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Outside in: 'accented cinema' at large

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ABSTRACT *This paper aims to engage in a critical analysis of the concept of 'accented cinema' recently developed by Hamid Naficy to refer to the emergent genre of exilic/diasporic filmmaking. Naficy's theorization of 'accented cinema' in particular and discussions around exilic/diasporic cinema in general will be challenged on the basis of the observation that the cinematic styles and thematic preoccupations associated with exilic/diasporic films consistently appear also in wide-ranging examples of contemporary 'world' cinema that are often classified under the rubric of 'national cinemas'. To illustrate this observation, the paper provides a parallel reading of three recent films – A Time for Drunken Horses (1999) by Kurdish-Iranian director Bahman Ghobadi, Happy Together (1997) by Hong Kong director Wong kar-wai, and Distant (2002) by Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan – whose directors cannot possibly be considered as 'exilic/diasporic' in a conventional sense. Yet, it will be argued, the styles and thematic concerns associated with exilic/diasporic cinema manifestly prevail in all three films discussed in this paper as well as in many other examples of contemporary 'world' cinema. Departing from this observation, the paper will open up the new genre of 'accented cinema' to further questioning and suggest that unless the mutual entanglement between exilic/diasporic filmmaking and national cinema is disclosed, the notion of 'accented cinema' will not be sufficiently able to realize its critical potential.*

KEYWORDS: Exile, national cinema, exilic/diasporic cinema, accented cinema

Critical attention in current film scholarship seems increasingly to be focusing on a newly discerned mode of filmmaking that might be described as 'exilic/diasporic'. Films made by 'exilic/diasporic' subjects living in Western metropolitan centers have been recognized by several scholars as an emergent body of work and subjected to critical analysis. Often inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's conception of 'minor literature',¹ theorists of 'exilic/diasporic cinema' argue that new cinematic languages articulated by members of diasporic communities in the West can be conceived as a distinct body of work with peculiar cultural, aesthetic and political characteristics.²

Elaborations on the emergent modes of exilic/diasporic cinematic production culminated in recent years into more extensive studies with a broader temporal and cultural focus.³ Hamid Naficy's 2001 book *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* offers arguably the most comprehensive account of the emerging field of exilic/diasporic cinema in terms of both the time span and the range of films that it covers. The term 'accented cinema' actually represents a reworking of the concept of 'independent transnational cinema' that Naficy proposed in his previous work to refer to an emergent genre that '...cuts across previously defined geographic, national, cultural, cinematic and metacine-matic boundaries' (Naficy 1996: 119). Independent transnational films made by deterritorialized directors, according to Naficy, share certain features that could be observed not only in their thematic preoccupations and formal aspects, but also processes of production and reception. In his recent work, Naficy uses the term 'accented cinema' to describe the films

that exilic, diasporic and postcolonial/ethnic directors have made in the West since the 1960s. The 'accent' of this cinema primarily emanates from the experience of displacement of the filmmakers and their artisanal and/or collective modes of production. Reflecting upon the home and host societies and the deterritorialized conditions of the filmmakers, 'accented' films are 'interstitial because they are created astride, and in the interstices of, social formations and cinematic practices' (Naficy 2001: 4–5).

The emergent theory of exilic/diasporic cinema makes an important critical contribution not only to film studies, but also to the broader field of cultural theory. With its extensive scope and thorough inquiry, Naficy's work will be an invaluable reference in film studies. *An Accented Cinema* presents an impressive body of research that includes close readings of a wide range of films, significant biographical notes on the directors, and information about the historical context and social formation from which the films emerged. Acknowledging the critical importance of this body of work, my intention in this article, nonetheless, is to take issue with the formulations of 'exilic/diasporic filmmaking' in general and Naficy's theorization of 'accented cinema' in particular on the basis of a plain observation: the cinematic styles and thematic preoccupations associated with exilic/diasporic films consistently appear also in wide-ranging examples of contemporary 'world' cinema that are often classified under the rubric of 'national cinemas'. Starting from this observation, I would like to open up the new genre of 'accented cinema' to further questioning and show that unless the mutual entanglement between exilic/diasporic filmmaking and national cinema are disclosed, the notion of 'accented cinema' will not be sufficiently able to realize its critical potential. In doing so, my intention is not to work against the concept, but rather point to the paradoxes and possibilities that it produces.

To this end, I will make a parallel reading of three recent films, *A Time for Drunken Horses* (*Zamani Baraye Masti Asbha*) (Bahman Ghobadi, 1999), *Happy Together* (Wong Kar-wai, 1997), and *Distant* (*Uzak*) (Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2002), whose directors cannot possibly be considered as 'exilic', 'diasporic' or 'postcolonial ethnic' in the conventional sense, and hence, cannot be included within the category of 'accented' cinema. Yet, I will argue, the styles and thematic concerns associated with exilic/diasporic cinema manifestly prevail in all three films that I discuss as well as in many other examples of contemporary 'world' cinema. I chose these particular films not only because they powerfully illustrate my arguments, but also for a practical reason. My readers, I assume, might be familiar with them because of the international acclaim and awards that they have received.

In what follows, I will track Naficy's frame of analysis to make a parallel reading of the select examples of the 'world cinema' that I have at hand. In this respect, I will first direct attention to certain aspects in the biographies of Ghobadi, Wong and Ceylan in order to illustrate that although these directors cannot be regarded as 'exilic/diasporic' subjects in a conventional sense, they all have a somewhat troubled experience of belonging and cultural identity that heavily informs their films. Next, I will point to the commonalities between the accented genre and the cinemas of these three directors in terms of their 'interstitial' mode of production and the shared thematic and stylistic features of their films. In my analysis, I do not address all aspects of Naficy's work, but only the ones that I perceive as the most significant in relation to the films that I have at hand.⁴ In this framework, I will concentrate on the following characteristics of the 'accented cinema': the prevalence of journeying as a recurrent thematic trope in the stories; emphasis on particular uses of open, closed and third-space chronotopes in the narrative; and frequent employment of self-reflexivity, self-inscription, asynchronous sound, multilinguality, accented speech and epistolarity as potentially disruptive cinematic strategies in the films. After a discussion of *A Time for Drunken Horses*, *Happy Together*, and *Distant* in relation to the items above, the final part of the paper makes a call for a reassessment of the category of 'world cinema' in light of the recent debates around exilic/diasporic filmmaking. I will argue that 'accented cinema'

could be a more effective concept if it was conceived not on the basis of a narrowly defined notion of 'situatedness', but on a broader understanding of critical positionality *vis-à-vis* the questions of belonging and identity.

Identity, belonging and self-inscription

Naficy's 'accented cinema theory' is an extension of authorship theory in the sense that he perceives 'accented' films as informed by their directors' autobiographies, reflecting their unique stylistic signature or 'fingerprint'. As different from classical auteur theory, however, accented authors are not understood as autonomous and transcendental artists who are graced by unique genius and creativity. Naficy departs from classical auteur theory as he maintains that

any discussion of authorship in exile needs to take into consideration not only the individuality, originality and personality of unique individuals as expressive film authors but also, and more important, their (dis)location as interstitial subjects within social formations and cinematic practices. (Naficy 2001: 34)

What characterizes accented authors, then, is the way that they undergo and express the experience of exile. Naficy distinguishes between three types of accented authors on the basis of different forms of geographical/cultural displacement that they experience. 'Exilic' authors, who end up residing in a Western country after having been driven off or set free from their places of origin, tend to maintain an ambivalent relation to both their home and host societies. Being members of diasporic communities in the West, 'diasporic' filmmakers, on the other hand, tend to maintain a long term sense of ethnic consciousness and distinctiveness about their cultural origins which make them nurture a collective memory of an idealized homeland. 'Postcolonial ethnic and identity' filmmakers, finally, express their identities with a hyphen, since, as opposed to their 'diasporic' counterparts, they tend to emphasize less their bonds with original homeland. Different types of accented films, then, are created by diverse experiences of displacement and disparate emphasis on the relationship to place (of the home as well as the host societies). Yet, regardless of these variations, accented cinema on the whole embodies a peculiar style that can be observed in its thematic preoccupations, narrative structure, and visual form.

The films that I discuss in this paper, *A Time for Drunken Horses*, *Happy Together*, and *Distant*, symptomatically display the characteristics that Naficy attributes to 'accented cinema' although their directors do not fit into the categories of either 'exilic' and 'diasporic' or 'postcolonial ethnic and identity' authors. Unlike the directors examined by Naficy, Ghobadi, Wong and Ceylan do not reside in Western metropolitan centers as exilic, diasporic and/or postcolonial-ethnic subjects. They have not emigrated to the West and do not hold passports from North American or European countries. Instead, all three filmmakers reside in non-Western countries and, for that reason, their films are usually discussed in the context of the 'national' cinemas that they supposedly belong to. This, however, does not necessarily mean that the cultural identities of these filmmakers are less complicated nor is their relation to the places that they occupy, their 'homeland', less problematic.

Bahman Ghobadi is known as one of the promising young directors of the New Iranian Cinema. Born (in 1968) and raised in Baneh, a small town in the Kurdish province of Iran, Ghobadi has a degree in movie directing from the Iranian Broadcasting College. He made several short films throughout the 1990s which received several international and domestic awards. During this period, he also worked as a protégé of some prominent Iranian directors such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf and Abbas Kiarostami. Despite his obvious ties with Iranian cinema, Ghobadi, nevertheless, defines himself not as an Iranian, but Kurdish filmmaker. *A Time for Drunken Horses*, Ghobadi's first feature film, discloses the director's

strong attachment to the Kurdish community. The film is about the struggle of a family of desperately poor children to survive poverty and deadly territorial conflicts at a village near the mountainous Iraqi-Iranian border. Ghobadi declares that his film is meant to be a tribute to the Kurdish people whose brave struggle for survival he personally witnessed (Nesbit 2004). The ethnic and cultural alterity that Ghobadi persistently accentuates in his films challenges, in Hamid Dabashi's terms, 'the official claim of Iranian cinema to national authenticity', yet does not qualify him to be an 'accented author' since this form of alterity does not entail emigration to the West (Dabashi 2001: 261).

Known as a 'Hong Kong filmmaker', Wong Kar-Wai, unlike Ghobadi, is not a member of an ethnic minority group in his country. Instead, his personal history is very much imprinted by the strange metamorphoses of the city that he moved to with his parents in 1963 at the age of five.⁵ Hong Kong's peculiar position in colonial history makes the city a place defying easy categorizations. Historically caught up between different sovereignty claims (British and Chinese), economic systems (capitalist and communist), ideologies (colonialism and nationalism), and languages (Mandarin, Cantonese and English), Hong Kong culture is established on shaky ground that produces a constant sense of turbulence and uncertainty. The ambiguous status of the city has hardly been resolved upon its handover from British colonial rule to mainland China in 1997, since Hong Kong did not gain territorial independence at the end of colonialism. As Rey Chow indicates, the city's passage into 'postcoloniality' is marked by a 'double impossibility' for it entails 'a forced return to a "mother country", itself as imperialistic as the previous colonizer' (Chow 1992: 153). Hong Kong identity, in this sense, inevitably designates a categorical crisis for it cannot be easily subsumed under the notions of either 'national belonging' or 'exilic loss'.

Since his first feature film in 1988, Wong's cinema can be said to be haunted by the experience of 'displacement' not so much in the conventional sense of changing places, but in the sense of the constant transformation of the place that one inhabits. His films characteristically evoke the indeterminacies of Hong Kong by turning the city into, in Ackbar Abbas's words, a 'visual and spatial paradox', a 'skewed space' in which 'many different groups feel equally (not) at home' (Abbas 1997a: 55). Interestingly enough, *Happy Together*, Wong's sixth feature, occupies a distinct place in the director's oeuvre since it was uncharacteristically shot not in Hong Kong, but a totally different location, Buenos Aires. The film is about a gay couple who have traveled from Hong Kong to Argentina to give a new start to their troubled relationship. Despite its romantic subject matter, *Happy Together* also entails a subtle commentary on Hong Kong's 1997 hand-over to China as its subtitle, 'A Story about Reunion', implicates.⁶

Among the filmmakers that I discuss, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, one of the most critically acclaimed young directors of new Turkish cinema, seems to hold the least complicated cultural identity since he is simply a Turkish citizen living in Istanbul. Ceylan spent his childhood in the late 1960s at a small town near Çanakkale (a city in North Western Turkey) until he has moved to Istanbul to attend university. Despite his degree in Electronic Engineering, he chose to pursue an artistic career first as photographer, then director. The three highly autobiographical feature films that Ceylan has made so far prove that his identity is very much caught up by the question of 'provinciality' and what might be called the condition of 'involuntary belonging'. What characterizes Ceylan's cinema, in this regard, is not so much the problems of displacement and exile, but that of entrapment at an engulfing place where one supposedly belongs to. As such, his films can be said to offer a perspective on exile from reverse as they reveal the problems of constraining belonging and spatial confinement. *Distant*, Ceylan's third film, is about the morbid relationship between a professional photographer living in Istanbul and a young cousin from his native town who has come to the city with the hope of starting a new life there.

Ghobadi, Wong and Ceylan maintain a troubled relationship with places/cultures that they supposedly belong to. The films by all three directors entail a critical interrogation of the questions of belonging and identity in relation to their specific local contexts, yet this interrogation also resonates with and bespeaks for our contemporary global condition.

Interstitial mode of production and split reception

Another important commonality between 'accented genre' and the films by Ghobadi, Wong and Ceylan is about a shared function of the filmmakers' mode of production which can be described as 'interstitial'. Dividing accented production into 'interstitial' and 'collective' modes, Naficy describes the former as operating 'both within and astride the cracks of the system, benefiting from its contradictions, anomalies, and heterogeneity' (Naficy 2001: 46). One crucial aspect of 'interstitial' mode concerns financing. Accented filmmakers usually invest in their own films, raise funds and put up with budget constraints. For that reason, they often perform multiple functions in their films to have fuller control over both the authorship and the cost of the projects. These multiple functions might include horizontally serving as producer, director, screenplay writer, editor, cinematographer, and sometimes actor, and vertically getting involved in all phases of their films from financing to distribution and exhibition.

As to their engagement with cinematic practice and mode of production, the cinemas of all three directors examined here can be called 'interstitial' in the sense that they 'operate both within and astride the cracks of the system' of both their 'national' cinemas and the 'international' cinema. Working within the constraints of state-controlled Iranian cinema, Ghobadi has to take responsibility horizontally and vertically for all aspects of his films from functioning as scriptwriter and producer to obtaining permission from Iranian authorities, finding funds and orchestrating the distribution (Kutschera 2003). Adopting a small scale and artisanal mode of production, Ceylan also performs multiple functions in the production of his films that include writing, shooting, editing, and sometimes acting. He has to deal with the processes of fund raising and distribution personally. The small crew that he always works with comprises family members, relatives and close friends. Finally, working with small budgets (usually around \$100,000) is not only a matter of necessity, but a preference for Ceylan who perceives 'minimalism' as his own way of resistance to the culture of excessiveness and the craze of consumption characterizing our contemporary world (Ceylan 2003: 121). As different from the realist style of Ghobadi and Ceylan, Wong, who is now considered to be an 'international auteur', is often associated with an extravagant postmodern style. Known as a director who breaks away from the normal practice of the commercially minded Hong Kong film industry, Wong works both within and outside of Hong Kong cinema. Since his first feature in 1988, he has usually written the scripts of his films, produced them, and worked with the same technical crew, though in his latest project he worked with a huge budget and big stars. Always having a hard time in convincing production companies to invest in his films, Wong talks about the question marks that he creates in the minds of the producers as follows: 'The whole thing has gone against what our whole industry collectively believes in. Making a film that doesn't sell is already bad enough; a commercially failed filmmaker getting more work is even worse; and on the top of that a whole bunch of people are telling everyone that this filmmaker has made some very, very good films...' (Wong 1997b: 100).

The interstitial positioning of the cinemas of Ghobadi, Wong and Ceylan can also be observed in relation to the reception of their films. Naficy talks about a 'split reception' that 'accented' films usually get, which typically arises from the disparity between the critical acclaim and small audiences that they receive (Naficy 2001: 51). Ghobadi, Wong and Ceylan experience such a split particularly in relation to the disparity between the domestic and

global reception of their films. All three directors are not associated so much with the popular/mainstream cinemas of their 'home' countries and local audiences cannot be said to be very enthusiastic about their films. Instead their reputation is mostly based upon the critical acclaim and prestigious awards that they receive in international arena. For one thing, all three films that I discuss here won important awards in Cannes Film Festival in the years that they were made.⁷ As a result, they all have been distributed internationally and received critical applause. This positive reception in the international arena, however, created rather a suspicious reaction in 'national' context. After reaching a larger audience in France than in Turkey, for example, *Distant* was cynically accused by Turkish popular media of being 'distant' to Turkish people.⁸

As such, the cinemas of Ghobadi, Wong and Ceylan can be identified as 'interstitial' for they resonate against prevailing cinematic production practices, while at the same time benefiting from them. For all three directors, 'interstitiality' means being located at the intersection of the local and the global. Like 'accented filmmakers', they can be described as 'situated but universal' in the sense that they work in the interstices of social formations and cinematic practices.

Encircling journeys, intense experience of space

'Journeying', according to Naficy, is a major thematic preoccupation characterizing the accented cinema (Naficy 2001: 222). Revolving around home-seeking, homelessness and/or homecoming journeys, accented films are deeply concerned with the issues of territoriality, rootedness and geography. Their preoccupation with place is inscribed in three modalities of narrative 'chronotopes' (a term that Naficy borrows from Mikhail Bakhtin) or 'time-space' configurations: 'Open' chronotopes, emphasizing boundlessness and timelessness, are usually reserved for the representation of idealized homeland (with a visual emphasis on its nature, landscape, landmarks and ancient monuments). Stressing claustrophobia and temporality, 'closed' chronotopes, on the other hand, are often utilized to depict life in exile and diaspora. 'Third-space' chronotopes, finally, involve transitional and transnational sites such as borders, tunnels, seaports, airports, hotels and transportation vehicles. Functioning as the 'organizing centers' of films, these three chronotopes are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Instead, each accented film may contain 'a primary chronotope or multiple mutually inclusive chronotopes, which may reinforce, coexist with, or contradict one another' (Naficy 2001: 153).

The stories of all three films that I examine here revolve around journeying and intense experiences of space which entail different configurations of open, closed and third-space chronotopes.

A Time for Drunken Horses depicts rural Kurds' fierce struggle for survival in villages around the mountainous Iraqi-Iranian border from the point of view of its child protagonists. Having lost his father to landmines, 12-year old Ayoub (Ayoub Ahmadi) becomes obliged to work for smugglers to support his two sisters and two brothers, one of whom, Madi (Madi Ekhtiar-Dini), is disabled and urgently needs an operation just to live for another six months. The film tells a deeply pessimistic story since from the outset it is obvious that there is no light at the end of the tunnel. Madi's illness does not have an ultimate cure, all that can be done for him is to extend his life a little longer. Ayoub has to risk his life everyday at battle-stricken borders just to carry on the day-to-day survival of his family. Despite all the misery surrounding them, however, the children are portrayed not as pitiful victims, but dignified characters. As such, *A Time for Drunken Horses* seems to re-invoke the poetic power of Italian neo-realism that foregrounds, in Andre Bazin's words, a 'latent pessimism', yet there resides in it the 'appeal of the potential of man, the witness to his final and irrefutable humanity' (Bazin 1971: 74). As the film bears witness the characters' moving

conviction in life, the 'border' takes on a double meaning in the story connoting both livelihood and death. While border trade is the basic means of employment, hence survival, for Kurdish villagers, it also means putting one's life in danger every day because of military zones, territorial conflicts and landmines.

Employing Naficy's terminology, *A Time for Drunken Horses* is organized around a peculiar articulation of open and third-space chronotopes which at times contradict with one another. Consistent with open chronotopes, the *mise-en-scene* favors '... external locations and open settings and landscapes, bright natural lighting, and mobile and wandering diegetic characters' (Naficy 2001: 153). The entire film, with the exception of a few indoors scenes, is shot in open spaces. The mountainous landscape with its snow covered hills, curving roads, spectacular constellations of sunlight is elegantly depicted by Ghobadi's camera. Similarly, openness is suggested in the film 'by long-shots, mobile framing and long takes that situate the characters within their open settings, preserving their spatiotemporal integrity' (Naficy 2001: 153). As opposed to the usual structure of open chronotopes, however, spatial openness in the film is not correlated with timelessness. In other words, the beautiful rendering of the open space serves to create not a sense of tranquility, boundlessness and timelessness, but that of anxiety, agitation and agoraphobia. In order to make sense of this divergence, we need to pay closer attention to the film's articulation of 'border' as a third-space chronotope as well as its use of time.

In an interview, Ghobadi indicates that what he perceives as humanity's worst enemy is the 'borders' imposed on ethnic communities like the Kurds by great powers (quoted by Kutschera 2003: 58). The centrality of the figure of 'border' in *A Time for Drunken Horses* is certainly related to this political deliberation informed by personal experiences. Border gains a ubiquitous, yet spectral, presence in the film in the sense that it is profoundly inscribed in the landscape, but hardly discernible as a concrete entity. As indicated by Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn, border, in the film, 'ceases to be an identifiable, recognizable place and instead signifies a nightmarish unstable zone of inexplicable military atrocity' (Chaudhuri and Finn 2003: 47–48). It continually shifts and re-figures the space by designating new no-zones, passageways, and routes. This ubiquitous, yet spectral, presence of 'border' renders landscape as a devious labyrinth with invisible walls. The sense of unity and continuity associated with open chronotope is constantly disrupted as the landscape gradually dissolves into disconnected spaces. Instead of producing a tranquil mood, open chronotope is associated with anxiety and agitation also because of the heavy winter conditions and the freezing cold that the characters constantly suffer from. The title of the film actually refers to the harsh climate that makes it necessary to mix water with alcohol to protect mules from getting frozen. Under these stark conditions, perpetual journeys that Ayoub has to carry on across deadly border zones give rise rather to an agoraphobic experience of space.

The association of open chronotope with anxiety and phobia is related also to the use of time. It is possible to observe two different registers of time in *A Time for Drunken Horses*. The film foregrounds, at one level, mythic time, (as 'time' in the title suggests), that is, unbounded time of nature and geography. Not recorded by official registers, stories of the Kurdish community tend to be rendered invisible by historical time. Instead, Kurdish people seem to gain an existence as an extension of the landscape that they unofficially inhabit. This is the layer of mythic time in the film that is organized around cycles of nature on the one hand, and corresponding habits and rituals of the community on the other. The static nature of mythic time is frequently interrupted by an alien sense of chronological time that makes itself known through the pressure that it puts on the characters. Throughout the film, Ayoub experiences a constant sense of running out of time. Besides the medicine and injections that Madi has to take regularly, he also needs an operation that must be conducted urgently. For all this, Ayoub has to make money and take his brother to Iraq.

Unbound mythic time is interrupted by the pressure of chronological time whose logic remains incomprehensible for the characters although they feel obliged to meet its requirements. This bizarre interweaving of mythic and chronological registers of time in the film can be said to have a sadly ironic expression in Madi's disfigured body. Although his chronological age is 15, hence older than Ayoub and Amina, not only is Madi's body much smaller than theirs, but he is also emotionally less mature. Chronological time does not match actuality.

As opposed to the plain documentary outlook of *A Time for Drunken Horses*, Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together* stages a complex visuality like the director's other films. The film is about two gay lovers, Lai Yiu-fai (Tony Leung) and Ho Po-wing (Leslie Cheung), who have traveled from Hong Kong all the way to Argentina, hoping to see the famous Iguazu Falls and give a new start to their thorny relationship. The deeply melancholic story of the film is actually about the inevitable failure of both endeavors: Lai and Ho can neither see Iguazu Falls nor be happy together. In the end, Lai, the more caring and reliable one, manages to save enough money to return to Hong Kong while the promiscuous and seemingly reckless Ho ends up mourning after him.

Happy Together revolves around both outward and inward journeys of quest. The outward journey is obvious: two main characters travel to Buenos Aires, then Lai returns to Hong Kong via Taipei. There is also a third character in the film, Xiao Zhang (Chang Chen), a young Taiwanese man who Lai befriends in the Chinese restaurant where they both work. Zhang, like Lai and Ho, is in the middle of a journey. He comes to Argentina from Taipei to reach the most southern point of the continent known as the 'end of the world'. The outward journeys that the characters carry out seem to be accompanied by an inward journey of quest to reach a state of some kind of internal fulfillment and reconciliation with oneself. The route of this inward journey becomes most explicit in the case of Lai, whose voiceover gives a subjective explanation to the unfolding events in the story.

The inward and outward journeys around which *Happy Together* is organized gain a new significance when considered in relation to the questions of displacement and cultural identity. The seemingly romantic story of the film is entirely punctuated by references to the complexities of Hong Kong identity in the context of the city's hand-over from British to Chinese rule. Sheldon H. Lu suggests that the narrative, at its very beginning, foregrounds the 'uncertainty of national identity for the Hong Kongers' (Lu 2000: 280). The opening shot zooms in on the travel documents of the two main characters which state 'British nationality'. The emphasis on national belonging (or non-belonging in this case) directs attention to the paradoxical situation of Hong Kong residents under British rule who were granted the right to free travel to most countries by the British administration, yet usually were not allowed to become permanent residents of Great Britain (Lu 2000: 280). Following this emphasis at the opening, the dates of the events are highlighted at several instances of Lai's narration so as to remind the audience that the protagonists' journey takes place shortly before Hong Kong's handover to China in July 1997. Another explicit reference to history comes towards the end when Lai, during his short stay in Taipei, watches the news of the death of Deng Xiaopeng on television on February 20, 1997. Deng Xiaopeng, the former president of the People's Republic of China, is known as the architect of the return of Hong Kong to China by proposing the concept of 'one country, two systems'. Several critics suggest that the film's English title actually resonates with the historical question that whether Hong Kong and China will be 'happy together' after their reunion in 1997 or not.

Apart from these references to historical context, the destination of the protagonists' journey is also quite suggestive. Buenos Aires, the city where Lai and Ho choose to travel, is not just any city, but the antipode of Hong Kong, the opposite side of the world in the sense that when it is day at one city, night in the other. The journey that the protagonists start out, then, can be seen not just as a romantic flight, but as a search for a radical break from

'home', a self-exile, in other words, that involves a desire to migrate somewhere completely dissimilar to 'home'. Pointing to the references to historical context in the film, however, does not mean to suggest that *Happy Together* should be read as a political allegory. The way that the film addresses the question of cultural identity, I think, serves not so much to convey an implicit political message, as to provoke a critical re-assessment of the meaning of home, belonging and migrancy. This provocation can best be discerned in relation to the film's inscription of open and closed chronotopes that coexist in continuity.

Most scenes in *Happy Together* are consistent with the spatial aspects of the closed chronotope in the sense that the *mise-en-scene* usually consists of 'interior locations and closed settings' and a 'dark lighting scheme that creates a mood of constriction and claustrophobia' (Naficy 2001: 153). Many scenes in the film are shot with a hand-held camera around Lai's constricted living quarters, its untidy and dirty-looking interior, the long corridor leading to the public bathroom, and the shabby-looking kitchen shared by all the tenants. These scenes create a sense of confinement because of the emphasis on closed, narrow and sometimes poorly lit interiors. The tone of the relationship between Lai and Ho further reinforces the perception of visual constriction. After their break up at the beginning of the film, Ho, having been badly beaten up, returns to Lai one day. During the following days, Lai looks after him at home as Ho cannot use his hands and is practically confined to bed. As his process of recovery approaches completion, Ho finds out that his passport is missing, apparently having been taken by Lai as a measure to prevent him from leaving. The scenes depicting Ho's physical confinement at home and his consequent discontent contribute to our perception of the tight interiors as claustrophobic. When we consider some other frequently appearing locations in the film (the tango bar, the kitchen and the narrow alley of the Chinese restaurant), it is possible to observe that, to some degree, they also invoke a similar sense of visual constraint.

Contrary to the sense of confinement articulated in the scenes set in constricted interiors, there is another type of image inserted into the narrative that conveys a profound sense of openness and boundlessness. This is the image of water. Iguazu Falls occupies a pivotal place in both the story and the visuals of the film. Visiting the Waterfalls has been the motive triggering the lovers' journey to Argentina in the first place. As an image, Iguazu appears two times in the film. The first image follows the couple's failed attempt to reach the Falls and their consequent break up. It is more like an 'imagined' Iguazu not seen by any of the characters. The second image appears towards the end, when Lai actually visits the Falls by himself just before leaving Argentina. Though one is imagined and the other is real, the visual structure of both images is almost identical. The unrestrained flood of water is filmed from a helicopter and caught in slow motion. In its dreamlike quality, in both scenes, the image of water evokes a sense of absolute boundlessness and plenitude, and hence constitutes a profound manifestation of open chronotope.

Considering the coexistence of closed and open chronotopes in *Happy Together* in continuity, it seems possible to suggest that the film's visual and narrative order tends to produce a logic of not so much opposition and contrast, but, in Ackbar Abbas' terms, 'repetition and seriality' (Abbas 1997b: 79). The experience of displacement in the film ironically points not to an opposition between home and elsewhere, but their 'reversibility'. Rather than representing a radical elsewhere, Buenos Aires becomes a repetition of Hong Kong. The sense of constriction created in tight interiors in *Happy Together* invokes very much the image of Hong Kong in Wong's other films typically captured in fragment and medium shots, sometimes in radiant color and from unusual angles. In this way, Buenos Aires, Hong Kong's antipode, a city that is supposed to bring a radical break from Hong Kong, turns into a repetition of it. Instead of taking the protagonists somewhere different, the journey proves the reversibility of home and elsewhere. Closed form chronotope, in this respect, signifies home and exile at once. Similarly, the inscription of open chronotope in waterfalls does not necessarily belong

only to Argentina (the exilic space), but also 'home', if 'home' is taken as not only a physical entity, but a metaphor for a fantasized state of unitariness and undifferentiation.⁹

Abbas uses the term 'virtual migrancy' to define the kind of displacement that the protagonists in *Happy Together* experience (Abbas 2004). Different from the more recognizable experiences of exile and refugee, 'virtual migration' is characterized by a pattern of flight and return which seem to cancel each other out. In the case of 'virtual' migration, 'the trip itself always seems to end in an inconsequential and inconclusive way, as if there were nothing in it at all' (Abbas 2004: 7). Despite this circular pattern, however, the journey is not made for nothing, but it takes the travelers to a state where home loses its narrow specificity, and homelessness loses its pathos (Abbas 2004: 9). Defined in this way, 'virtual migration' sounds somewhat similar to what Naficy calls 'homelessness journey', characterized by continual displacements and wanderings (Naficy 2001: 290). As home and elsewhere begin to resemble each other and become increasingly interchangeable, homelessness gains a new meaning in these journeys beyond its conventional connotations.

Like Nuri Bilge Ceylan's earlier films, *Distant* (2003) offers a peculiar blend of documentary style realism and highly aestheticized visuality. The three feature films that Ceylan has made so far, *The Small Town* (*Kasaba*) (1997), *Clouds of May* (*Mayıs Sıkıntısı*) (1999) and *Distant* (*Uzak*) (2002), constitute parts of a trilogy since they tell different temporal segments of the same story with the same characters often played by his own family members. All three films revolve around the same trope: real and imagined journeys of homecoming and escaping from home. Depicting tiny details of everyday life without seeking to reach any particular conclusion, the films simply appear to bear witness to a contemplative mode.¹⁰ In all three films, a particular character, Saffet/Yusuf, played by the same actor (Mehmet Emin Toprak), occupies a central place in the narrative. In *The Small Town*, Saffet is portrayed as a young, rebellious man who is desperately bored by the provincial town where he was born into and yearns for a better life elsewhere. *Clouds of May* is a film about the making of *The Small Town*. A young filmmaker, Muzaffer (Muzaffer Özdemir), returns to his native town to make a film about his own family. As the filmmaker's young cousin, Saffet, while helping out in shootings, tries to convince Muzaffer to take him to Istanbul. Although Muzaffer never wholeheartedly invites him, Saffet perceives their kinship tie as a legitimate ground to move to his cousin's place. The story of *Distant* depicts what would have happened if Saffet's plans were to come true. Here, we have the same characters played by the same actors but with different names. The story depicts the morbid relationship between a commercial photographer, Mahmut (Muzaffer Özdemir) and a young cousin, Yusuf (Mehmet Emin Toprak), from his native provincial town who has come to Istanbul to start a new life there.

The story of *Distant* is set at the intersection of two overlapping journeys. Yusuf's journey from the provinces to Istanbul constitutes the core of the narrative. The film opens with a long shot depicting Yusuf trekking through a snowy field to reach the main road to get a ride to Istanbul. In the background, there appears the small town that he leaves behind. While the direction of Yusuf's journey is from the provinces to Istanbul, there is another journey in the narrative, this time, however, away from Istanbul. During the time that Yusuf stays at Mahmut's apartment, Mahmut's ex-wife is about to migrate to Canada with her new partner to start a new life there. On the morning that she leaves for Canada, Mahmut finds out that Yusuf has also left him. This double abandonment marks the ending of the film.

Despite the prominence of the theme of journeying/migration in the narrative, *Distant* is a film not so much about mobility and displacement as the sense of getting stuck in an engulfing place where one is supposed to belong. 'Provinciality', in this sense, appears to be a powerful thematic trope in *Distant*, like Ceylan's earlier films, signifying constraining belonging and spatial confinement. It is doubly articulated in the narrative: On the one

hand, the small town that Yusuf has come from represents provincial life in comparison to the cosmopolitan and sophisticated culture of Istanbul. On the other hand, however, the 'small town' itself becomes a metaphor for provinciality of Turkey as a whole in relation to the ('Western') world. Mahmut's former wife feels entrapped in Istanbul similar to the way that Yusuf feels about his native town. In an interview, Ceylan explains how he feels about the perceived 'provinciality' of Turkey as follows: 'Turkey is from the small town of the world. I started going to Europe when I was 17; the disparity of those places is startling. They also make you feel somehow the extent to which they view Turkey as the small town' ('From *Kasaba* to *Uzak*: Interview with Nuri Bilge Ceylan' 2004).

At first sight, the story of *Distant* is about the slowly deteriorating relationship between a guest and a host as they both discover day by day the small elements dividing them. A deeper look, however, would prove that the morbid tone of the relationship between Yusuf and Mahmut arises not so much from the elements dividing them, but from what they share. What Mahmut sees in Yusuf is not simply a stranger invading his private space with lumpen manners, but someone who reminds him of something all too familiar and intimate. Yusuf's provincial identity makes Mahmut face his own background, the suppressed side of his own identity. What he cannot stand is not Yusuf's alien presence, but the affinity between the two. Consequently, Mahmut grows increasingly intolerant and cruel towards his younger cousin. As the tone of the relationship between the two gets more degenerated, they make each other feel less and less at home in the space that they share. Every small detail from the odor of Yusuf's worn out shoes to the crumbs of tobacco that he leaves on the living room floor begins to upset Mahmut. On the other side, Yusuf feels excluded in a place where he is not allowed to smoke, use the main bathroom or watch television freely.

Though many scenes in *Distant* are shot in interiors (Mahmut's apartment), there are also multiple scenes beautifully depicting the city of Istanbul. These are not typical urban images (with busy districts and crowded streets), but quite peculiar renderings of open space emphasizing solitariness and void. Caught in the rare white of a snow storm, Istanbul appears to be barren and deserted. In one scene, for example, as Yusuf walks down by the docks (he looks for a job at sea), the camera follows him through the snow and comes upon a ship that is rusted, half sunken and tilted to one side. The ship stands there, in the words of one critic, like 'some relic of a forgotten civilization or a frozen mammoth' (Lane 2004). The sense that these images of open space convey is that of inaction and stasis. Everything in the city appears to be abandoned and frozen in time.

In this way, both open and closed spaces are characterized by a sense of paralysis and loss of motion. Once the symbol of freedom and mobility, Istanbul gradually turns into a constraining territory for Yusuf, which is not much different from the small town he escaped from. Beneath its eye-catching charm, the city is aloof and uninviting. As Yusuf's awkward attempts to communicate with others fail, he feels increasingly lonely and excluded not only in Mahmut's apartment, but in Istanbul as well. Similarly, Mahmut feels increasingly disoriented by both his ex-wife's approaching departure and Yusuf's unwelcome arrival. Both journeys take place against his will and make him feel more and more alienated from the life that he has established for himself at Istanbul. In the end, the sense that *Distant* conveys is that of 'entrapment' in an engulfing space without any prospects of going elsewhere, since there is no elsewhere. Characters seem to carry an internal sense of boredom and provinciality everywhere they go. The small town is not something that one can put behind by going to distant places. Drawing upon the claustrophobic side of home and belonging, Ceylan's films illustrate the sense of spatial entrapment with powerful visual symbols. In his earlier films, recurring images of an upturned turtle entrapped in its own 'home' served as a symbol for constraining belonging and spatial confinement. In *Distant*, the painstaking procedure of killing a little mouse captured in a mouse-trap in

Mahmut's kitchen takes over this role and turns into one of the most 'captivating' images of the film.

Multilinguality, accented speech and epistolarity

'If the dominant cinema is driven by the hegemony of synchronous sound and a strict alignment of speaker and voice', Naficy asserts, 'accented films are counter-hegemonic insofar as many of them de-emphasize synchronous sound, insist on voiceover and other first person narrations delivered in accented pronunciation, create a slippage between voice and speaker, and inscribe everyday non-dramatic pauses and long silences' (Naficy 2001: 24). Considered in this light, we can say that *A Time for Drunken Horses*, *Happy Together* and *Distant* all employ to some degree multilinguality and/or accented speech, as well as strategies de-emphasizing synchronous sound.

A Time for Drunken Horses is reportedly the first Iranian film to be shot largely in Kurdish. Persian is also spoken in the film. In *Happy Together*, as the characters communicate among themselves in Cantonese and Mandarin, Spanish is often heard in the background. Although everyone speaks Turkish in *Distant*, Saffet's speech, like Mahmut's mother's, is marked by a heavy regional accent.

Voiceover narration is used in both *A Time for Drunken Horses* and *Happy Together* as a strategy de-emphasizing synchronous sound. The events are narrated by Amaneh, Ayoup's younger sister, in the former and by Lai in the latter. In *Distant*, where there is no narration, 'everyday non-dramatic pauses and long silences' are recognizably inscribed in the narrative to accentuate its static visual atmosphere.

According to Naficy, epistolarity is another chief contributor to the accented cinema's style. Exile and epistolarity are constitutively linked in the sense that 'both are driven by distance, separation, absence, and loss and by the desire to bridge the multiple gaps' (Naficy 2001: 101). All three films that I examine here utilize epistolarity in diverse ways that at times serve to expand self-reflexivity and/or disrupt synchronous sound.

In *A Time for Drunken Horses*, we begin to hear an interview in the background during the credit sequence between a man (supposedly the filmmaker) and a female child (Amaneh). From Amaneh's brief answers to the filmmaker's questions, we learn some basic things about her family. As the credit sequence gives way to the opening images of the film (that depict a busy market place where Kurdish children take up odd jobs like wrapping glasses or carrying parcels), the interview at the background goes on for a while. Then, the filmmaker's voice ceases as Amaneh takes over the role of the narrator all by herself.

Such an opening creates a slippage between voice and speaker as we never see the visual representation of the interview that we hear in the background. It also serves to insert a degree of self-reflexivity into the narrative as it inscribes the director's voice, hence presence, at the very outset. In this way, the film not only reveals its constructed nature, but also reminds the audience that what we are about to see is not simply a piece of reality unfolding in front of our eyes, but a tale recounted through the mediation of the director; an oral letter so to speak. The narrative device that Ghobadi employs to frame his story (interview turning into narration) can be said to create a form resembling what Naficy calls 'letter film' in which the film itself takes the form of an epistle addressed to someone either inside or outside the diegesis (Naficy 2001: 101). Amaneh's story, recounted by her own voice, is presented like a letter addressed to the director/interviewer and with his mediation it then reaches to another recipient, 'global' audiences, who supposedly do not know much about the reality of Kurdish people. Blending interview and narration, the film presents its story as a letter addressed to a distant recipient.

In relation to epistolarity, *Happy Together* seems to make the strange suggestion that togetherness can be established only through distance. Epistles, in this regard, do not so

much serve to compensate for distance. Instead, any possibility of intimacy seems to depend entirely on them. Epistolarity is articulated through several devices in the film, most notably a tape recorder. Having the eccentric characteristic of being very keen on sounds, Zhang, the young Taiwanese character, claims that 'he sees with his ears'. Consequently, he is in the habit of recording the voices of his loved ones on a tape instead of keeping their photographs. In the second part of the film, a subtle mutual attraction between Lai and Zhang slightly comes to surface as they hang out together during their last days in Buenos Aires. In a night that they spent at a nightclub, Zhang gives Lai his tape to record whatever he wishes. Overwhelmed by his sorrow, Lai cannot say anything but cries to the tape. In the end, Zhang, actualizing his dream, goes to the lighthouse at the 'end of the world'. When he listens to the tape at the lighthouse, instead of words, he hears only Lai's sobbing. A month later, on his way to Hong Kong, Lai stops by at Taipei and pays a visit to the night market where Zhang's parents have a small food stall. There, he discovers a photo of Zhang taken at the lighthouse. As the camera shows the crowded and chaotic scenery of the night market, we hear Lai's voiceover: 'As I leave, I take one photo of him. I don't know when I see Zhang again. What I know is if I want to, I know where I can find him'. A spiritual togetherness in this way is established between Lai and Zhang as they go in opposite directions. Zhang goes afar from home, Lai returns home. Zhang brings along Lai's voice to the end of the world, Lai brings along Zhang's photo home. What gets them together is not physical proximity, but distance bridged by little epistles being kept as memorials of a hoped for future happiness.¹¹

Being a film about immobility and getting stuck to one's own identity, *Distant* employs epistolary devices only for them not to be used. One habit that both Mahmut and Yusuf share is not to answer phones. The telephone in Mahmut's apartment often rings to be answered only by the answering machine. Similarly, the camera turns into a device accommodating not communication with the world, but the lack of it. Once having aspired to be an independent filmmaker, Mahmut now has to be content with taking commercial photos for a firm producing floor ceramics. He spends hours arranging the lights and objects to produce perfect images of the lifeless, cold surfaces of ceramics. Having taken thousands of such photos in the last few years, his professionalism seems to have completely eaten up his passion for producing his own images. During a short business trip to a nearby town, Mahmut spots beautiful scenery complete with perfect conditions of sunlight. Sensing Mahmut's excitement, Yusuf suggests setting up the camera to help him take pictures. After a moment of hesitation, Mahmut loses his motivation as he feels too lazy to get out of the car, and drops the idea. In *Distant*, epistolary devices seem to mediate the lack of communication between the characters and the world.

Accented cinema at large

How, then, is it possible to situate films like *A Time for Drunken Horses*, *Happy Together*, and *Distant* in relation to the emergent exilic/diasporic cinema? How can we account for their obvious affinity with the 'accented genre' on the basis of the questions of mode of production and reception, authorial inscription, thematic preoccupations and cinematic style? How can we make sense of the fact that their directors are not exilic/diasporic subjects in the conventional sense? How can these films be situated in relation to the existing categories in film studies? If, in Naficy's terms, the films that exilic/diasporic subjects make are 'accented' in the face of a dominant cinema, which is considered to be universal and without accent (Naficy 2001: 4), what kind of a cinematic language do the films like *A Time for Drunken Horses*, *Happy Together*, and *Distant* speak? Can we settle this issue by simply calling them 'foreign' and confining them in their distinct specificity?

'World cinema' would be suggested as a pertinent category under which films like *A Time for Drunken Horses*, *Happy Together*, and *Distant* can be classified. Having gained

currency in recent years, the scope and meaning of the term 'world cinema' seems to be quite unclear. Although it sounds like a concept designating all cinemas in the world, in practice the term 'world cinema' is employed to include only a set of selected cinemas determined on the basis of usually arbitrary criteria. In a recent study, for example, Shohini Chaudhuri uses the term to refer to national cinemas outside Hollywood and focuses on the cinemas only in Europe, the Middle East, East Asia and South Asia (Chaudhuri 2005). Wimal Dissanayake, on the other hand, perceives 'world cinema' as a term designated to talk about the cinemas of Asia, Latin America and Africa, that is, the cinemas of the non-Western world (Dissanayake 1998). As such, the term sounds like an awkwardly trimmed version of the now outmoded concept of 'Third World cinema' that had been widely used during the 1960s and the 1970s to designate the entire cinematic production of 'Third World' societies.¹² Despite their somewhat overlapping contents, 'Third World cinema' is not same as 'Third Cinema' which has been envisaged in more specific terms as a counter cinematic movement posing an economic, aesthetic and cultural alternative to mainstream Hollywood and European art cinemas.

The notion of Third Cinema was first advanced in the late 1960s in Latin America. The term was launched in 1968 by the Argentinean filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in a manifesto entitled 'Towards a Third Cinema'. It was followed by the Cuban Julio Garcia Espinosa's 1969 manifesto 'For an Imperfect Cinema'.¹³ Solanas and Getino define 'First Cinema' as a cinema expressing imperialist, capitalist, bourgeois ideas, while 'Second Cinema' (usually European auteur cinema falls into this category) is associated with aspirations of middle stratum, the *petit bourgeoisie*. As different from First and Second cinemas, '... Third Cinema is the expression of a new culture and of social changes. Generally speaking, Third Cinema gives an account of reality and history... Third Cinema is an open category, unfinished, incomplete. It is a democratic, national, popular cinema' (quoted by Willemen 1994b: 182).¹⁴ According to Paul Willemen, one of the most important characteristics of these manifestos is their refusal to prescribe an aesthetics. They insisted on the legitimacy of any procedure that was likely to achieve an analytically informed understanding of the social formation and how to change it in a socialist direction. Also, the manifestos advocated a practice of cinema which, although conditioned by the situations prevailing in Latin America, cannot be limited to that continent alone, nor for that matter to the Third World (Willemen 1994b: 182). Yet, as a decidedly politicized cinema, the thematic focus of Third Cinema was mostly revolutionary anti-colonial struggle in Third World societies, and its style was usually associated with realism.

Critical legacy of 'Third Cinema' of the 1960s now seems to be reclaimed by 'accented cinema' theory. Emphasizing that both the 'Third' and the 'accented' cinemas are '...historically conscious, politically engaged, critically aware, generally hybridized, and artisinally produced', Naficy conceives accented films as one of the 'offshoots' of the 'Third Cinema' (Naficy 2001: 31). While the critical potential of Third Cinema seems to be appropriated by 'exilic/diasporic' cinema, the term 'world cinema' is left in a rather awkward position. Seeming to have no social, aesthetic and/or political specification, 'world cinema' sounds like an overblown, yet blank term since the signifier 'world' denotes everything and nothing at the same time. As a blanket category covering the entire bundle of non-Western (or in some cases non-North American) film production, the explanatory power of 'world cinema' is almost non-existent unless it is supplemented by another concept, 'national cinema', which in itself proves to be quite troublesome.

As Willemen indicates, the question of 'national' in film studies is ultimately tied up with the question of 'cultural specificity', that is, '...the need to know which specific social-historical processes are at work in the generation of cultural products, and the question of how precisely social existence over-determines cultural practices...' (Willemen 1994b: 175). In film studies, Willemen observes '...specificity is a territorial-institutional matter, and

coincides with the boundaries of the nation-state' (Willemsen 1994a: 209). The boundaries of cultural specificity in cinema, in other words, are established by 'governmental actions implemented through institutions such as censorship and its legislative framework, industrial and financial measures on the economic level, the gearing of training institutions towards employment in national media structures, systems of licensing governed by aspects of corporate law, and so on' (Willemsen 1994a: 209). Despite its indispensable position, however, the concept of 'national cinema' induces a number of important problems. The major problem with the concept, Andrew Higson points out, is its tendency to assume national identity as already fully formed and fixed in place (Higson 2000: 67). Also, it tends to take borders for granted and assume that they are effective in containing political and economic developments, cultural practice and identity. The cinemas established in specific nation-states, however, can rarely be autonomous establishments as the film business has long operated on a regional, national and transnational basis. The experience of border crossing, in this sense, takes place at the level of production, distribution and reception of films (Higson 2000: 69). Instead of taking 'national cinema' as a fixed and uniform totality, a new reading of the concept that goes against the grain of its conventional understanding gains increasing prevalence in current film studies. Ella Shohat, for example, indicating that the topos of a unitary nation often camouflages the possible contradictions among different sectors of society, suggests that any definition of nationality in film studies '...must see nationality as partly discursive in nature, must take class, gender and sexuality into account, must allow for racial difference and cultural heterogeneity, and must be dynamic, seeing 'the nation' as an evolving, imaginary construct rather than an originary essence' (Shohat 2003: 57). In a similar vein, Susan Hayward points to the necessity of developing a renewed understanding of national cinemas in the context of processes of globalization that give rise to the multiplication of points of differentiation within and across nations (Hayward 2000). 'As long as national cinemas attest to this process', she writes, 'the paradox of national cinema becomes clear in that it will always go against the underlying principles of nationalism and be at cross-purposes with the originating idea of the nation as a unified identity' (Hayward 2000: 95).

Discussions around 'national cinema' do not suggest a total negation of the concept, but rather a reassessment of its critical value under contemporary global conditions. The 'accented cinema', as a new 'transnational' genre designation, I believe, could offer inspiring possibilities for this discussion if its 'situatedness' is not defined in rigid terms.

Talking about the differences between the 'Third' and the 'accented' cinemas (Naficy 2001: 30),¹⁵ Naficy suggests that the 'situatedness' of the accented cinema constitutes a dividing line between the two cinematic movements in the sense that it is necessarily made by specific displaced subjects and diasporized communities (Naficy 2001: 30).¹⁶ What constitutes the critical potential of the accented cinema, in other words, is not so much its 'historically conscious', 'politically engaged', and 'critically aware' positioning, but 'situatedness' within a narrowly defined exilic/diasporic condition, which requires emigration from Third World and postcolonial societies to Western cosmopolitan centers. Such a restrictive definition of 'situatedness', I believe, would enclose the 'accented genre' in its own narrow specificity and preclude full realization of its critical potential. It is possible to conceive at least three potential problems with such a rigid definition.

First, a restrictive understanding of situatedness turns a blind eye to the multiplicity of the experiences of displacement, de-territorialization and migration within and across the non-Western world. All three films that I discuss in this paper testify to the complexity of the question of displacement in their own contexts, and effectively show that the problematization of the relations of belonging and identity is not in the monopoly of the exilic/diasporic subjects residing in the West. In this regard, although the flow from Third World and postcolonial societies to the West constitutes a crucial form of contemporary migratory

movement, it cannot entirely subsume the questions of displacement and exilic/diasporic experience.

Secondly, a restrictive definition of 'situatedness' runs the risk of endorsing into a celebratory understanding of 'exile', which regards exilic/diasporic experience as an a priori and sole condition of having a critical and oppositional positioning vis-à-vis the relations of belonging and identity. Attributing an intrinsically positive value to exile, this approach can easily be articulated into recent fashionable discourses that uncritically glorify the condition of the 'exile' as the quintessential role model for the so-called 'postmodern subject'.¹⁷ Such an essentializing understanding of exile could end up not only turning a blind eye to the 'interplay between nationalism and exile' as concepts 'informing and constructing each other' (Said 1994: 359), but also losing sight with contingent and concrete circumstances of different experiences of exile.

Thirdly, a restrictive definition of 'situatedness' has problematic implications not only for what it includes within its boundaries, but also for what it leaves outside. The potentially critical position of accented films vis-à-vis the questions of belonging and identity is defined in Naficy's (2001) theory in relation to the conservative position of the dominant cinema. Here, what the accented cinema reserves for itself is not only a critical and oppositional stance, but also the right to speak 'universally'. Again and again, Naficy indicates that the accented cinema is simultaneously 'situated and universal', 'local and global' (Naficy 2001: 4). So once again, we need to raise the question of how to 'situate' in this picture films like *A Time for Drunken Horses*, *Happy Together*, and *Distant* that engage in a critical interrogation of the questions of belonging and identity. A narrowly situated accented cinema tacitly implies that while it is entitled to raise a universal critique of the relations of belonging and identity at global level, 'world' films could speak only for their specific local contexts. Such a presupposition seems to mirror the highly contested division between 'the West and the rest' according to which the West represents the universal norm, whereas the 'rest' is defined on the basis of its difference. Hence, while the West is entitled to represent humanity in its entirety, the 'rest' is reduced to its particularity and local reality. A narrowly situated accented cinema, at its best, could challenge this view only to a limited extent as it enlarges the boundaries of the West as to embrace the formerly excluded and marginalized exilic/diasporic subjects and to bestow them with a right to speak universally. As long as it takes emigration to the West as a prerequisite for the entitlement to speak universally, however, this approach would leave the hierarchical division between the West and the rest intact.¹⁸

Pointing to these problems, my intention is neither to deny the specificity of the condition of 'exile' nor the historical reality of national boundaries. Delineating a new genre is about articulating boundaries, which would mean drawing limits as well as constructing relations. What I am trying to do here is to re-imagine 'accented cinema' as an inspiring generic designation that could account for the changing nature of the relationship between nationhood and exile/diaspora under global conditions. As Andreas Huyssen suggests, in our contemporary world, '...Home, Heimat, is no longer what it once used to be, either for the nation or for the diaspora' (Huyssen 2003: 151).¹⁹ What is required in this framework is a changing understanding of exile and diaspora, one that, in Huyssen's words, 'denaturalizes its notions of memory and culture and takes account of its changing relationship to the equally changing world of the national' (Huyssen 2003: 151). For film studies, this means re-imagining the categories of 'national' and 'exilic/diasporic' cinemas in less monolithic and hegemonic terms: 'Rather than existing in polar opposition, national and exile cinema engage in a dialectic that underscores the inherent heterogeneity of cinema' (Gemünden and Kaes 2003: 7).

Quoting Willemsen once again, 'a sense of non-belonging, non-identity with the culture one inhabits, whether it be nationally defined, ethnically or in any other way, is a precondition

for the most intense and productive aspects of cultural life' (Willemsen 1994b: 201). The films that I examine in this paper demonstrate that a narrowly defined experience of exile/diaspora is not a necessary and sole condition of articulating such a sense of 'non-belonging' and 'non-identity'. 'Accented cinema', in this context, can be a more effective concept if its function is re-conceived not so much as drawing the limits of exilic/diasporic filmmaking, but constructing relations across national and exilic/diasporic cinemas. For this, we need to come up with an unbounded understanding of the concept, what might be called 'accented cinema at large', which puts the emphasis not so much on narrow situatedness, but critical positioning in the face of the questions of belonging and identity. As a new generic designation that puts forward a critical frame of analysis, 'accented cinema at large' would enable us to develop parallel readings of contemporary independent transnational films (made by 'national' and 'exilic' directors alike) that take questions of belonging and identity as their central problematic. Addressing the question of cultural specificity beyond and across national borders, 'accented cinema at large' will complicate the question of 'national cinema' as it pays closer attention to ethnic, gender and class divisions within national formations. At the same time, it will also facilitate an understanding of contemporary independent transnational cinema with a stronger focus on the interplays between national, regional and global processes of production and reception. Ultimately, parallel readings of films by contemporary independent transnational directors (again 'national' and 'exilic' alike) will enable us to reveal the common cinematic strategies employed by these texts to raise a subversive critique of the hegemony of contemporary neo-colonial as well as nationalist discourses.

Notes

1. Deleuze and Guattari define 'minor literature' as a mode of discourse characterized by the 'deterritorialization of language', 'connection of the individual to a political immediacy' and 'collective assemblage of enunciation' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 18).
2. Since the 1980s, several scholars have talked about exilic/diasporic experience as a productive aspect of cultural production in film studies. Kobena Mercer, for example, maintains that the 'diaspora perspective' in Black independent filmmaking in Britain has a critical potential to 'expose and illuminate the sheer heterogeneity of the diverse social forces always repressed into the margin by the monologism of dominant discourses' (Mercer 1994: 66). Teshome H. Gabriel, likewise, speaks of black independent cinema as 'nomadic' (a term emphasizing its African roots) for it has been informed by an experience of marginalization and deterritorialization (Gabriel 1994). In a similar wane, Trinh Minh-ha's writings in the 1980s draw upon the paradoxes and possibilities of diasporic marginality in cultural politics of representation with a special emphasis on the question of gender (Trinh 1991).
3. In *The Skin of the Film*, Laura U. Marks, for example, uses the term 'intercultural cinema' to describe the work of those filmmakers who are cultural minorities living in the West, often recent immigrants from Asia, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa (Marks 2000). 'Intercultural cinema', as a movement coming from 'the new cultural formations of Western metropolitan centers', according to Marks, is increasingly becoming a genre characterized by 'experimental styles that attempt to represent the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge, or living as a minority in the still majority white, Euro-American West' (Marks 2000: 3). Drawing on the theories of Gilles Deleuze (1986, 1989) and Henri Bergson (1988), the particular focus of Marks' work is the ways that diasporic filmmakers excavate and rediscover cultural memories through appeals to multisensorial forms of recollection.
4. Naficy's (2001) book develops a 'model' for the accented genre (an ideal type so to speak) and seeks to chart all the features that would possibly characterize it, although these features appear only partially in individual films that he discusses.
5. Wong tasted displacement at an early age. Talking about his transplant from Shanghai to Hong Kong as a child, he says 'when I got there, I spoke nothing but Shanghainese, whereas Cantonese was, and still is, the local dialect. For some time, I was totally alienated, and it was like the biggest nightmare of my life' (Wong 1997b: 100).
6. *'Happy Together: A Story about Reunion'* is the English title of the film. Rey Chow indicates that the Chinese title, which has been borrowed from the Chinese translation of Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up* and

literally means 'unexpected revelation of scenes of spring', does not only sound quite different from the English one, but has also quite different connotations in the context of Hong Kong culture (Chow 2001: 230).

7. Ghobadi, Wong and Ceylan received respectively the Camera d'Or, Best Director and Grand Jury Prizes for *A Time for Drunken Horses*, *Happy Together*, and *Distant* in Cannes Film Festival in the years 2000, 1997 and 2003. Ghobadi shared his award with Hasan Yekta Panah's *Jom'eh*. Apart from the Grand Jury Prize, *Distant*, also won the acting awards for its two male leads (Mehmet Emin Toprak and Muzaffer Özdemir). Mehmet Emin Toprak, Ceylan's cousin and an amateur actor playing in all three of Ceylan's films, tragically died in a car crash the day after *Distant* was selected for the Festival. Sharing the Best Actor award with Muzaffer Özdemir, Toprak became the first actor ever to win a prize at Cannes posthumously.
8. Following its theatrical release in 2003, *Distant* reached a total audience of 57,745 in Turkey. In France, more than 80,000 watched the film in only three weeks following its theatrical release in February 2004 (*Radikal*, 'Uzak'ı Sevdiler', February 6, 2004).
9. Rey Chow reads *Happy Together* as a nostalgia film of a different kind in which nostalgia is '...no longer an emotion attached to a concretely experienced, chronological past; rather it is attached to a fantasized state of oneness, to a time of absolute coupling and indifferenciation' (Chow 2001: 232).
10. For more discussion on Nuri Bilge Ceylan's cinema, see Suner (2004).
11. According to Rey Chow, compared to Ho's self-aggrandizing and unfaithful attitude in *Happy Together*, Zhang's presence provides the suggestion of an alternative kind of affective relationship, one in which Lai's faithful and nurturing way of loving would become a mutually shared practice (Chow 2001: 237).
12. For more discussion on how the concept of the 'Third World' has appeared in film studies, see Shohat and Stam (1994).
13. In the 1980s, the notion of Third Cinema was again taken up by film scholars. Teshome Gabriel reformulated some of the Third Cinema theses in his 1982 book *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (Gabriel 1982). In the 1986 Edinburgh Film Festival, the notion of Third Cinema was selected as a central concept. Following the conference, Paul Willemsen and Jim Pines edited a volume in 1989 entitled *Questions of Third Cinema* (Willemsen and Pines 1989).
14. In a recent article, Robert Stam suggests that the alternative aesthetics proposed by 'Third Cinema' manifestos typically revalorizes, by inversion, what had formerly been seen as negative, especially within colonialist discourse. 'At the same time, these aesthetics tends to turn strategic weakness into tactic strength. By appropriating an existing discourse for their own ends, they deploy the force of the dominant against domination' (Stam 2003: 32). Stam focuses on three related aspects of these aesthetics: constitutive hybridity; chronotopic multiplicity; and the common motif of the redemption of detritus (loss, damage, injury).
15. Accented films, according to Naficy, tend to be less polemical in their ideological positioning and do not necessarily engage in Marxist politics and class struggle like many Third Cinema films did. Instead, their key concern seems to be the questions of displacement, belonging and identity and how they are experienced in both private stories of individuals and public stories of diasporic communities (Naficy 2001: 30).
16. Naficy makes this assertion about the situatedness of accented cinema as a response to Teshome Gabriel's argument that Third Cinema films may be made anywhere, by anyone, about any subject in a variety of styles and forms as long as they are oppositional and liberationist (Naficy 2001: 30).
17. For an extensive discussion and critique of the celebratory approach to 'exile', see Pels (1999).
18. At its worst, a restrictive definition of 'situatedness' would serve to assist the center's appropriation of the periphery. For more discussion, see Nelly (1993).
19. Naficy himself makes a similar point in an earlier article as he dwells on the multiple modalities of placement and displacement in contemporary global world and concludes that 'exile' should not be conceived as a generalized condition experienced by displaced people equally and uniformly (Naficy 1999).

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