

A Cinema without Borders

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The globalisation of capital, labor, culture and media is threatening to make borders obsolete and national sovereignty irrelevant. (Naficy 31)

The globalizing tendencies of finance and the increasingly prevalent transnational markets within the cultural industry of cinema are loosening the borders of what constitutes a 'national cinema'. The models and modes around the construct of nations and ideologies and nationalisms have been debated in considerable detail in Anglo-American film studies (Crofts, 1998) (Hayward, 2005) (Higson, 2002) (Hjort and Mackenzie, 2000). The concept of a 'national cinema' (Higson, in Bondeberg, 2000: 205) engages with this potentially restrictive model, conflating and coalescing around the national cinematic paradigm and notion of national identity. The (re-)conceptualization of the 'national cinema' debate (Crofts, 1998: 386-392) has transmogrified through a series of developments from its historiography orientated beginnings to the current shifting debates from the national to the transnational; the notion of cinema as an inter- or para-national phenomenon. In terms of the nation-state and national identity, the "key publications in the rethinking of the nation-state and nationalism...Anderson (1983), Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm (1990), Smith (1991), and Hutchinson (1994)...have all advanced non-essentialist conceptions of the nation-state and national identity" (Crofts 385). This non-essentialist approach encompasses underlying cultures and considers the heterogenic makeup of a given nation-state. This aspect has become increasingly prevalent within the sphere of migration and diasporas to 'Fortress Europe¹', which occurred as a consequence of the decolonization process after the Second World War. The re-thinking of the concept additionally extends to the effects of globalization and deterritorialization, which is concentrated within "the accelerating transnational flows of people (tourists, immigrants, exiles, refugees, guest workers), of technology, of finance and media images...and of ideologies" (Crofts 386). The concepts of 'deterritorialization' and 'globalisation' are intertwined due to the identifications and affiliations to cultures, communities and territories beyond the borders of the nation-state. The term 'deterritorialization' denotes "the displacement and dislocation of identities, persons and meanings" (Brah 203), which suggests that human subjects are severing their roots from their homeland, and are disembedded within new national and cultural spaces. The relationship to the new territory for these deterritorialized populations is ephemeral and the space is designated as temporary; the deterritorialized populations are not looking to settle in Belgium, it is a stopping point and not the ultimate location. This notion of a

fleeting relationship with the national space erodes the significance of the national frontiers, which will be engaged with in relation to the migrant identity.

In this article, the politics of globalisation and the effects of deterritorialization are appropriated to a text-based approach of the works of the Francophone Belgian filmmakers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, to whom I will refer as a single entity throughout this article. The auteurs articulate migrant identities, within the films *La promesse/ The Promise* (1996) and *Le silence de Lorna/ Lorna's Silence* (2008), from a position of the dominant and hegemonic culture. These films deal with the issue of migrant identity; a cultural and national affiliation that lays elsewhere, which thereby creates a fracture with the construct of a Belgian cultural identity. The prevalence of this issue within the works of the Dardenne Brothers necessitates an engagement with the reason why the concept of national identity is being increasingly advocated within a world typified by the global flows of people, information and finance. This therefore highlights the vulnerability of regional and national identities to the effects of globalisation.

An increasing engagement with transnational processes (such as the formation of the European Union and its gradual enlargement) suggests a slow erosion of antiquated boundaries, and marks a transition from "Fortress Europe" to a "New Europe", a borderless Europe. Loshitzky asserts that "Today's Europe...likes to view itself as the 'New Europe', free of its dark past and liberated from its traditional racism. Several politicians, public figures, intellectuals, and researchers have even declared the "end of nationalism" in Europe and the emergence of a 'post-Europe'" (Loshitzky 1). But does this deterritorialization of capital and goods immediately lead to a deterritorialization of national identity? The concept of a New Europe functions as a utopian view of the current state of contemporary Europe, which is increasingly monitoring its boundaries in fear of mass migration. The New Europe is evolving into a "Panoptican Europe [...] obsessed with controlling its geographical and cultural borders" (Loshitzky 4). This New Europe is thus becoming fixated with the protection of its borders from a cultural intrusion. Migration is perceived as an eternal threat to national identity, and is counteracted by the prevailing trends of extreme right wing politics, nationalism, xenophobia and racism within New Europe.

The globalised tendencies quell the significance of the national frontiers that protect and withhold the indigenous national identity. Instead, it may be more appropriate to deal with the "transnational/national dynamics in which culture and ethnicity, rather than territorial boundaries, play a dominant role" (Hjort and Petrie 13). The transnational/national dynamic in this sense highlights the irrelevance of the national borders, and reinforces the importance of culture and ethnicity. The focus upon these two key tropes, within this use of Belgium as a paradigmatic case study, loosens the national frame since the relevance of the territorial national borders has diminished. This is an especially salient point since the implementation of the Schengen agreement in 1995, which relaxed border control measures across the European member states and thereby permitted greater circulation of peoples across European territories. The result has caused the perception of a 'cinema without borders', which is predicated upon the interplay between regional, national, and transnational cultural practices. The transnational dimension will be explored in terms of the nationality and ethnicity of migrant characters within the post-1996

Dardennian corpus of works. In terms of analyzing the significance of the regional dimension of the 'cinema without borders' triptych, a focus will hence be placed upon the concept of a regional identity in relation to the corpus of works by the Dardenne Brothers, commencing with *Je pense à vous/ I think of you* (1992, Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne). These filmic opuses will be engaged with in order to interrogate the spatial importance of the post-industrialist, pessimistic town of Seraing, Wallonia.

The issue of ethnicity is a salient concept to unpick within this context, since it is unclear as to what it fundamentally constitutes. In terms of a parochial and myopic embrace with the concept, the ethnic body in the Belgian space equates to the migrant identity and the migrant body. The widely disseminated view of ethnicity is of otherness, alterity and cultural difference to the autochthonous peoples who inhabit the nation. This common conception of an ethnicity originates outside of the host nation's territorial boundaries and is hence not intrinsically linked to the nation's boundaries. However, by undertaking an anthropological approach to the term "ethnicity", it is possible to map the more general origins of the term, in which the term "ethos", from which ethnicity is derived, refers "to people in general but also to 'others'" (Soller 191). There is thus a discrepancy between the anthropological approach to the term and its current usage. Everett and Hughes (1952) postulate that "we are all ethnic" (Everett and Hughes, in Soller, 191), which does not exclude the dominant groups within a given space, but is rather inclusive of all population groups. Within this context, "ethnicity" becomes a much broader and all-encompassing term. As Everett and Hughes postulate "we are all ethnic" (Everett and Hughes, in Soller 191), it is necessary to delve beyond the Other within the Belgian space and include the autochthonous Belgian population. The extension of this concept of ethnicity develops into the field of an "interpretation of the rites and rituals of culturally dominant groups [which] sometimes provides the matrix for the emergence of divergent group identities" (Soller 193). In the case of the Dardenne Brothers, these emerging divergent group identities from the dominant culture can be applied to the concept of a Walloon ethnic identity. The Francophone Belgian identity can be fragmented into two divergent groups: a Brussels Belgian identity and a Walloon identity. Without providing a historical overview, the ethnic identities of these two groups are polar extremities, and are only united by virtue of the French language. Brussels is at the centre of the European Union, and is a cosmopolitan metropolis in terms of its demographical composition. The identities at the locus of Walloon cinema are instead predicated upon agriculture and its industrial legacy that has since faded, since the expression of its history and culture "did not begin to emerge until the mid-1970s, later reaching its apogee in the work of Jean-Jacques Andrien, Thierry Michel, and the brothers Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne" (Mosley 105). This period coincides with the deindustrialisation and the recession of the region, which as in turn manifested itself on the cinema screen. The notion of a Walloon ethnic identity, as presented on screen, is not fundamentally predicated upon the discourse of language, but is rather a confluence of the region's history, traditions and their effects upon the present.

Balibar asserts that "every 'people', who are the product of a national process of ethnicization, is forced today to find its own means of going beyond exclusivism or identitarian ideology in the world of transnational communications and global relations of force" (Balibar 105). This assertion suggests that it is necessary in the current transnational

and globalised sphere for the individual to break away from the boundaries constructed by ethnic and national identity in order to create a dialogue with those who are on the outside if s/he shares the same current predicament or “the same future” (Balibar 105). The Walloon individual shares the same issues with those who are not intrinsically Walloon, for example the closure of the factories and the subsequent unemployment. The globalisation of Wallonia has resulted in societal problems and issues, affecting not just immigrants, but the ethnic Walloons that inhabit the space. The marginal existence and lifestyle of the Belgian characters in the films *Rosetta* and *L’enfant* perpetuate the notion of “cinematic depictions of people caught in the cracks of globalisation” (Erza and Rowden 7). This assertion was originally conceptualized in reference to the discourses of migration and diaspora. This is reinforced in the Dardennian opuses, since the immigrant body in both *La promesse* and *Le silence de Lorna* is both exploited and becomes a victim of the globalised and capitalist predilections of the oppressive Belgian citizens. However, this notion can equally be re-appropriated to include the personal and collective sufferings of the ethnic Walloon population in the face of globalist tendencies. The effects of globalisation upon the population thus functions as a linking mechanism between the characters from disparate backgrounds.

The contemporary era of globalisation invokes the demise of the nation-state and the essentialist approaches toward national cinema, which imply cultural homogeneity within the nation-state. Appadurai coined the term “ethnoscape”, which considers the role of “people who move between nations, such as tourists, immigrants, exiles, guestworkers, and refugees” (Appadurai 25). The ethnoscape functions as a new cultural and ethnic space within the nation-state, which is a result of waves of migration of disenfranchised peoples from peripheral countries marred by poverty, civil wars and unrest. There are two distinct strands that emerge from the notion of disenfranchised peoples; the first strand concerns the forced migration of peoples such as asylum seekers and refugees, whereas the second level considers the peoples who are in search of an improved life, such as migrant workers. The immigrant population are a deterritorialized people whose notion of identity is not monolithic and static. Naficy postulates that “by their status as liminal subjects and syncretic multiples, they form a global class that transcends their original or current social and cultural locations” (Naficy, in Loshitzky 7). This movement of populations connects previously separate cultures, bringing them into contact with one another. The deterritorialization of peoples thereby creates a hybridization of culture within a designated space. The effect of globalisation generates a complex melange of cultures, which become entangled in the local culture. In his book, *Contemporary Film Directors: Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne*, Mai equates the Belgian ethnoscape presented in *La promesse* with the French ethnoscape presented in the *cinéma de banlieue*. He asserts that:

La promesse reflects a greater awareness of the politics of globalisation: in this case the exploitation of undocumented immigrants from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. The subject inspired a number of filmmakers, who turned their attention the experience of immigrants and their children in Modern day France. (Mai 44)

However, the problem with equating the French experience of immigration with the Belgian experience is the question of colonisation. The French immigration, predominantly from

North and Sub-Saharan Africa is a result of the legacy of colonialism on diasporas in the West. The continuation of these ongoing immigration patterns to France was originally determined by the colonial project. Belgium did equally have a legacy of colonialism in Sub-Saharan Africa, in the territories of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, which has impacted upon the significant Congolese immigrant population. *La promesse* is cited as an example of the issue of colonial/post-colonial encounter between the Burkina Faso immigrants and the Belgian space of Seraing, since “the Dardenne Brothers stage a ‘contact-zone’ in the European metropolis that transports the history of past encounters in colonial time and space...the once-colonized return to the metropolis, bearing with them traces and residues of colonization” (Galt and Schoonover 286). *La promesse* is, however, a problematic example of this form of immigration, since the immigrant characters in the film originate from Burkina Faso, a country that was subjected to French colonialist rule. There appears to be a confusion and conflation between the roles of the French and Belgian colonial experiences in Sub-Saharan Africa. The yoke of oppression and exploitation of the Sub-Saharan African body in *La promesse* is prevalent, which thereby invokes a discussion with the colonialist experience. Rather than being regarded as an exploited former colonial subjects in the space of Wallonia; the characters from Burkina Faso should be approached as mistreated immigrant “others”. The Belgian host does not welcome the immigrant guest, but instead exploits and abuses him/her.

The discourses of xenophobia, racism and exploitation are present within the film *La promesse*. These three elements are manifested through the cultural difference between the two bodies: the White European and the Black Sub-Saharan body. The immigrant body poses a vexing identity problem to the White European body, which is placated by the subjugation of the immigrant body. The immigrant characters from Burkina Faso, Hamidu and his wife Assita and their baby, arrive in the Belgian post-industrial space of Seraing, in search of employment opportunities and a new life in the West. They are clandestine and therefore do not officially exist within the Belgian space. Their position as illegal immigrants deprives the characters of their human rights, thereby dehumanising them and leaving them open to exploitation. The male immigrant character of Hamidou works as a labourer for the Belgian character, Roger, in the construction of his new abode. He and his family are financial prisoners of Roger; he exerts his power over them, controlling their finances, their home, their passports, and most importantly the threat of deportation if they do not bow to his demands. The illegal immigrants are subject to an exploitation of cheap labour by the Belgian characters. The dehumanisation of these peoples is evident in the case of the death of Hamidou, who dies whilst attempting to flee from the Belgian authorities. His death is concealed by the Belgian characters of Roger, and his son Igor, who do not aid Hamidou, but instead attempt to sweep his existence under the carpet, by burying him within the confines of the house. His burial serves to symbolize the repressed immigrant within Fortress Europe. The character of Hamidou can thus be perceived as a victim of the globalised and capitalist world; as the world becomes saturated with capitalist predilections of self-accession, there are of course victims.

The notion of oppression is embodied in the form of the working and middle classes, whereas the discourses of xenophobia and racism manifest themselves within the bodies of the underclass. Cardullo proposes that the film addresses the “European underclass’s [sic]

escalating hostility toward immigrants, especially Africans, in what has become a Darwinian struggle for survival between both groups” (Cardullo 579). This suggests that the Belgian underclass and the immigrant guest are on an equivalent social footing, vying against one another to succeed within the Belgian society. The xenophobic abuse that the character of Assita encounters, when the two White Belgian boys urinate upon and humiliate the Sub-Saharan body, can be attributed to the Belgian native’s reaction to the threat of cultural difference. This abuse is born out of a fear of alterity.

The deterritorialized immigrant body maintains an ‘uncertain allegiance caused by “double consciousness”, “creolization”, and “hybridity”...because they are supposed to bear the burden of integration” (Gilroy, 1993; Bhabha, 1994; Glissant, 1989; in Rosello, 140). The illegal immigrants, since they originate from Burkina Faso, do not have a linguistic burden in Wallonia. Due to the France’s colonial legacy in Sub-Saharan Africa, and Burkina Faso’s allegiance to the aegis of La Francophonie, the French language is entrenched within the characters’ psyche. In order to achieve acceptance into Belgian society, there is no linguistic frontier that must be transcended. Although the immigrants are located within a French Belgian space, the deterritorialized bodies maintain their Sub-Saharan cultural identity and heritage. The characters hold on to their indigenous religions and traditions. The religious difference to Belgium is portrayed when Assita requires help to build a pen for her sheep, so that she can sacrifice it for Ramadan, which places her within the Muslim faith. The cultural traditions concern the inclusion of a ‘marabout’, an African spiritualist, who is used in order to retrieve information regarding Hamidou’s whereabouts. This suggests a retention of the former shamanistic pre-colonial traditions of Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite their location in the West, they have not forgotten the value of their past traditions, and do not betray their Africanity. The significance of African traditions is central to the character of Assita, who reverts to African rituals in order to cleanse and defend her baby from evil spirits. By embracing these African traditions and rituals, the deterritorialized peoples navigate an interstitial space; a space in which the clandestine characters are neither here nor there. The characters bring their own cultures and traditions, but these alienate them from the mainstream Belgian society, forcing them to the periphery. The migrant identity lies outside of the boundaries of the nation. This is neatly summed up in *La promesse* in which the statue belonging to Assita is broken into two distinct entities. Igor attempts to reconcile these two entities, but is unable to. The statue is an emblem of culture, derived from Assita’s Africanity. The fracture of the statue resembles the fracture within her cultural identity; one part resembles her African cultural identity and heritage, yet the other resembles her deterritorialized status in Belgian society. The inability to reconcile these separate entities coincides with Assita’s inability to forge a place within Belgian society due to her African heritage.

The concept of migration is a fundamental human right, which is outlined in Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; “everyone has the right to leave any country including his [sic] own” (United Nations). Within “Fortress Europe”, the frontiers are slowly eroding, which allows internal flows of populations between member-states of the European Union. However, a nation’s borders are racialised and do not allow the free movement of peoples from outside the European Union; there is an “impenetrable external shell” (Rumford, 136). The film *Le silence de Lorna* perpetuates the concept of a new

European-ness with the presence of Albanian characters in the Walloon space of Liège, which mirrors the extension of the European Union as it moves in an ever more easterly direction. The Dardenne Brothers have shifted their focus to a re-mapping of the European space, thereby distancing Fortress Europe from post-colonial immigration dynamics.

The means of entry to 'Fortress Europe' for the Albanian character of Lorna was achieved by marriage. Marriage has thus become a means of legal entrance into the EU. For Lorna, marriage is a passage for naturalization, and a means to achieve Belgian citizenship. The subsequent result of her marriage is the prize of a Belgian identity card, which Lorna parades as a trophy in front of her Albanian boyfriend Sokol. Both the Albanian and Russian immigrant characters are in search of Belgian citizenship, which implies that the populations of a New Europe are looking toward the West and a Fortress European identity to define themselves by. The Belgian ID card is a symbol of her attempted assimilation into Belgian society; it is a symbol of her achievement of a national identity within the European Union. Passports, ID cards and visas are objects of bio-political borders, which exist as an official way of regulating the movement of peoples. They are controls established in order to differentiate between 'desirable' and 'undesirable' migrants. It further emphasises the point that the movement of the peoples from "New Europe" within Fortress Europe is not entirely straightforward; it is fraught with issues and difficulties of assimilation.

As previously addressed, the immigrant body bears "the burden of integration" (Rosello 140) and in the case of Lorna, this notion can be applied to the burden of her marriage to a Belgian junkie. She is forcibly linked to this person, Claudy, who she despises and dehumanises. She does not allow him to sit in between her bed linen, and when he requires a cup of water, she places it upon the floor. By these actions, he is thus equated with a common house pet, rather than a human being. The character of Claudy is dependent upon Lorna, as he seeks to quit his addiction, becoming not only a mental, but also a physical burden as he grabs her legs and pleads for her support. Since she is not an indigenous Belgian, she must bear the burden of a tainted native Belgian in order to become naturalised. The character of Lorna additionally bears the linguistic burden of moving to a new country with an unfamiliar language. The character, and actress, maintains an Albanian accent when conversing in the French language, which easily identifies her as an outsider to the Belgian landscape. The discourse of language also permits an interplay between the local and the global. For example, Lorna's constant communication with her nomadic Albanian partner, with whom she converses in Albanian, functions as a means to transcend the territory's boundaries. Lorna's conversations by telephone with her partner highlights the power of the telecommunications to transcend boundaries and time zones, facilitating communication across boundaries and compressing geographical space. The world is presented as interconnected through these ubiquitous technological systems, thereby postulating a potential promise of homogeneity.

The film, *Le silence de Lorna*, maps to what extent people go in order to escape their position in society and to emancipate themselves from the shackles of poverty. This notion of desperation leaves the immigrant characters exposed to exploitation and human trafficking. After having exploited Claudy for his Belgian citizenship, Lorna becomes the subject of exploitation by the Belgian mobsters. Lorna is implicated in a vicious circle of

greed, poverty and exploitation. In this new globalised world, people are used as currency; the trafficking of people into Liège in Belgium is equated with money. The notion of money in *Le silence de Lorna* forces ties and relationships between people; people can be bought like goods, since their Belgian citizenship retains a value. Lorna buys Claudy at the beginning of the film and a Russian in turn buys her after Claudy's death. Lorna is at first the exploiter in order to achieve citizenship, but then she in turn becomes the exploited. The notion of exploitation, similar to *La promesse*, highlights the capitalist axiom that remains at the spine of the new globalised world, but as people benefit from the capitalist system, there are once again victims.

The trope of the ethnoscape, as proposed by Appadurai (25) in addition to the discourses of xenophobia and racism, is not indelibly linked to Belgian cinema, but is rather part of a much broader European cinematic trend.² The issues surrounding the discourse of immigration are not universal per se, but instead fit into the context of the burgeoning issues of diaspora and migration in contemporary European cinema. However, it is possible to apply the significance of the trope of regional identity to the filmic products, which "reflects the origins and sense of identity particular to the directors" (Austin 222). As previously discussed, the Dardenne Brothers are not deterritorialized peoples within the Belgian and more specifically Walloon space, but are instead firmly rooted within the space since birth, with the Walloon experience deeply entrenched within their psyche. As Jean-Pierre Dardenne states:

Some people say that if that town (Seraing) didn't exist, we couldn't make films. Maybe it's true. In any case, that's where we made most of our documentaries and all our features. It's the town where my brother and I left childhood and became teenagers. Maybe it's because the town was very important for us as teenagers that we keep going back there. Maybe. (Jean- Pierre Dardenne, in *At the Movies*)

Jean-Pierre Dardenne asserts the spatial importance of Seraing to the regional identity of the auteurs themselves; the filmmakers maintain a personal connection to the location. By drawing upon the Dardenne Brothers' corpus of works, it is possible to map the historical account to the current predicament of the peoples that inhabit the town. The documentaries provide a pre-history and a memory of the industrialised space of Seraing, and the current corpus post-*La promesse* concentrate upon the current de-industrialised space. The auteurs are Belgian Walloon filmmakers from the space of Seraing; producing films within that exact location, except for the film *Le silence de Lorna*, which was produced in the neighbouring city of Liège. The Walloon space therefore exists at the locus of the Dardennian opuses, utilizing the de-industrialization of the region as a framework to explore a Walloon community that has been fragmented due to the competitive struggles between individuals in search of employment and a place as a contributor to Francophone Belgian society.

Stuart Hall (225) postulates that cultural identity is experienced from a particular time and space, and, in the case of the Dardenne Brothers, this is the post-industrial space of Seraing. It is crucial to the understanding of the cultural identity of the region to provide a

brief account of this space. In the DVD interview (2005) for the film *L'enfant*, the Dardenne Brothers provide an account of what the town of Seraing means to them. Seraing is a small industrial town near the city of Liège, which was composed of factories, mines and the river (La Meuse) for transport. From an urbanistic point of view, the town comprised a panoply of factories and housing, with the workers inhabiting the lower part of the town. However, in the 1970s, the prevailing issue of de-industrialisation led to the decline of the area. The lower area of the town, that was previously inhabited by the workers, mutated into a space where the poor community now resides; the unemployed, single parent families and immigrants. There is hence a spatial importance thrust upon the space of the pessimistic and post-industrialist Seraing, with the Dardenne Brothers exploiting the local landscape. The local landscape has a history and a heritage embedded within the space and in the community that inhabit it. Since the notion of identity is contingent, the Seraing community are a product of their environment and create their own communal spirit and culture. They are intrinsically related to the space; they profited during the prosperous times when there was a period of industrialisation and vast swathes of employment, but they also faltered during a period of deindustrialisation and recession. The region and its population were fertilised by the waves of economic prosperity from the period of industrialisation, which have now stagnated and cease to exist. The current predicament that the Seraing population are in, with the deindustrialisation of the region, affords them with only a marginal and meagre existence. The marginal Walloon cultural identity and Walloon sensibilities are currently a product of the faltering and ailing environment.

Despite the fact that the Dardenne Brothers distance themselves from their post-*La promesse* fictional work, *Je pense à vous/I think of you* (Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, 1992)³, it is crucial to draw upon the latter film in order to contextualise the regional identity crisis due to the global economic effects. The film bridges the hiatus between the industrialized and deindustrialized Seraing and Wallonia. *Je pense à vous* is set in the town of Seraing during the period of deindustrialisation in Wallonia in the 1980s, which witnessed the decline of the steel industry in the town. The central protagonist, Fabrice, loses his employment, which leads his life to spiral downwards toward a position upon the fringes of society. He is forced to accept clandestine building work, and becomes an alcoholic; he has lost his proletarian life and is subjected to a marginal existence. The focus is thus placed upon an individual, the body of Fabrice, who functions “as a metaphor for the collective economic disaster that struck the whole Belgian region of Liège and Seraing during and after the 1970s” (Hessels, in Mathijis, 240). The Dardenne Brothers, in this example, place a focus upon the individual as symbolic of the collective, thereby creating a connection between the personal struggles and the collective struggles of the Walloon population. This therefore adheres to the concept of culture, since the individual is representative of the collective Walloon identity. The film text contextualises the space of Seraing, since it remains a pivotal element within the Dardenne Brothers corpus of works, and it exhibits a direct relationship between the deindustrialisation of the town and the disenfranchisement of the Walloon population.

The vision of the space of Seraing and Wallonia is presented from the diasporic and immigrant perspective in both *La promesse* and *Le silence de Lorna*. Loshnitzky postulates that “if the history of Europe is...the history of migration to Europe, and as most of this

migration has ended up in Europe's big cities, then perhaps the history of Europe needs to be rewritten from the point of view of its cities rather than its nation-states" (Loshnitzky 45). The key tropes to highlight in this assertion concern the mapping of the migration to Europe by focussing upon the migration to the big cities. However, this focus on a microcosmic level does not take into account the national picture. The works of the Dardenne Brothers, both *La promesse* and *Le silence de Lorna*, approach the migrants in spaces outside of the big cities, focussing upon the town of Seraing and the city of Liège, which is only the second most populated city in Wallonia. These spaces are not multicultural metropolises such as Paris, Marseille or Brussels. The focus therefore needs to be stretched to encompass the migrations in regional and localised environments. The immigrants arrive in Seraing brimming with a sense of hope, which implies the movement and migrations of peoples as a solution to a problem. The migrants are all bound together by a shared optimism; an optimism of inhabiting a space with opportunities; opportunities of employment and an improved lifestyle within Fortress Europe. Despite being in search of a way of life that is more positive, the diasporic communities and migrants suffer from a melancholic perception and loss of the homeland. This melancholic memory of the homeland is demonstrated through a portrayal of the cultural practices and shamanistic traditions within the space of the Belgian host nation. The retention of this cultural identity forms a hybridization, as previously discussed, of the Walloon culture within the diasporic body.

In terms of the space of Seraing, Galt and Schoonover assert that "*La promesse* exists in the no place commonality of international industrial capitalism...It could be anywhere in the new globalised world, symbolizing people's fragile hold on existence" (Galt and Schoonover 298). This assertion refutes the notion of the Dardenne Brothers promoting a Walloon regional identity, but rather it presents a globalised identity. However, it is possible to argue against the assumption that the film's setting "could be anywhere", since the auteurs and their corpus of works maintain an intrinsic personal connection to Seraing. The space of Seraing has indeed suffered from globalised effects, which has led to the deindustrialisation of the town, yet the explicit references to La Meuse (the river which flows through the heart of the town) and the location of the illegal immigrants in the lower regions, root the film within Seraing. It may be more appropriate to instead postulate the space of Belgium, or more precisely Wallonia, as a transient place for the illegal immigrants, and Belgium as a temporary residence. This notion of Belgium fits neatly into the historical account of the nation, which is "an amalgam of peoples who bear the marks of postcolonial relocation, the Jewish diaspora, and general post-war mobility: it is a mosaic of different groups of people, for whom Belgium is a place rather than a nation" (Spaas 8). Belgium is shown to be a transient place in *La promesse*, since a group of illegal immigrants, whose nationalities are unclear, attempt to smuggle themselves into America; the land of hope and freedom, constructed by immigrants for immigrants. They are unsuccessful in their quest and are subsequently arrested and deported, highlighting that the transient and ephemeral nature of the Walloon space, rather than a place to put down roots.

The concepts of the immigrant dream and the Promised Land, however, are portrayed as a crazy hope in both *La promesse* and *Le silence de Lorna*. In *La Promesse*, the vision that is proposed by the Walloon teenager Igor in the minibus to the clandestine migrants, who come from a plethora of different national backgrounds, is a Wallonia with

'lots of factories', which denotes that there is a myriad of jobs available in the region. These employment opportunities pertain to a historical account of the region, since the town of Seraing no longer retains these possibilities. *Le silence de Lorna* marks a break with the Dardenne Brothers' former works, since the hub of the immigrant dream is transferred from the town of Seraing to the city of Liège. The change of location may be only a matter of 10 kilometres, but it is a shift that obfuscates the deindustrialisation of the area. The city of Liège, although not as large as the capital city Brussels, is a city where the possibilities of finding employment are significantly augmented. The city thus retains a perception and an image of hope, rather than the pessimistic vision of the town of Seraing, void of hope. The immigrant dream, that Lorna maintains, is revealed when she begins to search for ideal premises for a snack bar. The dream is funded, however, by illegal means and exploitation, as previously discussed. This pertains to 'the dog-eat-dog mentality in the decaying industrial areas of Wallonia, the loss of solidarity and community' and 'the ruthless individualism of sections of the immigrant population' (Walsh, World Socialist Website). The character of Lorna retains a strong sense of hope to assimilate into the mainstream of Belgian society through her desire to create her own business. This hope of moving from the margins to the centre of this Belgian society is perceived as "crazy" (Luc Dardenne in Feuillère, Cineuropa.org), since the idyllic Belgian capitalist paradise that she dreams of is unattainable. The Promised Land is a space that does not exist, which is neatly exemplified in the final sequence of the film. Lorna's folly is highlighted by means of the imagined pregnancy, which is a direct embodiment of her guilt for the death of Claudy, since she converses with the imagined embryo in French. The guilt highlights her desperation and strong desire to escape her marginal position as an Albania on the fringes of the Promised Land of 'New Europe' and as an immigrant on the periphery of Belgian society and join the fortress of a Belgian neo-liberal capitalist society and the European center. Human beings have become disposable in pursuit of the dream, whether they are the native Belgian characters in the form of Claudy, or, by the end of the film, Lorna. After having squandered the deal to marry a Russian for citizenship, Lorna is removed from the Belgian space, whether this is her deportation or if she is journeying her last mile remains ambiguous. However, she escapes and creates her own space in the woods to reside temporarily. The space of Liège cannot support the hope of the economic migrants; on the contrary it is condemning them to a marginal existence at the periphery.

The struggles that the migrant characters have in attempting to assimilate into the fortress of Belgian society and to exist within the neo-liberal European centre is mirrored by the autochthonous Walloon characters in the Dardennian corpus of works. Although the body of Rosetta in *Rosetta* (1999) is not deterritorialized, the issue of the Walloon ethnicity and cultural identity remain salient points to address. The character of Rosetta is a victim of the global force of capitalism, which is evident from the opening sequence; Rosetta loses her job in a factory and it becomes necessary to forcefully remove her from her position. She assaults her boss, attacking a position of authority and the fortress of society as she seeks to find a space to belong. Her forceful rejection from her employment mirrors her forceful rejection from society. This becomes a recurring theme throughout the film; Rosetta is placed within a vicious circle of searching for, gaining, losing her employment. The vicious circle implies a permanent war that Rosetta is fighting against the fortress society and a "market where everyone is put into competition with everyone else – in a context where

people are in permanent rivalry and organised like that by a society and an economy” (Wolfreys, *Socialist Review*). The rivalry between people for employment numbs Rosetta and reduces her ability to create human ties and relationships, which further marginalises her and provides her with an alien status in society. She is unable to maintain employment, which she desperately craves, and is refused state benefits, which highlight that Rosetta⁴ is “falling through the cracks of the social structure” (Morgan 529). These cracks and liminal spaces, which are created by the effect of global processes and forces, plague the society and the Walloon cultural identity, by sidelining members of society from the dominant culture. These peoples are condemned to a marginal existence.

The discrepancy between the marginal and the dominant existences is addressed by means of a symbolic border between the two groupings. Rosetta inhabits an undesirable space, the caravan park; a space that is reserved for people marred by poverty and unemployment. However, she wishes to attain a place in the fortress of Belgian society, in the town of Seraing. She is ashamed of her position within society, which leads her to escape the caravan park by clambering through the woods each day to reach the town. The woods function as a boundary that clearly demarcates the spaces. Since this is not the designated means of entry and escape from the caravan park, she is clandestinely emancipating herself from the hardship that she is suffering in her home nation. The concept of the liminal space and cracks in society are additionally neatly summed up by Rosetta’s rhetoric, which she recites after having secured a job, friends, and a place to inhabit outside of a caravan park. She states: “Tu es Rosetta, Je suis Rosetta ... Tu ne tomberas pas dans le trou. Je ne tomberai pas dans le trou” [You are Rosetta, I am Rosetta...You won’t fall into a rut. I won’t fall into a rut]. The expression ‘tomber dans le trou’, in this sense means ‘to fall into a rut’, but the literal translation is ‘to fall into the hole’. The hole pertains to a space that is vacuous; a space where nothing can exist, take root and thrive. In the case of Rosetta, this hole is her former non-existent and marginal place in Belgian society. The rhetoric functions as the affirmation of her identity and her attempt to render concrete her desire to improve her status in order to become a valuable contributor to Belgian society and to ameliorate her marginal lifestyle. However, after once again losing her job, the character of Rosetta highlights the extent to which the individual has lost the power to control his/her own destiny and identity within the increasingly globalised society. Throughout the duration of the film, Rosetta suffers from abdominal pains, which occur on the occasions when Rosetta fails to integrate into the fortress of society. The pains are an embodiment of her suffering and her struggles, which are a consequence of her marginal position. The quotidian struggle and hardship for survival inflicts a physical suffering upon her body. This notion of pain and suffering reaches its climax in the final sequence of the film; a sequence in which Rosetta attempts to commit suicide. The struggles have not only made her suffer physically, but have also infected her mental state. She decides to gas herself, and her mother, in the caravan, but she does not have an adequate supply of gas. She is therefore forced to purchase another gas canister. Her prolonged struggle of carrying the weight of the canister reinforces the weight of economic hardship that has been placed upon her body. Under this oppressive weight, she releases her suffering in a cathartic manner; she collapses and begins to cry. The gas canister represents the weight of hardship and suffering that she has had to endure throughout her marginal lifestyle. Her decision to commit suicide represents an acknowledgement that she cannot cope with the environment and exhibits her failure to

assimilate herself into Belgian society. She is a victim of the miserablism that has enveloped the Walloon space and is vying for a place in the fortress of society, in order to find a space to belong. The victims of the de-industrialized and ever-evolving Walloon society are not restricted to the immigrant bodies, but can be extended to include the native Belgian population. Instead, marginality is engendered through the triptych of unemployment, poverty and social precariousness. In this Walloon space, ethnicity and difference from the national 'norm' do not form the basis of inclusion and exclusion; both indigenous Walloon populations and immigrant characters suffer from the same post-industrial condition that restricts them to the margins.

The trope of human trafficking, which occurs in the film *Le silence de Lorna* in the form of citizenship trade, is not restricted to the sphere of immigrant exploitation in the Walloon space, but is additionally transposed onto the native Belgian body. In *L'enfant*, the baby Johnny, who is born to unemployed teenage parents, is reduced to a commodity, which can be traded, rather than treated as a human with an identity. To reinforce this salient point, the child's identity is not formally recognised and registered at the town hall until halfway through the film. The identity of the child is thus in limbo; he does not formally belong to the region of Wallonia and the space of Seraing. According to the central male protagonist Bruno, it is possible "to have another (baby)". For him, the baby equates to business and a form of capitalist aspirations. The concept of reproduction, to him, resembles nothing more than a Fordist manufacture of goods. The victims of this form of exploitation and illegal capitalist pretences are the child and the mother; this is explicitly visualized when the mother immediately collapses upon hearing of the news of her child's sale. Sonia is hospitalised by the grief caused by losing her child, thereby victimising her and displaying her vulnerability. The character of Bruno is marginalised by his attitude towards society, which is in juxtaposition to the character of Rosetta. This concept of voluntary marginality is pernicious to society, since he steals from others in order to improve his lifestyle. Sonia acknowledges the increasing possibilities for menial low paid jobs in the Seraing space, but Bruno condemns his young family to a position on the margins by refusing employment. The young parents are, as a consequence, unable to support and provide for their child on both an economic and social scale. The character of Sonia, through her desire for Bruno to conform to a traditional work ethic, highlights her desire to accede to the centre of society by legal means. She wishes to end her daily struggle and achieve a place in the fortress of society. The denizens of this Walloon environment are suffering from the previously outlined post-industrial condition, in which stable employment opportunities are difficult to find in order to transcend from the margins to the centre of Belgian society. Instead, illegal means are embraced in order to exist. On the basis of the analysis of these filmic texts, it is clear to acknowledge the effects of the universal discourse of globalisation upon the local areas, culminating in localised struggles. These struggles are undetermined by ethnicity and presented as individualistic, which highlights the elimination of collective spirit that functions as the adhesive in social cohesion.

The transnational interconnectedness between nations weakens the power of the state and the political national project and leaves it susceptible to global effects. The process of globalisation and the transnational synergies are capricious and unfixed, which, as a consequence, undermine and question the strength of the nation-state and the national

structures. The cinematic landscape has changed and developed into a more transnational environment, particularly in terms of investment and film finance. The role of the co-production significantly increased in the 1990s, through European directives such as Eurimages and the Media I and II programmes; a development that mirrors the opening up of borders across the European Union in 1993. In the current climate, globalisation and transnational processes are inescapable, with increasing numbers of peoples becoming “connected” through the mass media and global telecommunications. Our identities are in a constant state of re-articulation, as these global denizens discover new senses of belonging within transnational “networks”. Although a person may be born in a country, a region, a town, they may still not embody and understand the core cultural and societal aspects of what assimilates somebody to a given space. But what of those peoples that are “disconnected” and sequestered from these transnational “networks” that are formulated through mass medias and telecommunication systems?

The weakening of the national construct leads to resistances emanating from localised environments within the nation. The localised resistances highlight the fragmentation of the nation and mirror the fragmentation of society, which is a consequence of the effects of globalisation. The solidarity of the nation is compromised, which is the case for the federal entity of Belgium. The territorial boundaries no longer play a role in determining identity; it is more important to engage with the tropes of culture and ethnicity within this transnational environment. The weakening of the nation-state is eroding the national frontiers, and is corroding the national spirit and the personal affiliation to the nation. The deterritorialized populations maintain a migrant identity that lies elsewhere; the space is a host to the migrant guest and provides a temporary hospice where the migrant guests can revive their ailing lives. The screening of the migrant body creates multiple and non-national identities and affiliations; the migrant identity is decoupled from the nation. The migrant characters, within the corpus of works of the Dardenne Brothers, do not maintain a personal affiliation with the space of Wallonia. The Walloon space represents a mere stopover point on the journey to paradise or a route to European citizenship. The Dardennian characters are not linked by race, but are all connected by virtue of the abject state of their lives. The films are concerned with peoples from both inside and outside of the state and the national political project, but they are regarded as minorities, since they are not “connected” to a larger apparatus and “have lost the ability to enter into any kind of exchange” (Elsaesser 125). The effects of globalisation link the migrant body to the ethnic Walloon, since they are all implicated in the same de-industrial demise of Wallonia; they are implicated in the current predicament and have the same future. The Dardennian characters epitomise the localised struggles, which thereby fragment the nation and obscure the notion of a Belgian cultural identity. The fortress of society, which is a bounded construct and represents the nation-state, sidelines the Dardennian Walloon characters. The search and struggle to attain a place within the fortress of society coincides with the disembedding of the individual from the national sphere and the struggle to discover one’s cultural identity. The concept of cultural identity is a quest, and since it is not a tangible and concrete entity, it is necessary for the Dardennian characters to search for a sense of belonging to a community. The characters, however, all remain alone, highlighting that these peoples wish to fight, strive and struggle in order to belong to a community in a display of solidarity, but it

is a show of solidarity addressing a state and a national political project that is struggling for its continued existence.

Notes

¹The term 'Fortress Europe' was originally conceived in relation to Hitler's Europe, which 'had become a seemingly impenetrable fortress, protected by what was later termed the Atlantic Wall, perhaps the most massively fortified military position in history' (Loshitzky, 2010:1). However, the notion of 'Fortress Europe' that I am referring to in this article concerns the gated community of Europe; a Europe fixated with the securitization of their soil from external migration. Rumford neatly sums up the notion of Fortress Europe as 'a combination of internal mobility with an impermeable external shell' (Rumford, 2006: 160). The borders within Europe are slowly eroding, but the ring-fences remain impervious at Europe's extreme edges.

² This current European cinematic trend that is being acknowledged within this article concerns the current phenomenon of immigration, xenophobia and racism within the cinemas of 'New Europe'. The cinematic trend is united by means of the intercultural dynamics perpetuated in the films, which are applicable to the works of many European cinemas.

³ The Dardenne Brothers tend to distance themselves from the film *Je pense à vous*, since it is a source of embarrassment for the auteurs and is not intrinsically Dardennian. This can be gleaned from the opening pages from Luc Dardenne's journal *Au dos de nos images*. He states "Que faire? Faut-il continuer à vouloir filmer? Faire des films? A quoi bon! Le mauvais film que nous venons de tourner devrait nous guérir à jamais de cette illusion, de cette pretention." (L. Dardenne, 10) [What shall we do now? Shall we carry on filming? Making films? What's the point! The bad film that we have just shot should cure us forever of this illusion, of this pretension.] On this basis, it is clear that the Dardenne Brothers mark this film as a watershed in their career.

⁴ Rosetta's marginalization from society is not only a result of globalist and capitalist forces, but is also predicated upon her gender. This therefore places a double marginalization status upon the body of Rosetta. The focus of this article, however, only concerns her marginal ethnic status, which is cast aside from the dominant Belgian ethnicity and will not address gender identity.

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