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Migrant and Diasporic Cinema in Contemporary Europe

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Summary

Over the past twenty-five years European cinema has been influenced and shaped by multicultural and multiethnic presences and themes. Representations of migrant and diasporic experiences have assumed a more prominent position in cinematic narratives; non-Western and non-European aesthetics have brought new styles and genres. Recent examples of German Turkish, French *beur* and Black and Asian British cinema as well as films of transnationally mobile filmmakers from the Balkans and former Soviet bloc countries have won considerable critical acclaim and have captured mainstream and international audiences. This AHRC Research Network explores how migrant and diasporic filmmakers have challenged traditional views of national identity and 'Europeanness'.

Programme priorities

The AHRC Research Network aims to bring together researchers who – in consultation with filmmakers and representatives from the film and media industry and the cultural sector – will explore the evolution of migrant and diasporic cinemas in contemporary Europe over the past twenty-five years. The Network team will examine how films of migrant and diasporic filmmakers have redefined our understanding of European identity/ies as constructed and narrated in European national cinemas. By adopting a comparative perspective in the search for the commonalities and differences between migrant and diasporic cinemas across different European countries, the Network endeavours to transcend the borders and limitations of an analytical framework which privileges the concept of discrete national cinemas.

Rationale and research context

With European cinemas becoming increasingly determined by multicultural and multiethnic presences and themes, critical paradigms which examine these cinemas in terms of their national specificity do not adequately address the shift from the national to the transnational which has occurred in European cinema in recent decades. This shift has been fuelled by the ongoing process of European integration, the geopolitical changes following the collapse of communism and the influx of migrants and asylum seekers desiring access to what they perceive as the politically and economically stable heartland of Europe. These wider socio-political processes have meant that the concept of European identity and nationhood is becoming ever more contested and fluid. This is reflected in a growing number of films made by migrant/diasporic filmmakers which challenge traditional concepts of national identity and/or 'Europeanness'.

As a result of these changes, the cultural spaces occupied by migrants are gradually shifting from the margins to the centre as representations of migrant and diasporic identities are assuming a more prominent position in cinema. The Network will map the field of investigation by critically examining the limitations of a 'national' approach to the study of migrant and diasporic cinema. It will also discuss the heuristic value and socio-political implications of existing terminologies (e.g. 'migrant', 'diasporic', *beur*, 'displaced', 'transcultural', 'minority' and *cinéma de métissage*). The Network will also focus on the proliferation of themes and aesthetic choices as well as different genres and narrative traditions. The expertise of individual researchers and range of case studies will provide a sufficiently broad basis to develop criteria that will allow us to map the relationalities and analogies between different manifestations of migrant and diasporic cinemas in contemporary Europe.

Aims and Objectives

The AHRC Research Network aims to undertake collaborative research in order to develop a comparative framework in which to analyse migrant and diasporic cinemas in contemporary Europe. The Network's objectives are:

1. To map the field of investigation by considering existing terminology and by analysing a considerable corpus of migrant and diasporic productions.
2. To understand the specificities of film production and distribution of migrant and diasporic cinema in a variety of different national and cultural contexts in contemporary Europe.
3. To compare – in an exemplary fashion – the reception of these films in different countries and contexts.
4. To explore issues of representation in contemporary migrant and diasporic cinema in Europe, investigating in particular the following questions:
 - How do these films articulate difference? To what extent are the axes of nation, ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, religion, language, generation and class intersecting, resulting in overdetermined identities of otherness and marginality?

- How is cultural hybridity constructed in the films' generic templates, the languages/subtitles and the music used?
- Does the evolution of migrant cinemas across Europe over the past twenty-five years follow similar patterns? How have funding and policy changed as well as generational shifts affected the development of diasporic cinemas?

Outcomes

- International Conference, 'Migrant and Diasporic Cinema in Contemporary Europe', Lincoln College, Oxford, 6-8 July 2006
http://ah.brookes.ac.uk/conferences/migrant_cinema/
- Network and Workshop, 'The Industrial Context of Migrant and Diasporic Cinema in Contemporary Europe', Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies, University of London, School of Advanced Study, January 2007
- Network Workshop at which key findings and research outcomes are presented and discussed, School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds, September 2007 (in preparation of publication, see below)
- Knowledge Transfer between academic and non-academic constituencies (contributions of filmmakers, representatives from the media industry and the cultural sector to conferences and workshops; public film screenings introduced by network participants and/or filmmakers; project website showcasing the research findings and providing references and resources)
- Publication of an edited volume on *Migrant and Diasporic Cinema in Contemporary Europe*, containing contributions of Network participants

Duration of the project:

15 January 2006 - 14 January 2008

The website will be maintained until at least January 2011