape of New York City in which the migration plot is situated (although it is not recognizable as New
York yet at this point) comes into view as Ike steps out of the airport. The film cuts back and forth between Ike looking around and up to the skyscrapers and shaky, blurry images of the nightly cityscape, accompanied by non-diegetic street sounds that are oddly similar to the ones we have heard before in the Nigerian city scene. The urban images are out of focus, blurry, and details are not recognizable. As Ike starts walking, the film moves into a rapid succession of New York City scenes in accelerated motion, which creates a dizzying and anonymous urbanity, signifying the underbelly of the urban center within which the protagonist eventually gets involved in 419 fraud schemes.6 Urbanity in God’s Own Country is in many parts associated with speed through accelerated motion and the urban setting is less distinctly recognizable (as New York City) as it is in the other films. The city itself becomes a location that signifies dread and fear and foreshadows Ike’s later descent into crime. Ike predominantly moves within spaces that are set in the underground of the cityscape and largely invisible or unrecognizable, for example the hotel kitchen in which only immigrants work and the bar and strip club in which 419 scams are plotted.

Subaltern laborscapes, like Appadurai’s other –scapes, constitute global spaces that form, change and dissipate as individuals enter the subaltern diaspora and rely on undocumented labor for survival. Farm labor has long been associated with low wages and the necessity of employing undocumented workers. Both Waalo Fendo and Las Cartas de Alou recreate this space, but both also subvert it into a space in which

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6 The number “419” references section 419 of the Nigerian Criminal Code, which prohibits the fee advancement schemes and letter impersonations that have come out of Nigeria in massive numbers within the past decade. At this point, “419” is used to refer to many different types of e-mail and letter scams and perpetrators are frequently called “419ers.” Although fee advancement scams originate not only in Nigeria, they are still commonly associated with Nigerian scammers, probably due to Nigeria’s reputation as a haven for corruption. The Nigerian government has launched a wide-spread campaign against 419 scams.
subaltern workers resist against the exploitation of their subalterity and move back into the cityspace with its greater variety of options. The urban centers of London and Liege provide spaces in which an invisible workforce serves and services the legal constituents of the nation state. The Baltic Hotel and Roger’s construction site are spaces that are multinational, multiethnic, and that always overlap with dominant laborscapes because subaltern workers rely on the link to the dominant laborscape to enter its subaltern counterpart. The overlap also constitutes the possibility of appearing to be part of the dominant laborscape, as is the case with Okwe.

In *La Promesse*, members of dominant laborscapes, Roger and Igor act as the gatekeepers and protectors who navigate between the spaces and manipulate both for the benefit of the respective other. *Kleine Freiheit* and *God’s Own Country*, despite their significantly different production backgrounds, show similarities in the visualization of a cityscape in which ethnoscape and laborscape overlap. *Kleine Freiheit*, unfortunately, completely erases an ethnoscape of African immigrants and thereby creates a problematic profile of African immigrants. In terms of depicting the homeland, however, these two films most clearly feature elements of nostalgia in which the homeland is idealized vis-a-vis and extremely alienating and hostile host nation state.

**Urbanity and Clandestine Labor in Accented Nollywood Films**

With *God’s Own Country*, my discussion of the illegal urban laborscape already includes an “accented Nollywood film,” but in this chapter I would like to further expand my analysis of cityscapes and clandestine labor by emphasizing the similarities between several films made by Nigerian émigré filmmakers (including Femi Agbeyewa). Above I have established the significance of the city as a place that offers niches for the
undocumented migrant to perform labor. I would like to begin my discussion with a more in-depth look at the Nigerian film industry because it seems to feature the most complex relationship between clandestine migration labor, urban centers, transnational cinemas, and the revision of imaginations.

A discussion of clandestine urban labor in accented Nollywood films necessitates an explanation of the special role that “the city” plays both for the production and settings of these productions. Nollywood conventions of filmmaking are highly visible in their diasporic counterparts and by including this group of films, I want to highlight that Hollywood movies cannot claim cinematic dominance to the degree they once could. The accent I propose to be on Nollywood is an accent placed on a filmmaking mode that is dominant in a non-Western context. Along with Bollywood, the Nigerian filmmaking industry therefore not only challenges Hollywood’s predominance, but also spreads out globally through the work of Nigerian émigré filmmakers.

In this section I am concerned with diasporic Nollywood films shot in the United States that have immigration as their central theme and are predominantly set in contemporary U.S. cities. I have selected these films because their stories are explicitly about the undocumented immigrant experience and the problem of finding work. In addition, these filmmakers convey fairly political messages, which are an important feature of accented cinema (but not of Nollywood), in that they contain open criticism towards both the home and the host nation. These filmmakers have not only produced truly transnational Nollywood films in terms of production locale, but have also taken on the theme of Nigerian immigrants who enter the U.S. and attempt to gain legal status or otherwise create a life for themselves as immigrants. The films therefore feature
narratives in which the home and the host country are always present, even if off-
screen, and in which the immigrant character struggles with the multiplicities of
diasporic identities.

Furthermore, diasporic Nigerian filmmakers reflect on their immigration
experience in settings that are reminiscent of the significance of urbanity for their “home
cinema,” Nollywood. Filmmakers in Nigeria’s megacity Lagos have produced
astounding numbers of video films in recent decades, but the significance of the city for
Nollywood film production does not stop there. Lagos itself is being reproduced, re-
imagined, and recreated in many of these films. The significance of the Nigerian urban
center for the country’s English-speaking film production is indisputable and the
production of English-speaking video films in Southern Nigeria is inextricably linked to
contemporary Lagos. With this phenomenon, Nollywood follows the cinematic tradition
of the cityscape as the setting as well as the symbol of national cinemas, such as Rome
for Italian, Berlin for German, and Paris for French national cinema.

In the development of Nollywood as a thriving and distinctly Nigerian film
industry, Lagos has become the icon and symbol of modern Nigerian filmmaking:
“[Nollywood] is a medium of the city. It is only a city like Lagos that could have
engineered and nurtured its birth” (Okome, “Nollywood: Spectatorship” 10). This is
significant for the purpose of my discussion because with re-appropriating the
convention of using urbanity as the prevalent setting, the films are an expression of a
space (the city) as both the place and object of the film, as well as the place where

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7 The same is true for the Northern Nigerian city of Kano with its thriving production of Hausa films. For
more information, see Brian Larkin’s groundbreaking book *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and
legitimate or fake copies will be sold. Here again, the illegal DVD vendors who are 
chased by police at the beginning of This America come to mind. Furthermore, in recent 
years, not only the distribution of Nollywood films, but also their production has become 
transnational and U.S.-based Nigerian filmmakers have produced Nollywood-style video 
that are set in American urban center such as New York City, Los Angeles, and Atlanta.8 
The global pockets that are at the heart of this discussion are the urban Nigerian 
immigrant communities in several U.S.-Nigerians accented Nollywood films who share a 
space because individuals sought a new life in the U.S. and with that vision became part 
of the diasporic community.

United States-based filmmakers Oliver Mbamara, Bethels Agomuoh, and Felix 
Nnorom, as well as Sola Osofisan and Eve Ikuenobe-Otaigbe, have concerned 
themselves, probably self-consciously, with the experience of Nigerian immigrants in the 
United States and by doing so, have blurred the boundaries between what is local, 
national, and global about Nollywood film conventions. Bethel Agomuoh and his fellow 
producers of This America, which I will discuss further below, Oliver Mbamara and Felix 
Nnorom, address their goal in making films that are about Nigerians, but are produced 
in the U.S.: “With the advantage of living in a technologically advanced country, we plan 
to slowly creep into the society and make Afro centric movies – told by African lead 
actors- written and directed by Africans – but marketed to the West” ("A Chat with…"). 
They suggest that the relocation of production from Nigeria to the U.S. not only offers 
some technological perks, but that it also makes Nollywood a truly transnational 
phenomenon, apart from its global distribution, within which filmmakers can continue to

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8 For more information on diasporic Nollywood, see Jonathan Haynes’ essay “The Nollywood Diaspora: A 
Nigerian Video Genre” (forthcoming).
address local issues, but on a global scale and to an extended audience through different access to marketing strategies catering to a Western audience. Given that “[The] audience of popular video film has a special role in Nollywood,” (Okome “Nollywood: Spectatorship” 5), the transnational filmmakers are now facing the challenge of using a very localized film tradition to appeal to a non-Nigerian audience.

As I have mentioned before, the Lagos cityscape is a recurrent image in Nollywood films because, as Haynes points out, “[location] shooting . . . creates a common realism, a mass of interchangeable, conventionally framed shots of Lagos streets and compounds, lavish parlors and ordinary bedrooms, hospitals and offices” (Haynes, “Nollywood in Lagos” 138). This interchangeability of how locations and spaces are represented is a feature that transcends into accented Nollywood films as well, in which case they represent how immigrant characters negotiate the local and the transnational space while (physically and mentally) navigating the diaspora. This is to say, accented Nollywood movies depict the Nigerian immigrant who travels abroad, but finds him/herself not only in a community of Nigerians, but in almost the same cityscapes (albeit different cities), parlors, and bedrooms, which make the film, once again, relatable. Okome maintains that “Nollywood is the medium of the Nigerian city” and goes on to describe the Nigerian mega city Lagos as a “quintessential postcolonial city” that is “heavy with a burden of the past but light-headed in its . . . drive to look ahead” (“Introducing 10). The reputation of Lagos as a place where everything is possible attracts young people with lots of visions from throughout Nigeria, but it also has a more universal appeal of the vibrant, diverse and worldly urban center.
Surely Lagos is more chaotic, less structured, and more flexible than most of its global counterparts. Nevertheless, the notion of the city as a place where one can achieve something is translated into the accented Nollywood films by recreating New York as a transnational and cosmopolitan cityscape. Significantly, Okome labels the urban video films “city video films” and maintains that “[the] city is foregrounded in the narrative as an ordering system, which is inescapable and all the characters must sign into its system of apprehending reality that is at once dubious and indescribable” (“Introducing” 3). In the immigrant experience, the foreign city is not only dubious in terms of being an unknown space and difficult to navigate, but also indescribable because of the ever-changing tension of expectation and reality. Accented Nollywood films establish urbanity as an important feature of the story in that it represents the urban immigrant space and its opportunities as well as dangers.

The films come across as unrelentingly realistic and the dramatic effect of typical Nollywood acting style and dialogue is considerably subdued. Furthermore the films feature symbols of transnational movement, such as airplanes, airports, taxis, trains, and so on. Like other recent Nollywood films that are set outside of Nigeria and are largely about Nigerians abroad, these accented films are “more restrained in style” (Haynes, “The Nollywood Diaspora”). The films make remarkably similar use of urban establishing shots of New York. In all cases, the city is unmistakable through the portrayal of well-known landmarks. This almost seamless transition from the Lagos cityscape to American urbanity not only suggests an adherence to Nollywood conventions, but localizes the transnational space by situating it within the character’s transnational experience.

9 Haynes observes the same for other Nollywood films set abroad.
Other diasporic Nollywood filmmakers have done the same, but in different American setting because they, too, used the city they themselves reside in. Pascal Atuma’s films, for example, are largely set in Los Angeles while Eve Ikuenobe-Otaigbe’s God Daughter takes place in Atlanta. Urbanity therefore remains recognizable and very much connected with the filmmakers’ identities in the diaspora, but the interplay between the local and the transnational adapts to the immigration theme of the respective diasporic Nollywood films. Lastly, the immigrant experiences are often tied to cities because of the existence of immigrant communities, better work opportunities, and, especially in the case of undocumented immigrants, greater ease of blending in with the masses and remaining unrecognizable as an illegal.

Bethel Agomuoh’s 2005 film This America introduces Eddie (Bethels Agomuoh himself) an immigrant from Nigeria who has married Anita, an American citizen, for a green card. Eddie receives a visit from his Nigerian cousin Ozobio whose intent is to return to Nigeria until he learns that he lost his job in Nigeria. He subsequently decides to stay in New York. However, lacking proper immigration papers and therefore unable to find work, Ozobio agrees to marry Anita’s friend Jeannie for his green card. The marriage however, soon turns sour and the film concludes with a shooting involving Jeannie and the police that leaves Ozobio motionless on the street, presumably injured or killed. In a parallel plotline, Eddie goes through relationship troubles of his own with his estranged wife who threatens to take his green card away.

As have mentioned in the introduction, This America opens with a view of a New York neighborhood in which street vendors sell CDs. A police car arrives and comes to a stop right beside them and as the vendors take off, they are chased by two policemen.
Urbanity is set up as a transnational space through becoming the work place of undocumented foreign workers. Self-consciously the film suggests the possibility that it itself is sold somewhere in urban America by an immigrant trying to survive. This mega-narrative of illegal labor introduces an important part of the relationship between immigration, labor, and the informal urban economy created by immigrants in American cities and the subversion of American consumerism into an urban underbelly of piracy, illegal trade, and illegal employment (as in God’s Own Country). Immigrants can survive, but are constantly under scrutiny. From here the film cuts to another scene in which protagonist Ozobio flees from his American gun-yielding wife. After a gunshot, the screen fades to black. These seemingly unrelated scenes (the end of the movie reveals the connection) take a fairly complex look at immigrant realities and introduces one of the central themes of the film, namely the vulnerability of migrants in the diasporic situation of difficult survival, illegal employment, and dependence on people.

This America also suggests that a part of the American dream remains completely foreclosed to the immigrant without proper papers. While the transnational urban setting offers opportunities for the migrant to integrate him/herself into a community within which s/he shares both the transnational vision and the localized purpose and design with others, this cannot happen detached from the nation state’s immigration regulations. For the transnational subject who does not have legal status or has gained legal status through illegal action, agency is severely limited and visions crushed as the imagination meets reality. This America represents this through Ozobio who is highly qualified for a position on Wall Street, but is unable to find one because he does not have the proper documents.
When he is looking for work, Ozobio walks past a Barclays Bank building and we see a sequence of signs and buildings, including a Wall Street sign, JP Morgan Chase, Guardian, and One New York Plaza. The diasporic setting is therefore not only implied to be a transnational place in its physical form, but in its representation it is tied to the immigrant’s attitude towards this particular locale and his or her imagination of the locale, for example the imagination of Wall Street as a place that promises wealth and success. Ozobio does have a successful job interview, but soon learns that he can only work with a green card. After the interview the city scenery changes its emphasis on Wall Street images to more general street scenes as if to signify the uncertainty that lies in this space for the immigrant and the accessibility of some spaces vs. others. On the other hand, however, the city is presented differently when Eddie receives his green card: we see the colors of the American flag reflected on a building next to which a pantomime is dressed up as the statue of liberty. Again the portrayal of the city reflects on the opportunities available or not available to the migrant and his/her attitude towards and position within the urban space.

The connection between the cityscape and immigrant labor is also obvious in God’s Own Country and Ike’s search for work closely resembles Ozobio’s unsuccessful attempts to do the same. When Ike sets out to find work, he, like Ozobio, looks very professional in a business suit and confidently walks through the doors of what appears to be an office building in an area that could be Wall Street. The scene cuts to another, but this time Ike is walking along a street that is lined with strip malls, car dealers, restaurants and nail studios in a fairly run-down part of the city that does not at all resemble Wall Street. Ike looks desolate. His suit jacket is gone and while his gait was
purposeful in the previous scene, he now walks slowly, looking down, and appearing defeated. The move from one cityscape to a different one resembles Ike’s move from being hopeful to the realization that the city does not hold the promise he had imagined.

Fittingly, it is in this scene (and this cityscape) that Ike is picked up by his friend’s younger brother Kwame who offers to work with him on 419 schemes involving credit cards and drugs. While Kwame offers Ike to join him in the schemes, they are standing on a highway bridge overlooking traffic and the skyline in the background. The fast-moving cars give an impression of urgency and a fast pace. As the cars are moving fast underneath him, Ike changes the road he has travelled on so far and considers a career in crime.\(^\text{10}\) Ike’s descent into crime and credit card fraud clearly refers to the reputation of Nigeria as a place of fraud and corruption and Nigerians as scammers.\(^\text{11}\)

Accented Nollywood film reflect on the significance of production circumstances and the filmmaker’s diasporic background. Nigerian émigré filmmakers are largely part of a diasporic Nigerian community and therefore still exposed to the experience of new immigrants. Although the filmmakers above have not themselves gone through the experience of living as an undocumented immigrant, they have witnessed cases in which Nigerians moved to the United States without proper papers. Accented Nollywood films address Nigerians in the diaspora, but Nigerian filmmakers in exile work hard on getting the films distributed in Nigeria and therefore make films that are appealing for audiences on both sides of the Atlantic (and beyond).

\(^\text{10}\) It is also interesting to note that the bridge from which he looks down resembles the bridge in Friedrich Schlaich’s 2000 film *Otomo* in which the African protagonist, and undocumented immigrant, is shot by German police. I will discuss this film in the next chapter.

\(^\text{11}\) One of the most recent expressions of this reputation was the representation of Nigerian thugs in Neill Blomkamp film *District 9* (South Africa, 2009), which drew significant protest from Nigerians as well as the Nigerian government.
CHAPTER 5
LOCALIZATION AND MEMORY: The CINEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF SPACE

Diasporic Perceptions of Place in Cinema

Based on the concept of the subaltern diaspora and the dynamics within and between the subaltern landscape and the “outside world,” I explore how the filmmaker envisions Africa and how its aesthetic representation complements the narrative. Africa has often been treated as a homogenous mass of impoverished and suppressed people and I want to examine if and how films about clandestine African migrants reinscribe this image of a downtrodden, poor, and corrupt continent. Furthermore, I am addressing the representation of the global North, both in the context of space and in the context of nation state where applicable. In her discussion of impossible homecomings in the works of Turkish-German director Fatih Akin, Daniela Berghahn addresses the traditional dichotomy of homeland and host nation in which “the host country is typically presented as a dark, claustrophobic prisonlike environment that sharply contrasts with memories of happier places back home” (Berghahn 15). In this chapter I highlight the cinematic representations of the homeland and the host space.

Nostalgia, Resentment, and the Re-branding of Nigeria

I have established in the previous chapter that Nollywood has become a truly transnational cinema in that the production of Nollywood films has crossed national boundaries. Sola Osofisan was among the reviewers of This America about Nigerian immigrants in New York and praised this production as “[very] enjoyable . . . Nigerians in America would be mostly familiar with the scenarios painted” (“Reviews and Comments . . .”). A common thread in films about transnational Nigerian migration is the
interaction between the seasoned immigrants who have established a life for themselves, and the newcomers who are struggling with illegality and/or impending loss of legal status. This situation produces a transnational discourse which these films communicate between established and newly-arriving immigrants and features seemingly explicit didactic modes of conversation. More specifically, I maintain that these films address the tension between migrant imagination and the representation of a social reality that the migrant encounters upon entering the imagined country of desire, which in this case is the U.S.

With the physical relocation of film production into exile, U.S.-based filmmakers show that the label "Nollywood," for all its pitfalls, is not dependent on a locality, but on features and aesthetics of filmmaking that have moved beyond merely being the result of improvising to allow filmmaking despite lack of funds. Instead, they have developed cinematic conventions that exist in their own right alongside those of their "-ollywood" and other world cinema counterparts. Osofisan, Agomuoh, Mbamara, Nnorom, and Ikuenenbe-Otaigbe have made films that remain true to the convention of accessibility by addressing the typical localized themes within a transnational context, namely migration and exile, and therefore create, in content and form, a fascinating transnational expression of Nollywood conventions. In his essay “Nollywood: Spectatorship, Audience, and the Sites of Consumption,” Okome points out that “one of the characteristics that mark Nollywood as an autonomous local cinematic expression is that it looks inward and not outward” (“Introduction 1). While the films I am discussing here are situated outside of Nigerian borders in production locale, setting, and spectatorship, and narrative, they, too, fall into Okome’s categorization of “local
cinematic expression” that is concerned with what is within the local, namely within the U.S.-based Nigerian immigrant community. Under these terms, the films are both local and transnational, both national and international, and both exilic and inward.

That Nollywood modes of production have left the confines of the nation state Nigeria is a sign of Nollywood’s transition into a less physically localized cinematic convention by expanding the meaning “of inward” to now include a transnational locale as well as a transnational imagination. Furthermore, these films do not only present stories of transnationalism by portraying Nigerian immigrants in the U.S., but they themselves embody this form of transnationalism in production, aesthetics, and most importantly for this discussion, discourse. Naficy argues that “although there is nothing common about exile and diaspora, deterritorialized peoples and their films share certain features, which in today’s climate of lethal ethnic difference need to be considered, even emphasized” (3).

Accented cinema, or films made by deterritorialized individuals, according to Naficy, needs to be viewed with the displacement of the filmmaker in mind because of its reflection on the films’ content and form. The films in question here therefore not only stay true to Nollywood conventions of filmmaking, but at the same time embody Naficy’s accented cinema in that they employ a discourse of fragmentation, displacement, alienation, and survival which re-inscribes the political and social concern of undocumented migration. In the context of this particular analysis, I foreground the significance of a “cinematic immigrant discourse” represented through dialogue because it is, just like the aesthetics of cinematography or mise-en-scène, reflective of the
fragmented nature of accented cinema, and it reflects on an edutainment discourse that is often associated with Nollywood.

In these films, migrant experiences that are often represented through statistics, legal documents, and fear- or pity-inducing newspaper clippings are literally given faces through employing Nollywood’s preference for close-ups. Haynes has described Nollywood as a “cinema of face” because of the many medium shots and close-ups that dominate Nollywood films. The immediacy of emotions conveyed through the emphasis on facial expressions serves a purpose of effect on the audience: “This is an aesthetic of immediate impact, plunging us into each moment and milking it for everything it is worth, rather than subordinating every element in the film to an overall sense of design” (139).

The predominant means of telling the story in the Nollywood tradition is through, often dramatically delivered, dialogue. Nollywood films traditionally “contain long sequences with little or no action but extensive, often repetitive dialogue. These sequences can be seen as tedious or mundane” (Moran 10). The immediacy of emotions as well as the foregrounding of dialogue gives Nollywood films their sense of urgency and drama, which is very appropriate for films that want to make both the content and the message relatable by creating familiarity even if the films are not set in familiar places. Therefore the films reproduce the ideology of a desirable destination America that circulates globally, but does so critically and through the perspective of the insider, the Nigerian, rather than the outsider, or the Western filmmaker and by means of cinematic aesthetics familiar to a Nollywood audience.
In the 2007 documentary *This is Nollywood*, Nigerian director Bond Emeruwa summarizes his view on filmmaking in Nigeria as follows: “Filmmaking in an economy like ours, I think, should be restricted to what I call ‘edutainment.’ So while we are entertaining, we should be able to educate” (*This is Nollywood*). Emeruwa continues to narrate that Nollywood films reach about 90% of the population and that they are the most productive way to inform and educate viewers. Indeed, many Nollywood films carry moral messages, statements, and warnings and can appear very didactic. The transnational potential of Nollywood as a means for exiles to stay in touch with their culture also resonates with actress Toyin Alausa: “we are finding that our stories, being done on film, is allowing us to impact on the culture of African children living abroad. And in some cases we are to start educating the children on their language and culture” (*This is Nollywood*).

The three films mentioned above represent this form of edutainment discourse formation. In addition, the fairly obvious didacticism, which I will address in more detail further below, gives the impression of an attempt to correct the image of America that draws immigrants even if they cannot obtain legal papers. The DVD case of *This America* indicates this ambition to correct this fantasy by including the phrase: “[This America] What we heard and what it is . . .” next to the pictures of the protagonists, one of whom wears traditional Nigerian dress to indicate that he has just arrived while the other, the seasoned Nigerian immigrant, is dressed in Western clothes. In fact, when asked why he made *This America*, Mbamara replied: “Many people back home have the wrong impression of the west. They have the assumption that life here is a bed of roses and that is not the case. . . . The main purpose is to ensure that Africans thinking of
relocating are psychologically prepared for the move” (An Interview…). The implied dialogue between the filmmaker aka seasoned immigrant and the immigrant-to-be is directly recreated in all three films.

Naficy emphasizes the significance of the filmmakers’ diasporic identity and their resulting relationship with the home and host culture: “[like] the exiles, people in the diaspora have an identity in their homeland before their departure, and their diasporic identity is constructed in resonance with this prior identity” (14, emphasis in original). Naficy goes on to argue that the diaspora “is a collective, in both its origination and its destination” (14). In all films, this collective is assumed through the interaction of people with the same origin and the same destination, but it is also presented as fragmented and strained by differing perceptions and imaginations of that origin and destination. This leads to the migrant-specific communication and processes of discourse correction regarding America as the “promised land” that takes place between legalized Nigerian expatriates and Nigerians without proper papers. For immigrants with valid immigration documents and work permits, economic survival is obviously less of a challenge than for those without legal papers, because their predominant concern is avoiding detection, which profoundly limits their opportunities to ensure economic survival for themselves, families, and communities at home. For the transnational subject who does not have legal status or has gained legal status through illegal action, agency is severely restricted, which shapes discourse formation in the negotiation of the new transnational living space.

With Missing in America, New Jersey-based Nigerian director, webmaster, and poet Sola Osofisan addresses the multiple layers of challenges that the subaltern
diaspora poses. Protagonist Agatha travels from Lagos to New York with fraudulent documents and under the pseudonym Tonia to find her husband Fela (Sola Osofisan himself) who has been in the U.S. for five years, but recently visited Nigeria. During this visit Agatha became pregnant and unable to reach her husband by phone or letter, she now tries to find and inform him of the pregnancy. She visits the address he left for her, only to learn that he has not been there in years. Unable to find shelter after being turned down by a Nigerian expatriate who used to be Fela’s roommate, but wants nothing to do with newly-arrived compatriots, she wanders aimlessly through a hostile New York and New Jersey landscape. Eventually she collapses at the doorstep of Bimbo, an established and successful Nigerian immigrant who reluctantly takes her in. Bimbo suspects that Agatha is an illegal immigrant who wants to stay in the United States, but eventually believes her story and helps her to investigate Fela’s whereabouts. With Bimbo’s help, Agatha tracks down her husband and discovers that he is now married to an American woman in an attempt to obtain a green card. After revealing the truth to Fela’s green card wife, who in turn threatens to report him to the authorities, Agatha decides to return to Nigeria to raise her child with the help of her family. In a parallel plot, Bimbo finds love and enters a relationship with another legal and established Nigerian immigrant.

The opening credits are accompanied by establishing shots of the urban center New York City in which the plot is set, but the sequence also reflects on the transnational journey of the protagonist. A fade-out shot of New York’s statue of liberty is replaced by a train arriving at the station and then again by shots of fairly generic New York street scenes, presumably of Time Square. These images then again fade into
overhead shots of Ellis Island and what might be Manhattan Bridge, as well as several New York street scenes. The sequence ends with an overhead shot of Manhattan which slowly fades out and into the beginning of the narrative. The opening sequence emphasizes the role of New York as a place of immigration, which is represented by landmarks such as the statue of liberty and its association with freedom, but also through images that are associated with immigration and journeying, such as Ellis Island and the train station, as well as travel images, such as tourists snapping pictures. This overall portrayal of the urban space creates an impression of openness, grandiosity, and vibrancy. After the opening sequence, the film immediately cuts to a medium shot of Agatha at the doorstep of a New Jersey apartment. While the transition might be abrupt, it also highlights that the personal immigrant story remains embedded in the larger picture of the “America Dream.”

During the course of the film, Agatha moves through a variety of different spaces. After learning that her husband is not at the New Jersey address, Agatha makes her way back to the city. We see her walking though a rainy and dreary New Jersey suburb along a street that is completely empty except for the occasional car. It is raining and Agatha is obviously not dressed warmly enough. This is a typical example of what Haynes has called the hardship/alienation sequence that are so often employed in Nollywood films that are set abroad, “in which the protagonists trudge disconsolately, carrying their shoulder bags, through the streets of a foreign city” (Haynes, “The Nollywood Diaspora” 7). The non-diegetic music emphasizes a sense of alienation and loneliness that recreates the position of the new immigrant in this diasporic space.

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1 Missing in America features a remarkable amount of exterior shots, which is rather atypical for Nollywood films. Traditionally most of the action in Nigerian video films takes place in interior settings.
Symbols of movement and journey typical for accented cinema are used here as well, such as train stations and the inside of the train when Agatha travels from New Jersey back to New York City. When Agatha exits Penn Station the film shows us a changed cityscape. The weather here, too, is grey and rainy and despite the presence of people hurrying along as well as the notorious traffic, Agatha again appears lonely and isolated. Not only her suitcase, but also her reluctant way of walking slowly, as if searching for something, marks her as a non-local. We are now looking at the city from her perspective and instead of looking down through overhead shots, we are forced to look up at the skyscrapers that rise up almost threateningly under a dark grey sky.

The images of New York as a dream destination for hopeful immigrants that introduced the film have now turned into a representation of urbanity that is confusing and alienating. Unable to find Fela in New York City and refused a place to sleep by Fela’s former roommate, Agatha again returns to New Jersey and once more we see her walking along the suburban street, only this time the scenery seems even more hostile and on top of it all, it is now snowing. It seems as if with every disappointment the protagonist experiences and the prospect of finding a place for the night fading, the outside shots become more dreary and depressing. Interestingly, the portrayal of the city changes once again in a later scene. Agatha is in a taxi on her way to where Fela supposedly lives. During her conversation with the taxi driver, who speaks to her as if she were an immigrant who will “understand in a few months” what it means to be more established, a sequence of urban images appears, including shots of New York skyscrapers and a rather beautiful overhead shot of the city and the river. But as soon
as the taxi driver leaves her behind, taking with him her suitcase and purse, we see her once again walking through rainy and dreary New Jersey suburbia.

Although the film does not actually show Agatha’s journey from Nigeria, the theme of navigating the foreign space is quite obviously represented through prolonged scenes of Agatha walking through different landscapes. While Missing in America features the typical establishing shots of urbanity that are so often seen in Nollywood films, it also includes more outside scenes in which the character navigates the cityscape, which is not conventional for Nollywood films, but very typical for accented cinema. The explicit positioning of Agatha in New York City street scenes and empty suburban New Jersey sceneries emphasizes Agatha’s foreignness and her detachment from the transnational location for which she is not prepared. On the other hand, Bimbo’s suburban home along with her expensive car suggests that the all-American life is after all accessible for immigrants, but only for those who arrive with a plan.

At the end of the film and after learning about her husband’s green card marriage, Agatha’s voiceover informs us that she is leaving to go back to Nigeria while shots of New York street scenes fade into each other. Her off-screen voice suggests that she does not participate in the street life of American consumerism and potential success. She remains removed from the urban space because she does not desire to become part of the diaspora, which she does not believe she could negotiate as an illegal immigrant because she is lacking, in her own words, the “special hunger.” The images of New York City that accompany the voiceover are heavily marked by

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2 Haynes observes that in Nollywood films, both domestic and diasporic, that are set abroad, the “characters simply dumped suddenly into the foreign environment, a new city, where they have to make or keep social relationships in order to obtain the necessary food, shelter, and employment” (“The Nollywood Diaspora” 7).
consumerism and show the typical New York shopping scenery with flashy and classy storefronts and pedestrians carrying large shopping bags. This is a variation of Haynes’ observation of the shopping sequence, “in which the traveler is seen in the landscape of consumerism . . . , in a giddy celebration of disposable income” (“The Nollywood Diaspora” 8). Instead, Agatha physically stays out of the consumer culture because she is not willing to pay the price for being part of it. Although the film acknowledges, through Bimbo, that it is possible to settle down and live the American dream even as an immigrant, it emphasizes that this is certainly not true for everyone.

In *Missing in America* and *This America*, immigration tropes are consciously placed and the films are first and foremost about the Nigerian immigrant experience while the migrant experience is only part of a complex series of events in Ikuenobe-Otaigbe’ *The God Daughter*. However, the relationships between the characters in the films exemplify the ever-changing diasporic identity in terms of how they incorporate their perceptions of both the United States and Nigeria into their interaction and evaluation of themselves and each other. All films clearly demarcate the line between the seasoned immigrant and the newcomer and within this dynamic, the settled character takes on the role of the mentor: as a legalized immigrant, Bimbo of *Missing in America* takes on the responsibility to teach Agatha about the realities of America as well as of Nigerian immigrants in America. In *This America*, Eddie assumes the same role for Ozobio and in *The God Daughter*, Nina and Basil take the newcomer Biu under their wing.
The films emphasize their edutainment component through dialogue, which explicitly recreates the importance of identity within the dynamics of teacher-student relationships that are suggested in the narratives. *Missing in America* re-inscribes the ignorance of newly-arrived Agatha through portraying the differences between American and Nigerian culture. When Agatha asks for tea, Bimbo’s corrective lecture highlights her position of the experienced immigrant: “I don’t have tea! This is America. We are all coffee junkies” (*Missing in America*) before she proceeds to serve her the all-American staple, chicken soup. The association of herself with America through the use of “we” clearly separates the women based on their degree of familiarity with American culture. Later in the film, Bimbo suggests getting fast food for dinner because she does not cook, which is far from acceptable from Agatha who insists on cooking Nigerian food. Bimbo’s identification with what is American is further highlighted through her association with typical Americana symbols such as her suburban home and luxurious car that are put on display to dazzle the non-privileged Nigerian newcomer. At the same time, Bimbo’s "Americanness" is depicted alongside her alienation from contemporary Nigerian culture. The fragmentation and negotiation of the immigrant identity suggested by Naficy is portrayed through stereotyping and rebranding Nigeria as a place where people don’t understand the reality of America.

Bimbo reacts to a call from her brother, who is in Nigeria, with annoyance, especially when she learns of the contemporary Nigerian practice of flashing.\(^3\) It seems as if Nigeria has become a somewhat obscure place full of people who do not

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\(^3\) To flash someone is to call the person and hang up before s/he can answer the phone. This indicates a request to return the call and take on the charges.
understand the reality of America, call her in the middle of the night: “A five to six hour time difference is a lot, but people back home don’t seem to understand that” (*Missing in America*), and pass on her address to strangers (Agatha). Furthermore, Bimbo repeatedly accuses Agatha of being naïve and “stupid” for coming to America without proper contacts and invading the privacy of a stranger (herself).

The rift between the Americanized immigrant and the Nigerian, both at home and newly arrived, takes place in a transnational space in which differences are communicated with a rhetoric of “me vs. them” and in which the characters are technically part of the same (Nigerian) community, but are divided by their differing transnational identities. With the alienation from the home country and identification with the new transnational space comes a sentiment of suspicion with regards to Nigerians abroad and those who have arrived recently. A friend of Agatha’s husband refuses to let her sleep in his apartment because “this is what you learn in America. You never give the JJC an inch or he will take the mile.” 4 But the newly arrived immigrants are not only a nuisance; they are also seen as a potential threat to the reputation of legalized Nigerians: “There are some that give hardworking immigrants a bad name” (*The God Daughter*). When Bimbo learns of Agatha’s pregnancy, she explicitly scolds her and accuses her of being “just like all the other Nigerian women. Here to get citizenship for your baby!” (*Missing in America*). This suspicion is unfounded because Agatha does not intend to stay, but it reflects on the ever-changing imagination, not only of the host country, but also of the home country Nigeria.

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4 JJC is Nigerian slang for a newly arrived immigrant and stands for “Johnny Just Come.”
With the explicit “Americanization” of characters and their suspicious and sometimes condescending attitude towards Nigeria and Nigerians, the films illustrate that imagination does not only shape the migrant’s perception of the host country, it also changes that of the country left behind. In the films, it seems as if with the green card comes a questionable enlightenment of sorts that Nigerians at home are greedy, that newly arrived immigrants are either naïve or corrupt, and that assimilation to American culture is tough but necessary. In order to become a reputable resident in America, certain rules have to be followed and certain things are to be avoided and the new immigrant better learn fast. The exchange between the characters suggests that there is no collective perception of the homeland within the immigrant community because the transnational space has created differing degrees of identification with both the home and the host country.

Furthermore, Nigeria itself appears in many conversations not as a place of longing, but a place a person has left behind an exposure to which, for example through meeting newly arrived immigrants, potentially creates annoyance and inconvenience: “You don’t know how disruptive and cumbersome it can be to receive unexpected visitors from Nigeria” (*Missing in America*). Bimbo and Agatha eventually overcome their differences and collaborate in finding Agatha’s husband (and love for Bimbo in the process), but the initial hostility between them is largely depicted through the lens of transcultural differences and suggests the complexity of differing immigrant experiences even if the migrants share a country of origin. As *This America* illustrates, it is not always the allure of America, but also the instability of Nigeria that leads to the immigrant’s wish for legalization. Ozobio only seeks to stay in America after he learns
that his job is lost and hears about the currently unstable political condition in Nigeria. Throughout the film, Nigeria is largely presented as a place of unrest and instability. Upon Ozobio’s expression of hope that the most recent political coup might change the political situation for the better, Eddie replies: “Ozobio, tell me, how is this coup different from the rest of them? [Government members will] stuff their pockets with money that belongs to the people. That’s what their predecessors have done in the past” (*This America*). The longing for a return to the homeland is replaced with a longing for the opportunity of not having to return, which is a significant factor in the representation of illegal immigration because of the immigrant’s insecure status.

The film addresses the complexity of illegal migration in that it acknowledges that transnational migration is not only about entering a country, but also about leaving another and not having to return. The negative rebranding of Nigeria on part of the legalized immigrant contrasts the notion of the idealized homeland suggested by Naficy, but could be an expression of the tension between the desire to return and the diasporic identity rooted in exile. This struggle, however, is not only created by the immigration policies of the host country: “Once you get into this country, it’s not that easy to get out. That is what some of us have to do to send money home” (*Missing in America*). Fela’s lament not only offers a perspective on America, but also on Nigeria, which once again becomes a place where people expect things from America that it cannot necessarily deliver. Immigrants are therefore not only pressured by the limitations of their
undocumented status, but by the reputation of America in Nigeria as being a place where anyone can make money.\(^5\)

While Nigeria is turned into a space from which the immigrant is bound to be alienated, the image of America as land of easy access to opportunity is consistently corrected. The desirability to stay in America is directly linked with the immigrant’s possession of papers, therefore the green card is one of the most prevalent divisive symbols in the films and it is portrayed as both object of desire and object of corruption. Significantly, the importance of the green card is communicated from the established immigrant to the rookie and is part of the discourse that dominates the relationships between the legalized and the undocumented migrant. Early on in *This America*, Eddie informs Ozobio: “For every immigrant in America, there are two types of marriages: marriage by choice and marriage by necessity.” The possession of legal papers furthermore indicates a degree on “Americanness” because all legalized characters are also the most Americanized although they have not necessarily been in the country longer than those without permanent residency. The emphasis on the green card as an object of desire but also of corruption complicates the way in which it is often imagined, namely as a key to the door of opportunity. Instead, obtaining the green card becomes a dangerous process and its allure goes beyond a legalized stay and takes on existential importance: “As far as America is concerned, you don’t exist without a green card, without a social security card” (*This America*). Ironically, instead of “coming into existence” (namely “becoming official” in America) by obtaining the green card, Ozobio

\(^5\) The theme of pressure on the immigrant to succeed abroad is illustrated in another film by a Nigerian expatriate. In *My American Nurse*, Pascal Atuma’s protagonist travels home to Nigeria where he faces disappointment and ridicule about his lack of success abroad.
quite possibly gets killed by his green card wife, which suggests that the promise of security that the document is supposed to provide does not hold up.

However, the absence of the green card creates anxiety and dependence which is illustrated through Ozobio and Eddie who both initially stay with abusive wives because their legal status depends on upholding the marriage for the legally required length of time: “If I divorce Anita now, I kiss my green card goodbye. She is my only hope for a green card” (This America). Both Missing in America and This America include highly dramatic scenes in which the green card wives threaten their Nigerian husbands with reporting them to the authority and therefore initiating their deportation. This America introduces the scenario of the blackmailed husband early on when Eddie refuses to give his American wife Anita the drug money she asks for and instead attempts to take their son with him. She tells him: “I will call immigration on your ass. You know, I’m gonna send you back to Africa!” (This America). In a strikingly similar scene in Missing in America, Agatha’s husband is threatened by his American wife when she learns that he already has a wife in Agatha who unexpectedly appears at their doorstep. The green card therefore becomes a key symbol not only of access to opportunity, but also as an object of tension because it leads to corruption, it leads husbands astray, and it initiates unhappy marriages with unwanted children. With his marriage to Jeannie, Ozobio betrays his promise to his Nigerian fiancée to return home.

Similarly, Agatha’s husband betrayed her by entering another marriage without her knowledge. Both films therefore turn the imagination of the green card as a way to opportunity into a discourse that suggests that the greed for the green card destroys families and, since it is conceivable that Ozobio does not survive the shooting at the end
of *This America*, quite literally lives. And even when green card marriages seem to turn into loving unions, those are also doomed to fail. Eddie eventually reaches his goal and is granted his temporary residence card after a successful immigration interview. And although at the same time, his marriage to Anita seems to develop into a legitimate relationship, the film does not allow a happy ending for Eddie who breaks up with her after learning that she had an affair.

The bleak ending of *This America* emphasizes the illegal immigrants’ dependence and vulnerability and suggests that America is an immigrant’s battlefield. Ozobio’s question: “How do you survive in such a selfish society” is met with the (rather defensive) reply of an American character: “We are not selfish – we are simply independent. You fight your own fight. That’s the American way” (*This America*). It is suggested that American individualism necessitates neglecting the communal concern that is represented as part of the Nigerian identity for the sake of embracing American individuality. Ozobio’s interference with a neighborly domestic dispute and subsequent near arrest is met with amusement on Eddie’s part: “As long as it is not happening in my apartment, it is not my business. You have to learn to look the other way” (*This America*). The irony of this statement is revealed at the end of the film when Ozobio, who is supposed to look the other way during the neighbors’ violent clash, becomes the victim of his wife’s domestic assault. Agatha learns a similar lesson when she meets the former roommate of her husband Fela who informs her that he has not seen Fela in a long time. She questions their friendship and he replies: “This is America. We could be neighbors and not talk to each other for months. We would still be friends” (*Missing in America*). And in a conversation with a taxi driver during which Agatha complains about
her hostess, she laments Bimbo’s lack of hospitality and wonders if “America does that to people” (Missing in America).

America is consistently redefined, or rebranded, as place of struggle and a necessity for survival skills. The god daughter Biu spends her day sleeping late and staying out at night, and at some point her fed-up uncle tells his wife: “She better adjust her sleeping schedule. However else is she going to survive in this country?” (The God Daughter). Later in the film, Biu is told by her Nigerian boyfriend (who is also her pimp) that “this is America. You either eat or get eaten.” The image of America as a place of opportunity is once again replaced with tropes of warfare and survival of the fittest (accompanied by the visuals of the urban jungle of New York and Atlanta). This is further exemplified during Agatha’s confrontation with her married-again husband during which he tries to explain his decision to marry for the green card: “Nothing here is like what you hear at home. You do not have any idea what it takes to live in this country as an illegal alien. I have suffered” (Missing in America). This expression of expectations is echoed in all these films and it is repeatedly expressed that living in America without legal documents is a constant struggle for survival which is bound to corrupt the immigrant. These images of warfare and survival are extended into an interesting distinction between the good and the bad Nigerian immigrant. The good immigrant is the hard working individual while the bad Nigerian immigrants deceive the women they marry for the green card, make a living through fraud and deception, and lie to their families in Nigeria about the ways in which they have acquired the money and goods they send home on a regular basis.
The characters acting as mentors of sorts are also concerned with protecting the reputation of the Nigerian immigrant community. Bimbo blames Agatha for only coming to America to ensure her child becomes a citizen because to her, that is common practice among “the bad” Nigerians. Biu’s uncle is also concerned with the reputation of his wife’s god daughter: “You know these [Nigerian] girls. Once they come into this country, they are hot cake. Guys everywhere. Before you know it, they have ruined their reputation” (The God Daughter). In Biu’s case, the continuation of the story proves her uncle right as she becomes part of the criminal underbelly of the Nigerian immigrant community in which she works as a prostitute and engages in theft and similar crimes. For this particular part of the collective, legal status is not important because they are, at least in this film, far beyond any concern with the law.

But the films not only portray the (sometimes obnoxiously heavy-handed) instruction of the rookie immigrant, they also offer examples of how the rookies wise up. In a voiceover at the end of Missing in America, alongside visuals of the urban jungle of New York City, Agatha tells, if not lectures, the viewer about what she has learned: “I am free to go back home now. America. America is a dream. For some it becomes a beautiful reality. For others, it is just a nightmare. It takes a special hunger to live in America as an illegal immigrant.” And because she is not hungry enough, she decides to return to Nigeria. The voiceover summarizes the trope of America as an imagination that can hold true for some and not for other. Agatha’s non-diegetic voice suggests that she can now speak as an authority after what she has gone through. This America ends on a similar note with a summary of its overall message, but does so through song. During the end credits, Soprano Lisa Marie sings a song written by Oliver Mbamara
(who also wrote the story the film is based on). The lyrics, like the voiceover at the end of *Missing in America*, heavy-handedly drive home the film’s theme: “Into this land we have come. Strangers we are to the culture. America. . . . We come not to live here. We find out we cannot live. . . . And though dearly we miss home, we have reason to stay here, America. . . . And for problems that we face, America, we shall not blame America.” (*This America*). In both cases, the message remains ambiguous in that it emphasizes the hardship newly arriving Nigerians will face, but also acknowledges that for some immigrants, there is no return. Instead of homeland nostalgia, the films emphasize the tension of adapting to a new transnational space.

The aforementioned *This America* features a beginning sequence that closely resembles that of *Missing in America*, which establishes the urban setting through a series of shots of New York City. However, this film features more realistic and fewer stereotypical New York City landmarks. Besides busy street scenes and people hurrying along Grand Central Station, the camera moves up skyscrapers and shows an American flag. The images are less romanticized than in *Missing in America*, but they, too, include the train station as a symbol of journeying. Eventually, the film cuts from the top of a skyscraper to the protagonist, Eddie, in his taxi. The transition from the establishing shots of the city to the beginning of the narrative is once again abrupt, going from long shots to medium and close-ups without transition and creating a sense of moving from the larger transnational context, signified by the cosmopolitan urban center, to the more personal and intimate story. Unlike most other Nollywood films, but like *Missing in America*, much of the plot-related action takes place outside, and conveys the impression that this film is “deeply rooted in the context of New York”
There are plenty of brief establishing shots of different parts of the city and not all of them are related to the migration theme of the film. The outlook on migration is just as pessimistic as it is in Missing in America. Agatha never truly makes it “inside” America and instead remains outside not only American consumer culture, but also the Nigerian expatriate community in New York. Ozobio, on the other hand, integrates himself into this space through his green card marriage, but he remains vulnerable and ultimately becomes a victim of this vulnerability.

Agbeyewa’s God’s Own Country is the only Nollywood film herein, except for a very brief scene in Missing in America, that is partially set in Nigeria. However, apart from the opening shot of the Nigerian city street, all Nigerian scenes are in rural setting and form a stark contrast to American urbanity. Following his unsuccessful search for a job and subsequent involvement in crime, Ike’s mind wanders back to rural Nigeria and the accompanying voiceover marks it as a place of solace: “Where I once found chaos I now find focus.” After experiencing America as a place of betrayal and lies in which he is forced to engage in crime and fraud, he longs for the peace and familiarity of Nigeria represented through the calmness of villages and nature, as opposed to the busy American urban center which for him represents 429 scams and deceit. The “truth” about “God’s Country” is significantly spoken in a graffiti-adorned back alley by the back entrance of a strip club. The thug who scammed Ike tells him “I would have told you the truth about god’s own country. How we are treated like dogs.” Throughout the film, America is a hopeless place for immigrants and there are no established well-to-do Nigerian expatriates to be found anywhere. God’s Own Country offers an interesting take on the space Nigeria, which is commonly associated with crime, fraud, and
corruption. For Ike, America is the place that introduces him to criminal activity while Nigeria is a place that promises peace and a reconnection with home. Agbeyewa’s film is the only one in which Nigeria is re-branded into a desirable space to which the protagonist would return if it offered more opportunity. At the same time, Ike never gains access to the established immigrant community in New York like his counterparts Ozobio and Agatha.

The edutainment discourse expresses the difficulties of navigating a transnational space in which the migrant is legally non-existent and severely limited in his or her movement. The use of characters who act as mentors reveals a rather obvious didacticism, but also emphasizes the transnational tension among immigrants of the same origin and with the same destination, but with differing diasporic identities. This tension reflects on the fragmentation and alienation that accompanies exilic filmmaking and its peculiar position between transnational locales. Migration, and especially transcultural migration, always necessitates forms of identity negotiation and the byproduct of identity formation in terms of adapting to the new environment is a process of “rebranding” both the host nation and the home country (Elsaesser). To a large extent, the films rebrand America to correct misconceptions of a land of plenty while to a certain extent also rebranding Nigeria. In this sense, the narratives reformulate the existing discourse in an attempt to “edutain” the audience about the realities of migration. Media images create imaginations in the viewer and the imaginations of America trigger desires to migrate. In the case of the films I discussed, the negotiation of the transnational discourse serves not only to create these imaginations, but to correct existing ones. The production of films about a place of desire within that very
place of desire by filmmakers who are living the desired live in the diaspora creates an
ambiguous message of: “don’t try as I have tried although I succeeded.” And of course,
the question is if and when these films will reach the audience that would be in the
position of the undocumented and therefore struggling characters because of the
problems of distribution, as Oliver Mbamara points out: “most of my movies have not
been released in Nigeria because of several logistic factors. But we hope to release
them soon over there” (“An Interview . . .”).

The films succeed in separating individual migration experiences from the macro-
level discourse of diaspora and transnationalism. While many European art house
cinema and Hollywood films present the experience of undocumented migration in
abstracted forms that are conveyed through subtle cinematography and comparably
subdued dialogue, these films quite literally tell it how it is or how the diasporic
filmmaker sees it. The transnational mode of production and the exilic position of the
filmmaker create an interesting and innovative new spin on Nollywood and certainly
these films exploit the conventions that work for them, such as the dialogue and focus
on individuals and their interaction. Characters have histories and relationships.

**Alienation, Loneliness, and Death**

In his stark and caustic 1999 film *Otomo* about the real events surrounding the
death of an African immigrant and two police officers in Stuttgart, Germany, Frieder
Schlaich, like the Dardenne brothers and Montxo Armendáriz, employs conventions of a
“cinema of the affected,” in which “the focus was unremittingly on alterity as a seemingly
unsoluble problem, on conflict of either intercultural or intracultural variety” (Burns). The
cinema of the affected is commonly associated with German films about Turkish guest
workers, in which the Turkish woman suffers under both the patriarchal suppression of her husband and her alienating reality in a xenophobic Germany. While it is true that with German filmmakers like the aforementioned Yüksel Yavuz and his even more successful colleague Fatih Akin, German filmmaking seems to have moved beyond the cinematic downtrodden Turk, the same cannot be said for African immigrants in German cinema.

With Otomo, Schlaich cinematically imagines the last day in the life of Frederic Otomo, a Cameroonian asylum seeker whose seemingly mundane encounter in a subway over a ticket lead to a manhunt across Stuttgart and the deaths of two policemen and Otomo himself. The film begins with a dark room illuminated only by the reflection of the street lights on the ceiling. Suddenly a match is struck and someone lights a candle. The now visible alarm clock shows the time as almost 4am. We see Frederick Otomo’s face in close-up and his eyes move around, as if he has just woken up. Through a sequence of extreme close-up shots, we witness what appears to be Otomo’s morning routine. Like voyeurs we watch him doing pushups and picking clothing from the wash line and listen to sinister music until the film cuts to a medium close-up of Otomo in the shower. At first we only see his back and after the darkness of the room, the white tiles seem very bright against his dark body and have a prison-like quality as if to suggest that the black body is engulfed by a white prison. The music has stopped and the diegetic sound of the shower adds a new urgency to the events on the screen. Next Otomo is back in his room and begins to gather his belongings and pack a suitcase. When he stops to look in the mirror, a stoic expression is reflected back to us. The blankness of Otomo’s stare creates a heightened sense of discomfort on part of the
viewer because being so close to the intimacy of his room contrasts the unfamiliarity of the face in the mirror. With this first scene, Schlaich establishes that Otomo personifies the stranger we are afraid of and who fascinates us at the same time.

The same sense is evoked when the two policemen who will later chase Otomo through the city see him for the first time. At this point, he has not yet become a fugitive. The police car is parked in front of the employment agency in which Otomo inquires in search for work. Otomo stands at the illuminated window, framed by the window frame. This time, we see him from a distance and the darkness outside the window evokes the image of a voyeur hiding in the dark. The voyeuristic gaze follows Otomo throughout the film. A stranger at the employment agency follows him to the tram and continuously stares at him. In the tram, Otomo notices the stare of a woman. Otomo must be aware that people look at him at all times. He cannot blend in like Okwe can in *Dirty Pretty Things* because in 1989 Stuttgart did not have a sizable African community. The shower scene with Otomo’s black body against the stark white tiles comes to mind again.

After a quarrel on the tram during which Omoto assaults a conductor, he flees the scene and runs through a tunnel. The quarrel ensues over a misunderstanding regarding Otomo’s tram ticket, which, as is revealed later, was indeed valid. Next we find him on the periphery of the city, as if the tunnel functions as a symbolic transition from marginalized black immigrant to highly visible criminal outcast. In a garden colony, Otomo breaks into shed. A close-up of his face does not reveal much emotion, but the following overhead shot of the Stuttgart cityscape reinforces the distance between the fugitive African immigrant and the dominant culture space that is now inaccessible and whose constituents are on the hunt. The trope of voyeurism and invasion of Otomo’s personal space continues when
police search the bag he left behind, which contains his most personal possessions. The camera slowly pans over letters, photographs and other personal items spread out on the table for all to see and stops at a pair of hands flipping through a small stack of personal documents. Even when Otomo kneels to pray in a church, he turns around to realize that he is being watched.

Schlaich’s representation of the host nation Germany makes extensive use of the contrast between interior and outside settings. In traditional “cinema of the affected,” interior locations often represent claustrophobic imprisonment. In *Otomo*, however, the outside cityscape feels claustrophobic because it evokes a panopticon in which an individual never knows when s/he will be watched. Otomo’s journey through the periphery of Stuttgart in search of an opportunity to flee the country takes him through gray and industrialized cityscape. The alienation trope is ever-present, but Schlaich gives us some glimmers of hope. At a pub in which Otomo orders coffee, the waitress serves him free breakfast and later, when the police inquire about the fugitive’s whereabouts, she acts as if he was never there. In the tranquility of a river park, he meets the only people who take a genuine interest in him. The almost immediate connection between German citizen Gisela, brought about through the intervention of Gisela’s granddaughter Simone, and Otomo is an entirely new experience for the immigrant who in eight years in Stuttgart has never seen the inside of a German apartment.

In addition to the presence of a hostile host nation, the absence of the homeland gains significance through highlighting the necessity to conceal real names and nationalities. Otomo lives in Germany under a false name and in order to gain asylum,
he claims that he is from Liberia. With his real identity as a Cameroonian from Douala with the name Frederic Otomo he does not gain access to the privilege of being allowed to stay in Germany. Otomo’s fraudulent papers are a thin veil of protection against deportation. The practice of assuming an alternative African nationality works only as long as African immigrants remain “African,” and therefore indistinguishable from each other. Schlaich highlights the general lack of knowledge on the part of both German authorities and German citizens. Even the sympathetic Gisela is fascinated by his “Africanness” and tells him that she engages in African dance. Ironically, the music she plays is Senegalese (and by one of the few African musicians who is known outside of Africa, Youssou N’Dour).

The absence of Otomo’s home space of Cameroon makes sense in the context of what Schlaich wanted to accomplish with the film, but it also erases a large part of the character’s person and keeps him confined within the limits of an “illegal” identity. In addition, Schlaich uses several examples of stereotypical racism on part of the German characters, but the “generic Africa” he brings in to correct racist perceptions upholds the image of “Africa” as a space the character escaped from. Otomo therefore holds up a mirror to confront German racism, but keeps the human connections between German and African individuals confined within stereotypical exchanges about African dancing and “how do you like it here?” The film, like other European films about clandestine migration, does not to justice to the complexity of Africa in terms of its vast variety of nation states. Las Cartas de Alou similarly de-emphasizes the spaces from which the clandestine immigrants have come. On the other hand, accented filmmakers,
among them the aforementioned Sissako and Soudani as well as the Nigerian filmmakers in the diaspora, resist the recreation of “Africa” and foreground the nation.

_Clando_ by Jean-Marie Téno constitutes an example in which the migration experience is very closely tied to the political entity of the nation state Cameroon, as well as the cityscape of Douala. Similarly to the engagement of Nollywood films with Nigeria as a nation state and as the homeland, _Clando_ is concerned with the nation rather than the continent and creates a palimpsestic layering of locale-bound histories and social realities. In this film, the clandestine migration experience is both a direct result and a reflection of life in the Cameroonian city space.

### The Subaltern Diaspora as a Place of Healing

The films I have discussed so far, with the exception of _Heremakono_ and _Waalo Fendo_, are largely set in the diaspora and the home country is evoked through connections and exchanges rather than on-screen settings. One film that is set in both the home and the host nation is Jean-Marie Téno’s 1996 film _Clando_ (_Clandestine_, Cameroon, France, and Germany). Téno was born in Cameroon in 1954 and immigrated to Paris in 1977 (only five years after Soudani). He considers himself a filmmaker whose task it is to make people aware of colonialism, but also of dictatorship and corruption in Africa. His documentary _La tête dans les nuages_ (_Head in the Clouds_) from 1994 takes place in the Cameroonian city of Yaounde and features the underbelly of the African city with rubbish heaps, corruption, and poverty. Another documentary _Afrique Je Te Plumerai_, depicts the impact of French colonialism on Cameroon (where it was censored).
Clando, which remains Téno’s only feature film to date, is a film about multiple layers and multiple locales of secrecy and (in)visibility. The appeal of Clando lies in the complexity with which he emphasizes a political reality in Cameroon and connects it to issues of migration, global inequalities, and redemption. In his useful overview over Cameroonian cinema, Jean Olivier Tchouaffé lists Clando alongside other, what he calls, protest films and argues that “this cinema navigates from the present to the past to extricate social processes and relations of power from the intricacies of Africa culture” (Tchouaffé 72). I would like to add to Tchouaffé’s analysis the dimension of migration because Téno’s concern with border crossings and transgressions adds an important dimension to the political message about stagnation, corruption, violation, and progress.

When the film opens, protagonist Sobgui Anatole drives an unlicensed taxi in Douala. As the fragmented and jumbled parts of the film unravel, we learn that in his previous profession as a computer specialist, Sobgui becomes involved in the student resistance movement in Douala and is imprisoned and tortured. After his release, he falls into a depression and decides to go to Germany to help find the son of a friend who had previously escaped Douala after a similar experience with Cameroonian officials. In Cologne Sobgui immerses himself into the Cameroonian community and starts a relationship with Irene who works for a human rights organization. In the end, Sobgui returns to Cameroon determined to stop waiting for things to change for the better. Clando represents “the difficulty in establishing a true Cameroonian democracy in the face of a system of political surveillance that finds democracy to be an inconvenience” (Tchouaffé 67). However, Clando also alludes to the central theme of migration, movement, and stagnation.
The title *Clando* describes protagonist Sobgui in several ways: In Douala, he is the “clandestine taxi driver” who works without a license. The clandos of Douala must be on guard not to be detected and fear the controls of their (non-existent) papers: “As a cab driver, Sobgui negotiates both the literal geography of the city and its metaphorical political landscape” (Petty 170). Clando Sobgui becomes a peripheral social agent and reduced of his legal mobility: he is thrown into prison, but remains mentally imprisoned even after his release and can only claim mobility that takes place outside of what is legal, namely through driving an unregistered taxi. Clando is partly about Sobgui’s experience as a migrant, but as the title suggests, the trope of being illegal, secret, and on the periphery is a condition that does not start in the host country. In either space, Sobgui must always keep part of his identity hidden: as a computer specialist he cannot reveal that he allows protesters to copy flyers, as a clando, he cannot reveal that his car functions as a taxi, and as an immigrant he has to hide his legal status.

Sobgui embodies the “horizontal mobility” that Dovey applies to *Touki Bouki*. In other words, the character can move sideways through the Douala cityscape, but horizontal “moving” up is foreclosed. Sobgui’s immobility, or paralysis, first becomes obvious when prison guards injure his feet to make him talk. The double-take on immobility through his useless feet and his imprisonment emphasizes both the political paralysis of the country and the helplessness of its citizens. Significantly, however, Sobgui was only a peripheral (once again) activist in the first place, which complicates the nature of persecution in the country and reflects on the chaotic political situation in post-independence Cameroon. During his prison stay, Sobgui heals enough to walk again, but even when authorities release him, his sense of imprisonment remains. He is
dropped off at a street corner and told to wait. Following their orders and waiting, Sobgui eventually meets his former coworker and upon learning that he has been released, he responds: “[the street] is now my prison.” Although he is able to slowly regain one way of mobility by way repairing his car and making a living as a clando, his psychological paralysis remains (signified by his inability to have sex with his wife and the subsequent tension between them). Sobgui’s shattered life after re-entering the Cameroonian public space does not leave room for a spirit of resistance. His life in Douala becomes unbearable for similar reasons life in the subaltern diaspora challenges immigrants: he knows that he might be watched or not. Once again the panopticon comes to mind.

Ironically, Sobgui’s move to Germany, which for most undocumented migrants means decreased mobility, becomes a way of regaining it, albeit slowly and with help. While Sissako’s Heremakono is concerned with waiting as a condition emblematic for the transitional migratory space, Clando highlights Sobgui’s waiting, both in Douala and Stuttgart, as a state of traumatized complacency; more importantly he waits to return to Cameroon rather than to leave it. For him the challenge does not lie in the crossing of the border, he flies into Stuttgart and pretends to be on a temporary business trip, but in the guilt of not coming to terms with his reality in Douala fleeing the challenge of fighting the system that violated his physical and psychological freedom. And Clando does not stop at international migration: two Tanzanians who were on their way to Nigeria tried to cross through Cameroon without proper immigration papers and now share a cell with Sobgui. By including this internal migration theme, Téno breaks up the dichotomy of origin Africa/destination Europe and highlights the high prevalence of inter-continental
migration in Africa. Furthermore, while going to Europe is considered “going into the lion’s den,” the migrant experience of the Tanzanian prisoners seems far more difficult than Sobgui’s stay in Germany.

For Sobgui’s German girlfriend Irene, Sobgui’s absence from attempts of political intervention in Cameroon and resistance against those who violated him is unacceptable. As a human rights activist, she sees Sobgui’s place in Douala to resist alongside others who were equally brutalized rather than in an immigrant community that is too far removed from the political upheaval to be productive in their resistance efforts. Like Waalo Fendo, Clando moves back and forth in time and between Douala and Stuttgart. In the film, the politics of Cameroon and Douala are extended into the diaspora, which also changes the dynamics between Germany and Cameroon. Within this context, Sobgui’s state of exile in Germany is only an extension of his battle with the atrocities committed against him. The conscience of his German girlfriend, and ultimately his own, do not allow for him to stay.

Sobgui’s purpose of exile is not primarily a desire to go towards a place, but to leave Cameroon. Although the film highlights mobility and border crossings and evokes clandestine mobility through its title, it does not foreground Sobgui’s undocumented political status in Germany. The important clandestine border crossing in Clando does not take place between continents or countries, but remains internal in that Sobgui is forced to negotiate his new marginalized position in the political landscape of Cameroon. Sobgui’s German girlfriend Irene encourages his return to Cameroon although she knows that it will be the end of their relationship. Petty argues that Irene embodies the well-meaning European activist who makes an effort to understand, but
whose skepticism towards Sobgui’s reluctance to return “indicates a fundamental lack of understanding that Cameroon’s crisis cannot be solved by European-style activism” (Petty 175). Instead of accepting Irene as the driving force behind Sobgui’s return to Douala, Petty credits his interaction with Chamba the Cameroonian he set out to find in Germany in the first place.

During his attempts to convince Chamba that there is no shame in going home without riches, Sobgui realizes that the same is true for himself. I would argue, however, that Irene’s influence and encouragement are not quite as misguided and futile as Petty suggests. Her companionship and work as a human rights activist keeps the pressing political needs of troubled Cameroon in the picture, even in the diaspora. Through her words and her work, she might personify the eager but unaffected Western onlooker, but she is also the one who articulates the urgency of action. Moreover, through her Sobgui realizes that he can make a difference. If Irene, as Petty suggests, “[personifies] Germany as a prototypical European space,” her character has at least moved beyond European hostility, xenophobia, and racism. Téno himself has commented on his choice of character: “Whoever reminds Africans to deal with their problems is welcome. It can be a white woman or man. I don’t see people in terms of color” (Ukadike “Questioning African Cinema” 305). The mutual exchange that takes place between Irene and Sobgui embodies a potentially fruitful exchange between the political spaces Germany (and by association Europe), and Cameroon. Sobgui leaves Germany knowing he has a “comrade” in Irene while she has been confronted with the reality of her idealized political fight. Sobgui’s decision to return to Cameroon frees him of the

7 Téno told Ukadike that he chose the diasporic setting because “Germany is a country where people are politically active” (Ukadike “Questioning African Cinema” 305).
undocumented and marginalized existence in Germany, but more importantly, it allows him to shed his victimhood upon return.

Sobgui returns to Cameroon with a vision. Naficy maintains that “the accented cinema inevitably arouses patriotic sentiments because it is also a state of the nation film that takes stock of the nation” (93). *Clando* most obviously takes stock of the nation by including the political context of Cameroon vis-à-vis the diasporic space that (re)invigorates Sobgui and, through the character of Irene, convinces him to go back. Germany, however, is not only a place of invigoration, but also of complacency and a false sense of security. Not very many films about clandestine migrants allow for happy endings and only a few include a voluntary return to the home country. In *Clando* exile becomes a space of redemption and rebirth.

Jean-Marie Téno’s *Clando* constitutes the only film of those discussed here that overtly takes inventory of the country of origin by recreating Cameroon as a space which violates the protagonist’s right to freedom and causes severe physical and mental harm. Furthermore, the film’s relationship between the place of origin and the destination is based on its overt commentary on the political upheaval in Cameroon rather than the dichotomy of undesirable global South and alluring global North: “a central thread in *Clando* is the way that state-controlled violence has become an accepted feature of daily life, perhaps the most visible contradiction posed by Cameroon’s present state of quasi-democracy” (Tchouaffé 67).

The film’s final scenes recreate the very first one in that the camera moves through the streets of Douala from the perspective of a car and it seems safe to assume that once again Sobgui navigates the streets as a clando. Sobgui’s final line “I don’t
want to wait anymore” leads us back to the first film I have discussed in this dissertation, Sissako’s *Heremakono*. The connection between the two films in the context of waiting for things to get better lies in their difference and reflects on the multiplicity through which filmmakers approach the issue of undocumented exile.

In diasporic filmmaking, the homeland and the host nation are always present, either on or off-screen, and their cinematic representations depend on a multiplicity of factors. The exilic experience takes place in both spaces even if the protagonist is physically present only in one, the multiplicity of memories and present keep the home and host space connected. As the migrant navigates, physically or mentally, both spaces, his/her interaction with constituents, either through memory or present, creates diasporic spaces that incorporate multiple global locales:

Keeping in mind that notions of locality or community refer both to a demarcated physical space and to clusters of interaction, we can see that the identity of a place emerges by the intersection of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchically organized spaces with its cultural construction as a community or locality. (Gupta and Ferguson 36)
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

In my discussion of the cinematic representations of a subaltern African diaspora I have directed attention to the imaginations of the global North in *Les noms n’habitent nulle part* and *Heremakono* and addressed the significance of spaces as transitional zones in an attempt to de-emphasize the commonly assumed binary of “origin” and “destination.” Transitional zones can be physical spaces on land or at sea, but they can also be internal spaces consisting of internal division and alienation such as experienced by Abdallah who both physically and psychologically remains in transit throughout Sissako’s film. Physical transit is evoked in *Heremakono* through the seemingly unconquerable dunes that prevent departure and the implicit dangers of the sea that releases a dead body onto the sand. Similarly, *Waalo Fendo* and *Las Cartas de Alou* pick up the ever-present topic of immigrants crossing the sea into Italy and Spain through images of immigrant boats and dangerous water crossings. Not all films about clandestine migration actually visually recreate the journey, but those that do consistently use the trope of sea travel.

The new African diaspora is shaped by the circulation of labor, which creates complex laborscapes in which migrants, nationals, and documented and undocumented workers interact for mutual benefit or unilateral exploitation. Few films allow for a resistance of the cinematic clandestine worker, but with *Las Cartas de Alou* and *Waalo Fendo*, the filmmakers added a layer to the migration discourse in which undocumented migrants step out of their visibility and resist. These two films, along with *La Promesse* and *Dirty Pretty Things* also recreate urban spaces in which worker provide accommodation and services without having access to the dominant cultural space to
which they are invisible. Clandestine laborscapes take the form of farms, street vending, construction sites, and hotels and the migrant characters with their labor service the on-screen host society. At the same time, the workers have to sell out to the middlemen who exploit them.

With diasporic Nollywood films, Nigerian émigré filmmakers have taken a filmmaking tradition that is genuinely African and added their own accent. The transnational significance of these films is profound both in terms of their treatment of transnational identity and their circulation and distribution. Adding Naficy’s accent to diasporic video films furthermore appropriately challenges the assumption there only is one neutral mode of filmmaking (Hollywood). Clearly, U.S.-based Nigerian filmmakers borrow heavily from Nollywood filmmaking traditions and aesthetics in an attempt at providing familiarity for their diasporic audience. With the use of close-ups, interior locations, and video film equipment, Nigerian filmmakers in the United States have transported a formerly exclusively West African convention of filmmaking into the West.

An existence in exile changes our relationship with the homeland and the new home profoundly. For exilic filmmakers, the task is to represent either space in accordance with their relationship with each other and the characters’ relationship with them. The variety of ways in which continents, nations, cities, and, internal spaces are reproduced and visualized in clandestine migration cinema seems to defy categorization at this point. However, the relationship between on-screen spaces and the filmmakers’ relationship with these spaces are often obvious and relevant. Accented Nollywood filmmakers, for example, challenge Naficy’s claim that nostalgia is a vital part of exilic
filmmaking in that they situate the homeland Nigeria within a contemporary context of living there and experiencing hardship.

The cinematic Nigerian home country is often chaotic, dangerous, corrupt, or lacking opportunity. In the case of *God’s Own Country*, however, this role as taken on by the United States and Nigeria is instead presented as a sanctuary or a place of conflict, which is, however, worth fighting for. As a German filmmaker, Frieder Schlaich’s sentiment with regards to the story of Otomo was to hold up a mirror and confront a society with their racism and xenophobia. Schlaich’s personal distance from the story and Otomo’s background reflects on the fleeting and superficial treatment of the “space” Africa that is still disturbingly prevalent outside of the continent. Jean-Marie Téno’s diasporic background, on the other hand, most likely has been the reason for the multiple geographical layers of *Clando*. One of the main differences between documented and undocumented migration, I argue, is the degree to which the migrant is vulnerable. The lack of legal documents obviously complicates life in the diaspora, but the vulnerability extends into the lack of mobility. For the subaltern migrant, the imagination of the home country’s community is both a trigger for migrating in the first place, but also constitutes the pressure which keeps many of them from returning. In *Clando*, Chamba explains his refusal to return to Douala by saying that he cannot return empty-handed. Alou, Yaro, and Demba keep their living conditions in the diaspora secret and keep up the myth of a prosperous North in their letters home.

Lastly, returns, homecomings, and death are common and important themes in migrant cinema in terms of the exile’s alienation from the home, his or her longing, or futile and successful struggle to return (with possible death). In cinema of clandestine
migration, moving out of subaltern exile is even more complicated because an 
undocumented status always potentially makes exile temporary: the individual can be 
deported at any time. The subaltern diaspora shapes and reshapes itself and the 
representations of most filmmakers do not allow for the settlement of the undocumented 
African individual in the host nation state. The movement out of the diaspora can mean 
many things: arrest and forceful removal from the host nation as in *Las Cartas de Alou*, voluntary return to the home country as in *Clando* and *Dirty Pretty Things*, death as in *La Promesse* and *Waalo Fendo*, or an uncertain future as once again in *La Promesse* and *Waalo Fendo*, as well as in *God’s Own Country*. I have discussed the significance 
of border crossings, both internally and externally, of undocumented migrants in terms 
of navigating the geographical constraints created by a capitalist world order. I argued, 
along with Appadurai, that border crossings, but also returns, are triggered by 
imaginations shaped circulating images. On the flipside, the departure from the 
subaltern diaspora can also be a result of a shattering of dreams and the revision of the 
imaginations. Even the death of cinematic characters takes inventory of the homeland 
and its relation to the character’s passing in exile because it reinforces uprootedness . 
Returns, homecomings, and death are common and important themes in migrant 
cinema in terms of the exile's alienation from the home, his or her longing, or futile and 
successful struggle to return (with possible death).

The multiplicity that characterizes the films I have included in this discussion 
reveals and confirms that the representation of exile, undocumented or not, has moved 
beyond binaries of us and them, self and other, North and South, and rich and poor. 
This analysis and discussion is far from exhaustive and much more work is needed to
successfully shape and expand the migration discourse as well as transnational cinema scholarship to include clandestine migration cinema in general and African clandestine migration in particular. The shifting of migration cinema from the aforementioned “social worker approach” or “cinema of the affected” (Berghahn) as in La Promesse to more political engagements as in Clando and the fusion of Nollywood and migration cinema in This America and Missing in America demonstrates in how far Naficy’s accent has become increasingly transnational, diverse, and complicated.

In recent decades, international filmmakers have attempted to capture the obscurity of unauthorized border crossings and recreated narratives of migration from the African continent into Europe. These films emphasize the perspective of the migrant who is forced to navigate an often hostile and unwelcoming environment. The problematic position of poor unauthorized immigrants in the diaspora reflects back on the global inequalities between the North and South. Moreover the production of these films represents the creation of imaginations in that they are fictionalized, filmed, and released back into the global flow of images that informs global constituents about the North (and the South, for that matter) and therefore creates imaginations that trigger new migratory movements. Transnational cinema then becomes both the vehicle and the embodiment of the traveling images that represent and create dreams of participating in the opportunities that the global North appears to offer.


Göktürk, Deniz, “Yüksel Yavuz’s *Kleine Freiheit / A Little Bit of Freedom*.” TRANSIT, Department of German, University of California at Berkeley: 2004.


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FILMOGRAPHY


*This is Nollywood*. DVD. Dir. Franco Sacchi and Robert Caputo. CDIA and Eureka Films, 2007.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Claudia Hofffman received her bachelor’s degree from the University of Hamburg, Germany, in 1999, her master’s degree from Purdue University in 2005, and her doctorate from the University of Florida in 2010. During her graduate studies, she focused on film and media studies and African studies with special emphasis on African film and migration narratives. Her studies included research and Yoruba language study at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, during the summer of 2008. In July 2010, she will begin a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of California at Los Angeles to continue her current research.