



Filming Home, Plurality of Identity, Belonging and Homing in Transnational African Cinema

A Case Study of the Films *Restless Wandering*, *The Place in Between*, and *That's My Face*

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Are you lost?

Me, lost? I never get lost. When you don't remember where you're going, remember where you come from. And you will never get lost.

A griot in Restless Wandering

Introduction

To feel at *home*, to feel one *belongs*, is essential for identity construction. For long the prevailing premise has been that because people develop emotional ties to a place and to community, nomadic lifestyle engenders a sense of homelessness (Cuba and Hummon 1993: 547-8). Although the first claim is unquestionably true, the latter belief is being challenged by our ever more transnational and multicultural world, where the concepts of home and belonging are going

through significant transformations. For many, 'home' has lost its meaning as being something rooted in one particular place or community. As people are increasingly more mobile and de-territorialised, home becomes imagined and invented through diasporas, and their memories, and through new, digital forms of community. The subfield of intercultural cinema in particular has tackled the issue of belonging in transnational space. It has explored questions such as what does it mean to have a plural meaning for home, and for belonging that can move in-between various cultures and borders? Consequently, intercultural filmmakers have discovered new affective methods and techniques to depict the quest for identities and homes. The objective of this article is to study these discoveries by analyzing three African transnational films *Restless Wandering* (2009), *The Place in Between* (2010), and *That's My Face* (2001).



Thomas Allen Harris, here holding an 8mm camera, used old and new 8mm footage to make the film *That's my Face* (*E Minha Cara*). Photo Courtesy of Chimpanzee Productions.

Central to my analysis is what it means to be at home. As stated above, home and identity are closely linked concepts. They form and shape one another. Just as our identities go through transformations in different stages of life, our identities can also be reconstructed and recreated during the course of migration and moving. Stuart Hall usefully defines identity as a “‘production’, which is never complete [and] always in process” (1996: 210). Hall’s description allows us to see identity as something ever fluid and dynamic. Due to its adaptable and plural characteristics it can be attached to multiple places and layers at the same time. This article translates Hall’s notion of identity-as-process to the idea of home, discussing home as a production in a process. In this article home is understood as an abstract concept, a feeling of belonging to a place or places. Home can be imagined and/or it can be a psychological state of mind. When referring to a place or a territory where a person has created a deep attachment I use the word *homeland*. Naturally, these concepts can overlap and are sometimes inseparable.

Throughout my research I found the quest for finding home particularly significant for filmmakers from the African diaspora. They have increasingly explored what Africa has meant to those outside the continent and how to return to Africa metaphorically (Hall 1996: 218). For many pan-Africanism has been an important facet to be included in their work. To define the ideology and the movement of pan-Africanism I borrow the definition by Lemmelle and Kelley (1994: 4) who discuss pan-Africanism as the contact between Africa and its diaspora. The running theme in pan-Africanism has been the historical links between countries resisting slavery, colonialism and imperialism (Ibid). Similarly, the contact between the continent and the diaspora has been one of the central themes in African transnational cinema. In this paper no boundary is created between continent-based African filmmakers over African diaspora filmmakers. I see all three filmmakers reviving memories and heritage of African cultures that invoke a feeling of home and a sense of belonging. The films call attention to the process of how to re-create African and/or diaspora identities and belonging in transnational space.

Although Africa is the connecting theme between the three works discussed here, these films not only discuss home inside and outside of Africa but also one's place in between many cultures. Without focusing on specific ethnicities, African nationalities or diasporas, the aim is to study the filming of home in African 'intercultural cinema,' which is defined by Laura Marks as a form of moving picture art representing experiences of living between two or more cultures or living as a minority. Because intercultural cinema cannot be confined to a single culture, and it moves between and within cultures, it is a valuable genre in the exploration of the concept of home in an increasingly transnational world (Marks 2000: 1, 6). As Hamid Naficy accurately observes, transnational filmmakers create "sites for intertextual, cross-cultural, and transnational struggles over meanings and identities" (Naficy quoted in Marks 2000: 7). Both Naficy's and Marks' theories help us to analyze transnational cinema and its representations of home.

I start the article by mapping out the literature on transnationalism and identity construction, and intercultural cinema. The literature selected specifically discusses belonging and feeling at home. In particular, I draw on the works of Liisa Malkki, Gaim Kibreab, Avtar Brah, Laura Marks and Hamid Naficy. This discussion will be followed by a close analysis of how the three case study films 'film home.' Finally, before the conclusion, the section 'Home as a Journey' will explore some of the joint findings of the films.

The first film analyzed is a short film titled *Restless Wandering* (2009) by Tunisian filmmaker Nouri Bouzid. It explores issues of modernity, nation-statehood, and border control in contemporary African societies. Further, the film explores how sedentarist metaphysics is a challenge for some people with more traditional notions of belonging and feeling at home in Africa. In this film, the confrontation between tradition and modernity is represented through two characters: a West African griot and a Tunisian security officer. The second film analyzed is *That's My Face* (2001) by African-American filmmaker Thomas Allen Harris. In this biographical documentary Harris goes for a one man's journey to discover his African spirituality in Brazil. The final film analyzed is *The Place in*

Between (2010) by a French director of Burkinabé heritage, Sarah Bouyain. *The Place in Between* is a fictional film, though it also has some autobiographical features, portraying a young woman's return to Burkina Faso from France in search of her biological mother.

All three films can be considered to belong to the genre of intercultural cinema and therefore they share a common foundation from which we can explore the concept of home. However, the differences in their styles and narration are also very useful to draw comparisons. In relation to Bouzid's and Bouyain's work the cinematic style in Harris' documentary is much more alternative and experimental. Additionally, since there are fewer female than male filmmakers working today (in Africa and the West), Bouyain's *The Place in Between* is a useful example to account for the female perspective, which in diaspora cinema has often been marginalized (Foster 1997:1). Finally, it is important to note that the conceptual approach of each artist is distinct. Whereas Bouzid's griot longs for continental Pan-African reconstruction, Sarah Bouyain's film studies postcolonial exile identity. Harris, on the other hand, is in search of African diasporic belonging. Indeed, the artists are situated in different historical, geographical and conceptual positions, yet their quest for what is home is a consequence of globalization. Instead of focusing on each of their conceptual positioning as such, my aim is to understand how home in African transnational cinema can be perceived and explored in various ways.

Literature Review: Identity and Home in Transnational Space

Increased global cultural interaction has brought people closer and made them more aware of each other than ever before; the increasing movement of people has become a defining character of global politics, economics, and culture. The world is more condensed due to the accelerated movement of information and capital. While different populations are more inter-linked, they have also become increasingly de-attached from their countries origin and their original homes (Malkki 1992: 25). De-territorialization, a weakening of ties

between culture and place, has been described as the central force of the modern world (Appadurai 1990: 11). Edward Said (1979: 18) also describes this period of globalization as the "generalized condition of homelessness." Further, Daniel Warner characterizes the contemporary world as being a place where "we are all refugees" or "tourists" (Warner quoted in Kibreab 1999: 385).

Although exile and territorial displacement are not new or exclusively post-modern phenomena they have more analytical visibility today due to a higher degree of research on the topic (Malkki 1992:24). In her research, anthropologist Liisa Malkki suggests that people's deep attachment to a place is significant in identity construction. However, drawing from nomadic metaphysics, one's territory does not necessarily define identity itself. Malkki further observes that in this time of 'generalized condition of homelessness,' it is more visible than ever before how identities are more fluid rather than fixed. During the process of de-territorialization, identities continue to be re-constructed and re-created throughout a person's lifetime. Consistent with Hall's notion of identity discussed above, Malkki sees identity as "always mobile and processual, partly self-construction, partly categorization by others, partly a condition, a status, a label, a weapon, a shield, [and] a fund of memories" (Malkki 1992:37). The emphasis in her work is on plurality of identity, which may be attached to multiple places while living in them, remembering and imagining them.

While Malkki has emphasized the de-territorialization that is seen to be underway in the global world, Gaim Kibreab (1999) has argued that the era of globalization has in fact reinforced re-territorialization of identity, home and homeland. Accordingly, Kibreab believes that, increasingly, people are leaning towards their own cultural, racial, historical and spatial belonging (Kibreab 1999: 385). He draws from sedentarist metaphysics, which conceives that one's culture and identity derive from a specific place and from a sense of belonging to somewhere. Moreover, sedentarists believe

that territory provides the basis of morality. Sedentarist thinking has led to a belief that people who are uprooted from their own culture and sense of belonging can suffer from immorality and a lack of identity (Malkki 1992: 31-2). Therefore, the exclusion and alienation of 'the other'¹, is greater than ever. As the displaced 'others' can be received with hostility, the desire to return to one's 'natural place', or physical home, has become increasingly important (Kibreab 1999:408).

Acknowledging Kibreab's notion of the desire to return home, especially in circumstances when one has been violently de-territorialised, it is also important to outline that desire is not always material, but rather imagined. Avtar Brah (1996: 181) argues that in an era which is so strongly defined and driven by the movements of people, the "[diaspora space]' is 'inhabited' not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous." By indigenous Brah means those who do not live in exile or possess a multicultural background. Yet they are deeply affected by transnationalism through multicultural people close to them and through the blending of various cultures. In her discourse about belonging Brah takes into account a 'homing' desire but distinguishes it from the desire to return to a homeland, which may not be as compelling, as we all already live in a diaspora space. Home can simultaneously be a mythical place of desires and imagination while also being the lived experience of locality (Brah 1996:192). Thus, "[t]he *concept* of diaspora places the discourse of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, *inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing the discourses of fixed origins*" (Brah 1996:193; italics in original). Brah believes that because of diaspora and the diasporic space in which we live, the concept of home can be perceived in new and more creative

1 'The other' can be seen as someone who differs from the majority population, for example on the basis of ethnicity, religion or nationality. For a more detailed discussion see Julia Kristeva's Powers of Horror (Kristeva & Roudiez, 1982) and Edward Said's Orientalism (1988).

ways. Understanding that every human has a strong desire to belong and to feel at home, this feeling does not need to derive from a person's natural place or place of origin. This 'homing' desire (rather than the desire to return to a homeland) is central to transnationalism and multiculturalism and to the films discussed here.

Since the beginning of the 1990s academia has seen a growing interest in the issues of identity and transnationalism. This research has increasingly focused on subfields of post-colonialism, multiculturalism and diaspora studies. Similarly, mainstream-media has also given an increasingly larger space for narratives of transnationalism (Shohat and Stam 2003:1). The engagement of the media with transnational identities can be very prominent in the process of fulfilling the homing desire. For people who live outside of their homelands, who belong to more than one culture, or who may be disconnected from their families, imagination begins to play a vital role in social life.

Arjun Appadurai (1990) has suggested that the image, the imagined and the imaginary are the components for the new global order. For people living geographically distanced from the places and people they feel attachment to, the imagination has become a new social practice. Media creates imagined lives for those living outside of their physical homelands. Moreover, subjects of home, homelessness, identity formation and transnationalism have become ever more popular in artistic expressions. As Appadurai (1990: 11) writes: "[D]eterritorialization creates new markets for film companies, art impresarios and travel agencies who thrive on the need of a de-territorialized population for contact with its homeland." Media engages people, places and imagined communities with distant places significantly impacting on national and transnational identity and communal belonging (Shohat and Stam 2003:1-2). In other words, the media has become a catalyzer for multicultural affiliations and transnational identifications, and a significant way of accessing 'home'.

Cinema as a Catalyzer for Transnationalism

In intercultural and transnational cinema, filmmakers draw from various cultures, memories and attachments. For transnational filmmakers questions of home, identity, nation and belonging are often central to their work (Naficy 2001: 6-9). The importance of their work lies in the way they challenge cultural separateness. Since their films are multicultural and hybrid, giving voice to multicultural scenes and settings, they can move between the dominant cultural relations and make racist and colonial settings visible (Marks 2000: xii). Hamid Naficy (2001) has further emphasized that films made by filmmakers with multicultural backgrounds often share similarities in the cinematic style and narratives. If we simply categorize transnational films under, for example, genres of national², Third Cinema³, ethnic cinema⁴ or identity cinema⁵ we misread films that reflect transnationalism and multiculturalism (Naficy 2001: 19). As a result, Naficy proposes a more appropriate term, 'accented cinema.' However, it is important to keep in mind that these filmmakers do not only work on the borders, but also "inhabit the interstitial spaces of not only the host society but also the main film industry" (Naficy, 1999: 133).

Naficy discusses three overlapping types of films which all have characteristics of what he calls accented cinema: exilic, diasporic and

2 National cinema can mean a government funded film-industry or a cinema specifically concentrated on representing a country or a nation. It often concentrates on informing the viewer much about the nation, people, and national issues occurring. The term "national cinema" is a subject of debate in the field of film studies, disagreements deriving from questions such as how to define "a nation". Some of the famous examples of national cinema are Russian and Iranian cinemas. For further interest see Vitali and Willemsen (2006).

3 Third Cinema started in Latin America in the late 1960s as a political cinematic movement strongly resisting colonialism and neo-colonialism, and artistically challenging hegemonic Hollywood cinematic style and its representation. See Solanans and Getino (1969).

4 Ethnic cinema emerges from the conflict between descent relations, emphasising the bloodline and ethnicity of the filmmaker. See Naficy (2001: 15).

5 Identity cinema often focuses in the country in which the filmmaker resides, and in that context discusses spilt identities or minority identities within majority identifications. See (Naficy 2001: 15-16).

ethnic films. John Durham Peters (1999: 18-20) distinguishes the differences between the categories. To Peters, exile is a painful banishment from home and is often experienced in solitariness rather than in community. Exile invokes home and homeland via longing and fantasizing. Diaspora is often a collective experience in which people are tied via a network to their compatriots. Home is more comfortably imagined and return is not seen as necessary or even desired. Whereas, ethnic films are most concerned with a specific group and they are associated with identity cinema. As Naficy (2001:15) explains:

[E]xilic cinema is dominated by its focus on there and then in the homeland, diasporic cinema by its vertical relationship to the homeland and by its lateral relationship to the diaspora communities and experiences, and postcolonial ethnic and identity cinema by its exigencies of life here and now in the country in which the filmmaker resides.

Thus, diasporic cinema becomes the crossing point in the filmmaking of these three different types. The emphasis of accented films is on their heterogeneity. They can overlap with each other and establish different relationship to places. Some highlight their relation to their host while others to their home country.

Despite the different approaches Naficy argues there is a frequent theme in accented films, which is a return narrative. The filmmakers are often situated at borders. These can be physical or metaphorical marked by, for instance, race, class, gender, or membership or a citizenship (Naficy 2001:31). They articulate the place in between which the transnational filmmakers occupy. Naficy (2001:33) highlights that the return, crossing the border or seeking or escaping home can be as much psychological and metaphorical as physical. Further, the films tend to have an autobiographical signature, where the filmmakers draw deeply from their own memories and experiences. As in Third Cinema, the films are often politically engaged. But unlike Third Cinema, they do not focus so much on national allegories, but reveal the racist, colonial and hegemonic

power relations between cultures through more personal and private storytelling (Ibid).

Although Laura Marks does not clearly categorize intercultural films as a genre, as Naficy does with 'accented cinema', they both attempt to theorize how the imagination is a key component used in intercultural cinema. The imagination discussed here is constructed by memories and experiences. Because we feel, remember and sense most strongly with our bodies, the conclusion of both authors is that imagination in film is sensed strongest via cinematic elements and narratives, which excite an embodied experience in the viewer. The human body is experienced externally through mediums such as mirrors, photography, films and the gaze of others, and internally by our own vision and proprioception (Naficy 2001:28). Considering the body itself as a home, "it provides our original and initial opening upon the access to the world" (Sobchack 1999: 47). In exilic experiences the body can be traumatized by, for instance, the hostility and racism of the new living environment, or it can be alienated because of a deviant dress, style or skin color (Naficy 2001:28). Moreover, the exile can become a "somatic experience, in which the subject's own body, or image, is appropriated by an external agency" (Wagstaff and Everett quoted in Dovey 2009b: 60). Therefore, Naficy proposes that through bodily experiences memories and associations of home can be evoked. They can be sensed by a touch, a smell or perhaps a mother tongue heard spoken in a street. Accented filmmakers tend to use tactile optics which evoke senses such as touch and smell and other sense memories, thereby memorializing and "recollecting the images, sounds, smells, people, places, and times they left behind" (Naficy 2001:29).

Instead of talking about 'tactile optics' like Naficy, Marks proposes that many intercultural films are 'visually haptic'. Her argument is that filmmakers, when positioned in between cultures, tend to look for new methods of visual expression. Whereas Western art has prioritized the sense of sight to express knowledge and experi-

ence, intercultural filmmakers in search or longing for home and memories draw on and evoke 'embodied' experiences in their film. Marks describes this as follows:

Haptic visuality is distinguished from optical visuality, which sees things from enough distance to perceive them as distinctive forms in deep space: in other words, how we usually conceive a vision. [...] Haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze. (Marks 2000: 162)

In other words, she argues that senses such as touch and smell are primary senses. Through touching, for instance, the whole body engages with the sensation. This is because a touch is experienced on the surface of the body; the sense is inseparable from us. On the other hand, sight or sound can be distanced from the viewer or listener. In films where haptic visuality is present, we are more engaged with the picture, which can evoke more intense feelings and memories. Marks (2000:163) continues:

[H]aptic perception privileges the material presence of the image. ...[I]mages that are so 'thin' and uncliché that the viewer must bring his or her resources of memory and imagination to complete them. The haptic image forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into the narrative.

Marks offers several examples of techniques which can provoke haptic visuality in relation to a film, such as: close-to-the-body camera positions, characters in actions of smelling, touching, or tasting, changes in focus and under- and over-exposed film. These observations by Marks and Nacify's, together with Brah's notion of 'homing desires', will be utilized when analyzing the films *Restless Wandering*, *That's My Face* and *The Place in Between*.

Representation of Africa and Exilic People

It is important to briefly state why the films discussed here have been selected. While both Africans and exilic peoples (immigrants, refugees, diasporic peoples), as subjects, have often been marginalized and victimized, the films here are narratives where the protagonists and filmmakers are locating their own destiny and place.

In his essay "How to Write about Africa", Kenyan-born Binyavanga Wainana (2005) writes about how *Africa* (as though it were a *country*) has been represented in media and literature only as a continent suffering from endless wars, illnesses and disasters. Africans are victimized and alienated in the eyes of the reader. They are voiceless and homogeneous people without an active role in their own destiny. In his article Wainana (2006) satirically comments how Africans have been stereotyped:

[The typical] African characters may include naked warriors [and a] loyal servant, [who] always behaves like a seven-year-old and needs a firm hand... [and the characters should] always include *The Starving African*, who wanders the refugee camp nearly naked, and waits for the benevolence of the West.

In the early days of motion pictures, Africa was not only homogenized and victimized, but its cinematic representation was also racist. For filmmakers in the early 20th century, Africa offered a new, exotic and bizarre setting for films. As Peter Davis (1996:3) writes: "[T]he pictures of the native people [were] scarcely distinguishable from those of the animal trophies. Africa was a hunting-ground for the white man and when Hollywood seized on Africa, this was the Africa it offered." Over a century later, Hollywood still stamps stereotypes of Africans (Davis 1996: 4). By looking at most of the blockbuster films made in or about Africa such as *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), *Lord of Wars* (2005), *The Last King of Scotland* (2006), or *Machine Gun Preacher* (2011) the observations by Wainana about stereotypical Africa remain true. Africa is a war-torn place, and Africans them-

selves appear to be helpless victims. The continent is still a white man's playground, where 'he' can make a change in the lives of Africans.

But it is not only the Africans who have been marginalized. Amongst the other colonized populations and nations, diasporas and exilic people have also often been represented as victims and 'the Other'. In the second half of the 20th century, an enormous number of people and nations have been displaced due to a failures of socialism, communism, nationalism, religious and ethnic wars, and the fragmentation of nation-states (Naficy 2001: 10). These peoples are the products of postcolonial displacement and post-modern scattering. Simultaneously, in the process of globalization, many have moved voluntarily. Without making a distinction between voluntarily and involuntarily de-territorialised peoples and people coming from multicultural backgrounds, these groups are represented in cinema in new ways. Instead of seeing the displaced peoples as mere victims and marginalized groups, they are increasingly represented as active agents connecting links between the borders of nations (Ibid).

Through the agency of exilic people we can explore ideas of home in a very intimate way, through individuals who live in between places and cultures, who journey inside themselves, to discover where they belong. It is important to note that all the filmmakers and the protagonists in the films have a choice. Being in exile or being alienated is not necessarily due to a hostile environment. Malian-Mauritanian filmmaker Abderrahmane Sissako, who has lived most of his life abroad, says:

I'm not a whole entity as such. I'm a multiple. And this multiplicity is fragility. This fragility becomes nearly a lightness. So I surf over things, perhaps with more ease. By that I mean that I'm not someone who is saddened by exile. I'm not a victim. It's a choice. (Sissako in Whitfiel 2002)

As Lindiwe Dovey (2009 b: 56) discusses in her article 'Subjects of exile: Alienation in Francophone West African cinema', exile is not

always painful and negative, but rather it can be reinvented as a positive and strengthening experience. Julia Kristeva (quoted in Dovey, 2009b: 56) also writes that "Being alienated from myself, as painful as that may be, provides me with that exquisite distance within which perverse pleasure begins, as well as the possibility of my imagining and thinking, the impetus of my culture." The protagonists in the films discussed here are not victims of alienation or represented as 'the other'. They are active pursuers in the search for home and belonging.

Homing in Transnational African Films

Restless Wandering in *L'Afrique Vue Par*, 2009, by Nouri Bouzid *L'Afrique Vue Par*⁶ is a collection of ten short films by some of the most prominent African filmmakers such as Flora Gomes, Gaston Kaboré, Mama Keïta and Abderrahmane Sissako. The films portray contemporary Africa in different parts of the continent and diaspora. The short film *Restless Wandering*, by the famous Tunisian filmmaker Nouri Bouzid,⁷ is a story set in the old ruins in Tunisia. An encounter between a West African griot⁸ and a group of Tunisian children is interrupted when a Tunisian security official suspects the man of having illegally immigrated to the country and drives him away.

The film is a remarkable representation of pan-Africanism. It is an encounter, and a meeting point of the north and the south. In the center of the discussion is what separates North Africa from Sub-Saharan Africa. The film articulates how Africans have been, and still

6 Translation: Africa seen by

7 Nouri Bouzid is arguably one of the most renowned filmmakers in Maghrebian cinema. Born in 1945 in Tunisia and trained in Belgium, Bouzid then returned to his home country and worked for several film productions. He was later imprisoned for five years for radical left wing activism (Armes 2006: 91).

8 Griot is a French word for a prestigious keeper of oral cultural traditions and heritage in West Africa, specifically referring to Mande culture (Panzacchi, 1994, Belcher, 1999).

are, affected by rules and ideologies introduced and imposed by colonialism. To highlight the changes occurring in African societies, Bouzid portrays the dichotomy of old and new; inclusion and exclusion is represented through the two characters – the griot and the security official. The griot character symbolizes African traditions and customs and the continent's rich cultural heritage. His role is played by the famous Sotigui Kouyaté⁹; a real Malian-Burkinabé griot, who during his life was hailed as one of the most significant contributors to West African cultural heritage (Guttman, 2001). Although griots belong to a particular West African cultural tradition, the griot's ethnic and regional background is never highlighted in the film. In the cast he is referred to as *L'Africain*. Thus, I read him to represent the rich African cultural heritage in general as well as the unity of Africa.

First, the spectator sees the griot silently resting in the ruins, representing what could be interpreted as sleeping, forgotten traditions. The children play near him and as soon as they spot him they wake the griot up. This suggests that it is the curiosity of the children and the new generations that could revive the ancient traditions back to life. When the griot teaches proverbs to the children, he describes Africa as a big tree. The many branches of the tree symbolize all the countries in Africa. Applying the metaphor of a tree into sedentarist metaphysics, a tree has represented fixed roots and belonging, particularly in Western history (Malkki 1992:28). However, here the roots are a symbol of a mutual substrate. The roots provide the history and foundation of Africa, but from that point all the countries and nations grow in different directions. The symbolism here can be linked to the ideology of pan-Africanism, which draws the

9 Sotigui Kouyaté (1936-2010) was an internationally acclaimed actor and a founder of a theater company in Burkina Faso. The Kouyaté family is part of prestigious clans of griots. Also Sotigui's son Dani Kouyaté is a griot and an important filmmaker (Guttman 2001). His film *Keïta! L'Héritage du griot*, is a fundamental work in African cinema, in which Sotigui plays the key character, Jeli-ba, the griot (Armes 2006: 168).

historical links between African countries and the diaspora, thus uniting Africa (Lemmelle and Kelley 1994).

The location of the film is particularly important. The story is set in Tunisia, which is not only the country of origin of the filmmaker, but it is also an important transit point for illegal immigration from Africa to Europe. In consequence, Tunisia has in past years passed more restrictive laws to limit such traffic. It has pursued a bilateral agreement with Italy to send illegal immigrants arriving in Italy back to Tunisia, positioning immigrants in very vulnerable situations (Baldwin-Edwards 2006:12-3). Through the character of the government official, the film critiques these laws and agreements.

The ruins represent Africa as a place. The ancient walls and buildings have been destroyed by colonialism. It seems everyone has forgotten the place except the griot. In the turning point of the film, a car drives into the ruins. The vehicle is a symbol of modern and materialistic values, which intrude into the space. An aggressive security official steps outside of the car, frightening the children away. The security official's only interest in the griot is whether he has legally immigrated to Tunisia, has valid identification, possesses money or is a terrorist. For him, these factors define one's purpose, identity and belonging. But the griot does not need official papers to define his identity. Being a griot is a continuation of ancient traditions. His profession and identity are defined through his belonging to the community and its acceptance and appreciation to Africa at large. A griot enjoys a unique position where he is enabled and expected to speak up and critique society, and therefore partaking in its development (Smith 2010: 28-9).

The clash of pan-Africanism and nation-statehood becomes highlighted when the griot states: "I'm not an illegal immigrant. I'm at home here [...] A griot feels home everywhere he goes." The security official is resentful of the griot's idea of them being brothers and belonging to the same living space. The official is a product and a guardian of nationalism, border control and modernity, whereas the

griot knows no borders in Africa. What is implied clearly is that the concepts of nation-statehood and nationalism imported from the West to Africa divided the united struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism. Cultures are being disturbed when imposing homogeneous national identities (Sethi 2011:46). The borders, nationalism and increased control of citizens are a threat for the unity and the traditional African lifestyle that the griot represents. The film suggests that the artificial exclusion and a weakening of old customs in modern society are slowly alienating Africans in their own continent.

There are no alternative experimentations in the cinematic style in the film. However, Bouzid utilizes some filming techniques to empower the narration. When the griot steps outside of the cave the camera creates distance by zooming out. The griot walks at a slow pace in the front of the screen and the children are unfocused and blurred in the background. The diegetic sounds constantly grow. We hear the walking stick hitting the soil and the rocks. Simultaneously as the sound of the wind grows, the movement of it becomes more vivid on the screen. This kind of footage creates a feeling of a revival of ancient Africa.

Throughout the film the narrative construction is simple and rather slow paced. However, despite the slowness, and simplistic structure much is said and implied in the film. Moreover, these features highlight the meaningful content and message of the film. Oliver Barlet explains that the slowness of the footage in African cinema is typical, as it allows the spectator to engage with the film. Senegalese director Ababacar Samb Makharam once said that in oral storytelling the slowness of narration is crucial. Because the oral tradition is so deeply rooted in African cultures throughout the continent many African filmmakers have aspired to sustain the tradition in new digital forms of narrations (Barlet & Turner 1996: 171, 191).

Drawing from the oral tradition, proverbs play a significant role in the film. The griot explains to the children "We have one mouth

and two ears, haven't we? It means that we have to speak once and listen twice." It can be interpreted that we, as spectators, also need to listen twice. The usage of sounds supports the proverb. Every scratch of the sand on the ground and the sound of the soft wind are clear. Outside the cave, the picture is almost silent, therefore all the sounds created by movements of the people and movements in nature catch our attention. As Barlet points out: "African cinema tells us, then, that we gain not only from looking at Africa, but also from listening to it" (Ibid: 192). This is the message of Bouzid as well, conveyed through the narrative, *mise-en-scène*, and slow shots and finally the soundtrack: we should listen to Africa.

The film ends with a scene where the griot is taken away by the security official. He leaves with him voluntarily but seems to realize the official's dubious motives. The camera zooms out high above the ruins. The children return to the middle of them and a close-up-shot shows one of the girl's faces. She and the viewer are left with confusion. How will the future generations preserve the memories of their African heritage?

Restless Wandering is not only an encounter between the griot, the children and the Tunisian security officer. It is also an encounter of Africans who are across borders, which are still, to this day, strikingly controlled by outsiders. It is an encounter of modernity and historical cultural heritage, and finally, it is an encounter of pan-Africanism and the artificial division of people. The griot feels at home everywhere. That is the essential content of the film. His identity constitutes from the past as much as it does from the present time. His belonging and right for being in a place is defined by the people, and not by immigration laws. Therefore, the film proposes an important question: does the obsession of sedentarist metaphysics of inclusion, exclusion and control over people's memberships alienate those with more nomadic or plural identity and belonging?

That's my face/ É a Minha Cara, 2001, by Thomas Allen Harris

Thomas Allen Harris is an African-American filmmaker, raised in both the Bronx of New York and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. In his career, Harris has filmed subjects of identity, sexuality and race. Although Harris's work can be considered as American rather than African, in his film *That's My Face* Harris creates a bridge between the two cinemas. *That's my Face* is an experimental documentary about race, but in relation to his earlier films, it is much more personal, autobiographical and explicitly discusses identity construction in relation to Africa. The film is shot following three different generations, from the 1960s to the early 2000s, with all footage being silent (Harris added voice-over narration in the editing stage). The film explores African spirituality and identity, first discussing what it was like for Harris to grow up in New York in a black community and later on in Tanzania. Harris expresses that he felt equally at home in both places. However, he could never identify himself with Christianity and was entreated – or 'haunted', as he puts it – by African spirits. The documentary thus follows his journey to Brazil where Orishas, Yoruba gods, are worshipped and where the Yoruba religion is merged within Catholic traditions.

The opening shot of the film shows people in the streets in Brazil. In a voice-over, Harris explains how he has had a double vision ever since he was a child. His left eye sees everything normally but the right eye is incapable of focusing, as if it only sees the essence and the aura of the object. This duality becomes the theme of the film: his growing up in two different countries; his feeling both American and African; his trying to follow his grandmother's teachings of Christianity but having dreams about the African spirits. Therefore, he finds the Orishas in Brazil consoling. Their duality, which evolves from two religions, is an aspect that Harris identifies with strongly.

The film is executed in a way that leaves space for other interpretations, since, as Harris states "[it is made to have] enough holes

in the narrative that you could add your own narrative to it" ("That's my face: An interview with thomas allen harris," n.d.). 'Leaving holes' can be interpreted via what Marks calls haptic visuality. Harris uses a lot of his own family home-video material and photographs. This footage is very grainy, and the camera is rarely still and focused. The footage from Brazil is shot with Super 8 film, which Harris believes brings nostalgia into pictures (ibid). Moreover, the film is almost always either over- or under-exposed with light. The framing of people's faces brings them very close to the screen and they hardly ever stay still: they dance, move and often stare straight at the viewer. Sometimes pictures are superimposed, creating duality and blurring views. The techniques which Harris uses can, as Marks has noted in her study of the techniques of intercultural filmmakers, "discourage the viewer from distinguishing objects and encourage a relationship to the screen as a whole" (Marks 2000:172). This is because the images prevent an easy connection to the narrative and therefore, the viewer is forced to complete the images, filling them with his or her own memories (Marks 2000: 163, 177).

In a process of completing the images the imagination becomes essential. Appadurai (1990) has expressed how the image, the imagined, and imaginary are central components in connecting people in contemporary world. They interlink the moving groups such as diasporas and the people who cannot afford to move, but who can move through the imagination created by the media. In *That's My Face*, it is not only the blurred, unfocused footage that creates the space for the viewer's imagination, but also the mismatching of the picture and sound. In addition to the visual, the soundtrack of the documentary highlights and encourages imagining. Harris' own voice is very mystical and soft. Sometimes there are several voices on top of one another. Sometimes Portuguese is mixed with English; sometimes it is translated into English, with the spectator still hearing the original Portuguese voice. The filmmaker explains that he wanted to create a 'dreamscape' ("That's my face: An interview with thomas allen har-

ris," n.d.). This is for the viewer to complete the picture with their imagination and to create their own dreamscape.

The reflections on plurality in the identities of the Orishas become essential for Harris's sense of belonging. Orishas in Yoruba religion are deities, which play the role as intermediates between the gods and men. During the cross-Atlantic slave trade the religion merged with Catholicism. The Orishas and the saints in Catholic religion were seen to reflect each other and both deities occupied same roles as spiritual intermediates between god and men. Further, the whole religion of Yoruba is stated to have developed into a transnational and pan-ethnic religion (Cohen 2002:17). The double roles and crossover of cultures and traditions are identifiable for Harris. His aim is to find his spiritual home. Although his journey is physical, finding it requires inherent imagining. He goes to Brazil and participates in religious festivals and celebrations to become closer to the Orishas. However, in the end, finding his spiritual home is more a psychological state of mind that he effectively creates through the film. *That's My Face* (in Portuguese *É a Minha Cara*) is explained as 'my thing'. It can be anything that one feels he or she can identify with, something, which represents him or her. Many characters in the film are in search of their *É a Minha Cara*. One says she came to Brazil from the United States to feel how it is like to be part of the majority. She wanted to feel home, not physically, but rather spiritually. In the black community in New York, where Harris grew up some people chose to ignore their African cultural heritage. For Harris this was not appealing. He states it was like putting up a mask. In Brazil the history of Africa is constantly present and celebrated. Harris' homing desire may not be completed but he finds the idea of a plural identity soothing; there he finds a space to belong.

The place in Between/ Notre Étrangère, 2010, by Sarah Bouyain
The Place in Between is the first feature film by the French-Burkinabe filmmaker Sarah Bouyain. The story is set in both Paris and in a se-

cond largest city of Burkina Faso, Bobo-Dioulasso. Amy, the protagonist in the film, is a mixed-race young woman; her mother is Burkinabé and her father who has passed away is French. Since Amy was eight years old, she has been living in France with her father and his new wife. In her early days of adulthood, Amy wants to reconnect with her biological mother and therefore travels to Burkina Faso in search of her. To her disappointment, her mother Mariam has left the village a long time ago and Amy stays with her aunt Acita and her maid Kadiatou trying to learn about her past. What the viewer knows, but Amy does not, is that Mariam has migrated to Paris, where she works as a cleaner and teaches Dioula language to a French woman, Esther, who works in the building where Mariam cleans. Esther is about to adopt a child from Burkina, but only reveals this to Mariam in at the end of the film.

Through foregrounding the encounters of the five women, Bouyain highlights the kind of transnational space, which Brah (1996:181) calls a *diaspora space*, in which we all live. According to Brah and Bouyain, it is not only people with a multicultural background¹⁰, but rather everyone who are affected by inter-cultural relations, differences and their challenges. In the film, only Amy's character belongs to two cultures. Yet the sense of a search for belonging and feeling at home is not a feeling reserved only for her. Both Mariam and Amy feel lost between the two countries and do not know where they belong. Esther, Kadiatou and Acita, although more grounded, are affected deeply by the uprooting of people like Amy and Mariam who they are close to.

For all the characters in the film, language plays an essential role; it both separates and unites the women. Acita and Amy have no mutual language to communicate with each other, but the young maid is able to translate their conversations. Mariam lives an isolat-

10 Multicultural as a person who comes from more than one country and/ or cultural background.

ed exile life in France, and refuses to establish connections with the African diaspora community. However, the language lessons she gives in her mother tongue to Esther provide glimpses of happy moments in her life. During the lessons, she feels useful.

As Naficy (2001: 28) points out, the mother tongue in a strange environment can evoke strong feelings and memories of home. These moments are a way for Mariam to feel at home. Esther learns a foreign language to prepare a foundation for her family relationship. Thus, language is a tool to connect and disconnect. In the Burkina Faso scenes, the viewer (if not a Dioula speaker) is always positioned within Amy's perspective. For her, conversations with her aunt are never subtitled. When the two argue, their feelings can be sensed and Amy's words understood, but only Dioula speakers would know how Acita responds. In this scene the viewer is forced to complete the image and understanding through reading Acita's expressions and listening closely to her voice. Here Bouyain utilizes the technique which Naficy call tactile optics. Thus the viewer interprets the feelings of characters with a deeper engagement and is not distanced from the conversation through subtitles. However, the scenes of Mariam teaching Dioula to Esther, and the dialogues between Acita and the locals of Bobo are translated. The conscious choice of the filmmaker to exclude the viewer with Amy is to emphasize how hard it can be to communicate (Amarger, 2010).

Language is one of the key components of our identity. Without Amy being able to communicate with her aunt she is forced to face her alienation from her family and culture and find alternative means of communication, which she does by employing universally recognized indications of different emotions. In order for Amy to express herself she uses physical contact, without the use of verbal formulation. In a scene where Amy and Acita converse in their own languages, they express themselves through smiling, laughing and touching each other. But it is not only language that makes Amy and Mariam feel estranged from Burkina Faso and France respectively.

The separation of the mother and the daughter creates estrangement. Whereas Amy tries to find her mother but fails, Mariam isolates herself, perhaps punishing herself, perhaps blaming herself for the separation they both experience. Also, a distant culture and non-integration are central to the women's feeling of homelessness. Mariam's roommate, for example, has made an effort to integrate into French society. She has made friends, decorated her room, and enjoys her life in Paris. Mariam has made a choice to stay detached from her surroundings. We see her wandering the streets in the suburbs on her own, and when a priest from the community church approaches her she retreats more into herself. Mariam's exile portrays the loneliness that is experienced as not due to a hostile environment but because she determinedly positions herself in a no-man's land. Her experience is complementary to that of John Durham Peters', who sees exile as a painful banishment (see chapter *Cinema as a Catalyzer for Transnationalism*).

When Amy returns to Burkina, she is not prepared to feel disconnected. After the first disappointments she complains about everything from flies and hot weather to miscommunication with her aunt over the phone to her brother in France. She has an African dress tailored but is not comfortable wearing it. Her blunt, white hotel room in Bobo becomes her place of escape. When she is discontent with her aunt, she returns to the hotel. After Amy's African dress falls off her in public because she does not know how to tie it properly, she returns to the room, and aggressively throws the dress away. She is considered a European tourist. The locals call her white, the taxi-driver charges her extra and her aunt decorates a room for Amy to feel at home. Acita says: "White people always hang things on their walls." As Bouyain notes, this is a legacy of colonialism: "[Amy's] family history could just as well have been lived by a French family living in France" (Bouyain quoted in Amarger 2010).

Amy's feeling of homelessness in Burkina Faso is further emphasized in the shot of her feet. Naficy remarks that close-up footage

of a body is often a way to show alienation in accented films. Further, Dovey (2009 b: 61) discusses how there have been "a surprising number of close-up shots of feet in francophone West-African film".¹¹ According to Said exiles are often thought to be cut off from their roots, their land and their past (Dovey 2009b: 60). Feet are the part of the body, which connects a person to the ground. Therefore, symbolically one is uprooted from her or his feet. In *The Place in Between*, only Amy's feet are shot closely. After she goes to see her aunt for the first time she returns to the hotel. After her showering, the camera focuses on her wet toes, restlessly rubbing against the floor. In another scene in Acita's house, Amy stands in the terrace looking at the rain. Again, the camera shoots her feet closely, while she plays with the water with her feet. To connect with her past she needs to attach her bare feet to the soil, and ground herself again to Burkina Faso.

According to Naficy (2001: 289) the visual style used in intercultural cinema is often incomplete and rough, as can be seen as the defining characteristic in *That's My Face*. However, in *The Place in Between* the camera is very still as it follows Amy and her journey. The still, sometimes completely stagnant camera is frequently used in the works of West African filmmakers such as Abderrahmane Sissako, Ousmane Sembene and Mahamat Saleh Haroun. Bouyain explains the fixity of the frame is to highlight Amy's anxiety and movement, her search for home (Amarger 2010). The everyday life in Bobo is calm and relaxed. Therefore, the anxious behavior of Amy, her nervousness and uncomfortable state of being, are emphasized. Further, the extra-diegetic signature music of the film gives a further sense of Amy's anxiety, following the events from Paris to

11 In her article (Subjects of exile: Alienation in Francophone African cinema) Dovey discusses closely the images of feet in films by Ousamane Sembene (*La Noire de...*, 1966; *Niaye*, 1964; *Xala*, 1974), Samb Makharam (*Et La Neige N'Etait Plus*, 1965), Djibril Diop Mambety (*Hyenas*, 1992) and by Abderrahmane Sissako (*Waiting for Happiness*, 2002).

Bobo and the other way around. Even though the locations are distant and different they are connected, not only through the soundtrack and anxiety of the characters but also through the style of editing. After the footage of Acita and Kadiatou washing clothes and pouring water the camera follows Esther pouring water for Mariam. When Amy and Acita are shot sleeping, the music and camera moves to film Amy's French mother lying down on her couch, focused on a picture of Amy as a child. Later in the film Esther receives a mango fruit as a gift from Mariam. Soon Amy is picking fruits from a tree in Bobo and leaves one beside her resting aunt. This parallel editing style reaffirms the intense dialogue between the women as well as showing the character's loneliness and lack of belonging in different parts of the world.

Home as a Journey

Restless Wandering, *That's My Face* and *The Place in Between* all share a common feature of highlighting the issue of return and reconnection to home and the homeland. In the first film, modern enforcement of nation-state boundaries alienates the griot, representing the traditions of Africa, from his homeland and livelihood. The latter two films discuss the issue of what it means to belong to different cultures and the complexity of reconnecting to one's origins in these cases. Naficy writes how the trope of the journey is a dominant element in accented cinema. The journeys of de-territorialization and re-territorialization take different forms but just as importantly, they are not only physical and geographical but also cultural, metaphorical and psychological (Naficy 2001: 222).

In *That's My Face*, Harris detaches himself from his physical home even before beginning his journey to Brazil. The first half of the film is a preparation for his journey. As Sissako (quoted in Armes 2006:198) says: "We make true exile within ourselves even before we depart. It's a sort of interior exile." This interior exile trans-

lates into a 'no man's land.' One does not belong to the place of departure, nor to the destination. Similarly, Mariam in *The Place in Between* resents herself into interior exile. Amy feels internally alienated as well, as she finds it hard to re-connect to her past, whereas for the griot in Bouzid's film, the alienation is forced through an outsider. Naficy (2001: 6) writes that:

Journeys are not just physical and territorial but also deeply psychological. Among the most important are journeys of identity, in the course of which old identities are sometimes shed and new ones refashioned. In the best of the accented films, identity is not a fixed essence but a process of becoming, even a performance of identity.

Throughout the three films there is a binding theme, that identity and belonging, the sense of being at home, is a psychological state of mind. The homing desire is in one's imagination. Although, the protagonists are actively seeking their place in between cultures, they have no need to fix their feet on one specific place. Instead, they reconstruct and reattach to multiple places and identities. The films effectively perform identity and belonging as a process. This conception of home and belonging being fluid and plural is essential for those who have lived through experience of exile.

Conclusion

Since the end of the twentieth century there has been a profound shift in the understanding of the spaces of cultures. The conventional premise has been that people and cultures are rooted in their natural places and territories and therefore, sense of belonging and feeling at home are inseparable elements from peoples' homelands. However, the process of globalization has accelerated the flows of capital, transport and people. Thus the world and people have become more inter-linked than ever before. Territorialized spaces and borders are constantly compromised and challenged by de-territorialised people, as they occupy multiple places and inter-link

them to one another, creating ambiguous borders. As a consequence, the concept of home has gone through a transformation, from being something rooted and fixed to fluid and 'processual.' As people are scattered from their homelands, communities or are chronically mobile, the images and imagination are essential part of social process, reconnecting the people and places. As the images and media create connectedness amongst the displaced and transnational people and places, the homing desire translates into an imaginative connectedness.

Transnationalism has not only triggered debates about belonging, nation and home in academia, but has also become more visible in media. The voices of transnational artists have been increasingly influential, especially in cinema. In an era where people are more nomadic than ever before, the diaspora space is inhabited by not only those who belong to several cultures, but also by everyone who is affected by globalization. Therefore, a work that articulates the basic human need and desire of homing and belonging is more valuable than ever before. By understanding home and belonging as only a physical attachment to a place, we dismiss the lived experiences and memories of those with multiple attachments. It is then the plural, nomadic and transnational views, which provide us with fresh perspectives on the concepts of home and belonging. As Deleuze and Guattari state:

History is always written from a sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one, even when the topic is nomads. What is lacking is a Nomadology, the opposite of a history (Deleuze and Guattari quoted in Malkki 1992:31).

I see intercultural cinema as a prominent medium to represent 'Nomadology': the missing side of the history written from the point of view of those who have often been marginalized and yet have contributed to and significantly shaped the contemporary world. In this article I have analyzed three films: *Restless Wondering* by Nouri Bouzid, *That's My Face* by Thomas Allen Harris and *The Place in*

Between by Sarah Bouyain; and demonstrated their success to portray home as a journey, a fluid and plural concept which can be re-invented and re-constructed in the process of de-territorialization. The artificial division of people is not only controlled by the physical borders, but also by the legacy of colonialism and sedentarist metaphysics. The characters in the films are in search of plural, more nomadic identities, through which they can establish attachments to multiple places, especially to Africa. Therefore, the films call attention to what the griot in Bouzids's *Restless Wandering* describes as the African tree. Africa and the African diaspora share mutual substrate, from where they grow in different directions. The imagination becomes a profound element to reinforce these connections, and keep alive the memories of African heritage.

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