

Polyphonic Bodies, Accented Voices: Diasporic and Migrant Identities in Current Flemish Cinema

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On March 22, 2016, three coordinated bombings in the Zaventem airport and the Malbeek metro station in Brussels resulted in the death of 32 civilians and three attackers. After suspect Salah Abdeslam was arrested in Molenbeek and incriminating material was found in Schaerbeek—working-class neighborhoods with a high density of Muslim inhabitants—the events focused attention on Brussels’ municipalities after the Paris attacks of November 2015, and reinforced the media relabeling of Molenbeek as a “jihadist haven.”¹ Situated in the North-Western area of Brussels, the municipality of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean is composed of a densely diverse demographics, with inhabitants of Moroccan, Turkish, Congolese, and Eastern European descent, among several other ethnicities and nationalities. Rather than pointing to the crucial role of the neighborhood in epitomizing the complexity of Belgium’s composite ethnoscape,² the rebranding of Molenbeek as a breeding ground for Islamic terrorism and ISIS recruitment contributed to the misrepresentation of migrant lives in Brussels, adding fuel to the fire of an already heated scenario.

In the Fall 2015, the release of *Black*—the second feature by Flemish-Moroccan duo Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah—retroactively challenged such a biased depiction of migrant and diasporic subjects. One of the highlights of Flemish cinematic season 2015-2016, and a sign of prosperity for a local film industry with international ambitions, *Black* travelled the film festival circuit all over the world, performing reasonably well at Belgium’s yearly box office³ and gaining critical consensus in Flanders as well as abroad.⁴ Adapting for the screen Dirk Bracke’s young-adult novels *Black* (2006) and *Back* (2008), the film restages Shakespeare’s classic tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* in the gritty scenario of Brussels’ multi-ethnic feuds. The conflicted love-story between Marwan, a petty thief from Molenbeek, and Mavela, a teenage girl from Matongé (the African district of Brussels), not only allows Flemish cinema to be showcased on the international film market, but brings further and much-needed

attention to the representation of migrant and diasporic subjectivities in Flanders and Belgium at large. The “hood”—a recurrent motif in El Arbi and Fallah’s work—appears as a locus of critical inquiry, a spatio-temporal microcosm that embodies to the fullest the complex negotiation of supranational, national, regional, and ethnic identities embedded in Brussels as the simultaneous capital of the European Union, the Belgian nation-state and the Flemish region.

Black constitutes the point of entry for this article, which examines the representation of migrant and diasporic subjects in current Flemish cinema through two symptomatic examples, *Turquaze* (Kadir Balci, 2009) and *Image* (Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah, 2014). I especially look at how both films portray diasporic and migrant identities in intersectional terms, emphasizing the intertwined levels of oppression and marginalization experienced by the films’ protagonists in relation to their ethnicity, nationality, and liminal condition as mobile subjects. Such an analysis has two related objectives. First, it suggests a possible implementation of plurinational frameworks for the study of identification and representation practices in subnational contexts—geopolitical entities that lack nation-state recognition, but respond to national-belonging principles⁵ and develop distinct national imaginaries. Second, it shows how the representation by, for and about migrant and diasporic subjects can open a horizon of possibilities for subnational cinemas, such as the Flemish one, to exist beyond a national framework that accounts for territorial, linguistic and ethnic homogeneity rather than multiplicity.

The choice of Flanders as the focus of attention for this article is dictated by the peculiar position the region and its capital occupy in geopolitical as well as cinematic terms, both internationally and within the Belgian nation-state. Organized into four semi-autonomous federal communities—Dutch-speaking Flanders in the North, French-speaking Wallonia in the South, German-speaking municipalities on the Eastern border of Wallonia, and Brussels as the bilingual capital embedded in the Flemish territory—Belgium functions according to an analogous partition on the cinematic level. With the emergence of two regional film funds—Wallimage in Wallonia and the Flanders Audiovisual Fund - Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds (VAF) in Flanders—Belgian cinema consolidated in the 2000s as a bipartite entity, crystallized into two strands of film production regularly announced before a film’s opening credits: “Belgian cinema made in Wallonia” and “Belgian cinema made in Flanders.” Previously included in the Wallimage fund under the name of “Bruxellimage,” the Region of Brussels Capital developed and launched in 2016 its own film fund initiative, Screen Brussels, as a separate entity.

Francophone and Flemish cinemas have acquired in recent years the scope and dimensions of regional industries with national concerns and an international reach, sometimes participating in cross-regional co-productions. It can be argued that such cross-regional dialogues between film imaginaries and funding infrastructures enable the interpretation of Belgian cinema as a mosaic of several national entities, rather than as a national monolith. The distinctiveness of Belgian cinema as a plurinational entity with “split” screens and multiple identities (Mosley) can, however, be only partially understood without taking into further consideration the nesting of intersectional identities that occurs at the regional as well as the national level. The case of accented Flemish cinema presented in this article thus

serves as a starting ground to understand how such identities can help reconceptualize the plurinational and “split” composition of Belgian cinemas, cultures and identification practices in broader terms.

In his 2000 volume *Plurinational Democracy: Stateless Nations in a Post-Sovereignty Era*, Michael Keating observed the emergence of Western subnational entities—which he defined as “stateless nations”—as central players in the “post-sovereign moment” of the late twentieth century. Keating suggested abandoning traditional concepts of centralized sovereignty and multinationalism to rather embrace “plurinationalism,” the concurrence of several national identities within a single community or even individual:

National identities are not always monolithic and exclusive. They become so in times of political conflict and polarization, but at other times people are able to live with several identities. It is for this reason that I use the term “plurinationalism,” which includes the idea that individuals can have several identities, rather than “multinationalism,” which implies distinct national communities living together. If people do indeed have plural national identities, then we can think of building political units underpinned by national sentiment at different levels, rather than seeking to preserve the concept of nationality for just one. (19-20)

Keating’s notion of plurinationalism accounts only for specific forms of coexisted diversity and it is therefore complicated by several caveats. As Kris Deschouwer et al. argued in their conference paper “Measuring (sub)national identities in surveys: Some lessons from Belgium”, the employment of behaviourist and dualistic approaches for the assessment of national self-identification practices in subnational scenarios poses several limits to the further complexity of identities, such as those of Belgian citizens. A standard procedure for the measurement of national identification in political science, the Linz-Moreno question⁶ has been especially challenged throughout the years and within different plurinational contexts such as Belgium, Spain and the UK (Abdelal et al.; Sinnott; Guinjoan and Rodon).

Based on a five-point scale hierarchical classification that traces the salience and intensity of national identity,⁷ the question—which Moreno himself conceived as a tool for mapping “dual identities” (Moreno)—carries the risk of relying on several major assumptions: the strict opposition of competing identities, the lack of nuance in the feeling of national belonging, the exclusivity of the given choices, and the homogeneity of the responses regardless of the class status, gender and ethnicity of the respondents (Deschouwer et al., Guinjoan and Rodon). The binary scheme proposed by the Moreno scale—and partly employed by Keating in *Plurinational Democracy*—was intended to rationalize the scope of overlapping and multiple identities in the outcome of nation-state fragmentation and globalizing forces. It, however, fails to acknowledge the intersectional aspect of such forces, and especially the different gradations of national belonging and identification practices due to the circulation and relocation of diasporic and migrant subjects in the globalized era.⁸

Taking *Turquaze* and *Image* as my privileged case studies, I will use the remainder of this article to point to the broader spectrum of plurinational representation in Flemish cinema. I will focus on the intersectional nature of diasporic and migrant identities in Flemish accented cinema as a mirror of the polysemous nature of Flanders as a geopolitical entity and a cinematic industry. Both *Turquaze* and *Image* will be considered as symptomatic examples of a larger corpus of recent Flemish films concerned with the self-representation and external perception of accented subjectivities in the composite scenario of Turkish economic diaspora in Flanders, and African migration in Brussels. The conflation of multiple identities within the same subject, as presented in Balci, El Arbi, and Fallah's films, will be unpacked from a representational and an industrial standpoint. On the one hand, the films' production will be contextualized within the recent history of accented Flemish filmmaking and the development of cross-cultural film policies beyond the ethnolinguistic divide of French and Flemish cinemas in Belgium (Willems, Willems and Smets). On the other hand, the intersectional qualities of the identities presented in the films will be analyzed in relation to the features of accented cinema in Flanders with specific attention to questions of spatial and temporal mobility.

Given the heterogeneity of the films' geographical, cultural, and linguistic settings, their "Flemishness" will be assessed on the basis of their production and funding history. As emerged in conversation with Karla Puttemans, head of VAF, during my research trip in Flanders in 2015, the main criteria for determining the eligibility of a film for Flemish funding is the director's nationality.⁹ Considering the funding schemes of *Turquaze* and *Image*—which were provided by the films' production companies in the context of my research visit—both features qualify as Flemish by virtue of the requirements put in place by VAF. Looking at the mise-en-scène of migrant and diasporic experiences in relation to the Flemishness of my case studies, I will present accented Flemish cinema as a productive ground for an intersectional take on subnational cinema and belonging: one that endorses multiplicity over unity, dissonance over homogeneity, and conceives a polyphony of bodies and subjectivities not necessarily confined within a unitary design of nationhood and national identity.

Accented Cinema and Crossover Policies in Flanders

Although the historical trajectory of imperial colonization in Belgium dates back to the late nineteenth century, and the subsequent heritage of postcolonial migration to the early 1960s, the history of diasporic and migrant cinema in Flanders is less than two decades old. Having emerged sporadically at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Flemish accented cinema has surged as a circumscribed and yet relevant phenomenon over the past twenty years, thanks to the work of both white Flemish directors and second generation filmmakers of Turkish and Moroccan descent.

In his seminal book *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Hamid Naficy coined the notion of accented cinema to discuss the interstitial work of exilic, diasporic and ethnic filmmakers emerging from "postcolonial displacement and postmodern or late modern scattering" (11). As a result of both the decolonization processes occurred between the 1950s and 1970s, and the fragmentation of nation-states in the wake of global

economies in the 1980s and 1990s, exilic and diasporic filmmakers migrated to the West in different forms and patterns, giving way to a heterogeneous phenomenon that can be read through the lens of a shared stylistic approach. Although brought into migration by diverse historical and socio-political circumstances, accented filmmakers share analogous conditions of liminality, ambiguity and simultaneity, which inform the ethics and aesthetics of their cinema, as well as their political experiences and practices. The tension between the local and the global, the margin and the center, the homeland and the hostland are at the core of Naficy's analysis, which aims to identify inconsistencies, but also recurrences in the films produced under conditions of exile, diaspora, and geopolitical dispersion, using accented style as their common denominator. The negotiation of plural identities, the hybridization of narratives, the deterritorialization of bodies and subjectivities considered by Naficy as essential components of the accented paradigm can be observed in current Flemish cinema as well. It is especially through the notions of "hyphenated identities" and "double consciousness" that the accented cinema framework can be pertinently applied to the Flemish case studies considered in this article.

Employed to define the work of ethnic filmmakers emphasizing their racial and ethnic identity within their host country (especially in the American context), the hyphen is discussed by Naficy as an ambiguous punctuation marker, one that resists the homogenizing power of mono-national(ist) identities, but also carries the risk of creating a qualitative hierarchy between hyphenated and non-hyphenated identities. It is when conceived as a contesting sign of nested, hybridized, multiple identities—rather than fetishized as a nativist matter of stability and authenticity within a national framework—that the hyphen works productively against essentialist notions of nationhood and towards a transnational understanding of accented filmmaking. In this sense, the hyphen can be repurposed so as to understand the way diasporic filmmakers in Flanders approach the plurality of their geopolitical, linguistic, ethnic and even gender identities within the narrative and style of their cinema. Dealing with personal feelings of displacement as well as with the larger tradition of diasporic and exilic cinema preceding their work, Flemish-based hyphenated filmmakers use their "double consciousness" to move across spaces, temporalities and identities, creating a fertile ground for challenging and expanding the plurinational dimension of national belonging based on the dualistic divide of Flemish-Walloon communities in Belgium.

Naficy also traces an analogous disruption of binary categories in the way accented films are aesthetically, spatially and temporally conceived in contrast to dyadic conceptions of gender, such as those of classical cinema (154). It is Naficy's provocative contention that all accented films are, in fact, "feminine texts" by virtue of their reconfiguration of both inside/domestic, outside/natural spaces as coded in feminine terms, and that the pulling forces of belonging and nostalgia in relation to homeland and hostland affect the way gender identities are reshaped in such texts. By arguing that "[t]hese films destabilize the traditional binary schema of gender and spatiality because, in the liminality of deterritorialization, the boundaries of gender, genre, and sexuality are blurred and continually negotiated" (154-155), Naficy advocates for an intersectional understanding of accented filmmaking practices. Gender and sexuality, along with ethnicity and race, intervene as crucial factors in the renegotiation of identities for exilic, diasporic and migrant subjects. Naficy's engagement

with the intersectionality of accented cinema thus invites the audience to think about the feature films examined in this article as manifestations of three interconnected issues: the paradoxical liminality and simultaneity of border-crossing identities, the gendering of accented aesthetics and subjectivities, and the hyphenated nature of accented filmmaking practices within plurinational and pluriethnic film industries and imaginaries.

This latter point is further supported by the very structures of crossover film policies in Flanders and by their concurrence with the emergence of accented Flemish cinema in the early 2000s. As Gertjan Willems argues in his brief overview of the phenomenon on *rekto:verso*, the work of Flemish-Turkish amateur filmmaker R. Kay Alban can be appointed as the starting moment of accented cinema in Flanders, while the debut of white Flemish directors Jan Hintjens (*Osveta*, 2000) and Guy Lee Thys (*Kassablanka*, 2002) signalled the incursion of domestic filmmakers into the exploration of Flanders' multicultural texture (Willems). Combining the analysis of narrative aspects and industry-related data in current Flemish cinema, Willems and Smets' article "Film Policy and the Emergence of the Crosscultural" further identifies two specific strands of cross-cultural filmmaking in Flanders: migrant and diasporic cinema made by migrant and diasporic directors in Flanders (i.e. *Turquaze*, and more recently *Image*, *Marry Me*, and *Black*); and Flemish films funded with Flemish money but shot outside Flanders (i.e. Peter Brosens and Jessica Woodworth's Mongolian/Belgian/German co-production *Khadak* [2006] and Peruvian-based *Altiplano* [2009], and Gust Van den Berghe's *Blue Bird* [2011]).

With the notable exception of diasporic and migrant-themed films shot in Flanders by white Flemish directors and with Flemish funding (namely Nicolas Provost's *The Invader* [2011], Guy Lee Thys' *Mixed Kebab* [2012] and Peter Van Hees' *Waste Land* [2014]), the two categories identified by Willems and Smets serve as a taxonomic tool to understand how cross-cultural dynamics intervene to complicate Flanders' quest for national identity as a homogenous and univocal construct. Either by minimizing the link with Flanders or by bridging the gap between homeland and hostland, both strands of filmmaking challenge fixed preconceptions of national cinema and nation-statehood in the globalized era, as they also demonstrate the many opportunities offered by crossover film policies in recent Flemish cinema (96). In the remaining sections of this article, a close reading of *Turquaze* and *Image* will allow us to bring the industrial level of this analysis in conversation with the spatio-temporal configurations of accented filmmaking in Flanders, providing a template for the polyphonic understanding of diasporic and migrant identities presented therein.

A Study in Harmonic Dissonance: *Turquaze*

Identified by Willems as the first film made in Flanders "by and about immigrants," *Turquaze* is a productive example of the tendencies traced by the author in the current structures of the Flemish film industry. The film also occupies a relevant position in the national imaginary of Flemish cinema challenged by its millennial "accented turn":

The heterogeneous body of films under the category of migrant and diasporic cinema challenges the notion of immobile and national cinemas, both textually and in terms of production and (potentially) distribution. *Turquaze* fits that

description as it takes the unsettling of homogeneous national and ethnic identities as its main theme. Moreover, the national is surpassed by the importance of the local and the trans-local: it is not so much Belgium, Flanders, or Turkey that forms the basis for the development of the plot as specific districts of the “home” cities of Ghent and Istanbul. (Willems and Smets 87)

Co-produced by Dirk Impens’ Flemish company Menuet and by the Turkish company GU-Film with the support of several financial partners (among which VAF contributed to 45% of the €2,000,000 total budget), *Turquaze* transcends the “nationalization” of Flemish industry and imaginary on several intertwined levels. On the industrial one, the film attests the interest of Flanders in fostering the cross-cultural diversity of its cinema, as well as Balci’s intention to reach out to both domestic and diasporic audiences in the region.¹⁰ On the representational one, it underscores the need to move beyond the ethnolinguistic and inter-regional divide pertaining to the Flemish-Francophone Belgian split, so as to reflect more widely upon the experience of diasporic subjects divided between memories of the homeland and the hostland. Shot partially in Ghent and partially in Istanbul in accordance with its co-production agreement, Balci’s first feature translates the conflicted position of hyphenated subjects through its accented style, narrative and modes of film production and circulation, providing a fruitful case study for challenging essentialist notions of national identity and national cinema in Flanders.

The dialogue between the center and the periphery as the accented marker of *Turquaze*’s approach is evident from the film’s plot, which departs from the intimate dimension of the three main characters’ story and connects it with the broader experience of displacement and acceptance of their diasporic condition. The death of the *pater familias* and the return of their mother (Tilbe Saran) to Istanbul affect the lives of three Turkish brothers living in Ghent. Timur (Burak Balci), who works in the Museum of Fine Arts, but wishes to become a trumpeter in the local marching band, starts questioning the relationship with his Flemish girlfriend Sarah (Charlotte Vandermeersch), whom he has never introduced to his family. The eldest brother Ediz (Nihat Alptug Altinkaya), a mechanic struggling with the frustrations of a childless marriage and oppressive feelings of gender inadequacy, neglects his wife Zehra (Hilal Sönmez) to find temporary comfort in the affair with a Flemish woman. The youngest son, Bora, (Sinan Vanden Eynde) escapes the impositions of Ediz’ conservative household by committing small crimes and acts of vandalism that will eventually bring the family back together.

Mainly focused on the conflicted love-story between Timur and Sarah, and partly on Ediz and Zehra’s troubled marriage, *Turquaze* uses the romantic sub-plot not only as a way to enhance the film’s palatability to a wider audience, but also as a metaphor that exemplifies the intricate network of tensions at play in the everyday life of its diasporic characters. The cultural clash between the two young lovers—resolved by their reconciliation in the film’s closing scene—and the renegotiation of gender dynamics for the married couple epitomize on a microscopic scale the macroscopic conflicts and efforts of the diasporic characters to reconcile the ways of life of the homeland with the conditions of existence in the hostland.

Such efforts are addressed in the film from both a narrative and a formal standpoint. At the level of the former, the employment of romantic drama conventions serves two purposes: it endorses the renegotiation of a more nuanced national cultural belonging for Timur, and it allows the acceptance of a less contrived gender identity for Ediz. At the level of the latter, the film's editing works with spaces and temporalities to visualize the diasporic experience as a matter of displacement, relocation and hybridity. Such an experience is portrayed in both visual and sonic terms as a condition of harmony rather than rupture. The following reading of the film will thus proceed in two steps. First, the staging of the diasporic condition via memory and space will be observed in relation to Timur's character and the negotiation of his accented identity. Second, the de-construction and re-construction of diasporic masculinity as a mediation between the traditional models of the homeland and the opening possibilities of the hostland will be discussed with respect to Ediz's character, allowing the transition to the representation of migrant male subjectivity in El Arbi and Fallah's *Image*.

As Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg pointed out in the introduction to *Locating Migrant and Diasporic Cinema in Contemporary Europe*, the diversification of Europe in the wake of transnational flows of people and capital in the globalized era has largely affected the structures and modes of European filmmaking. The questions of identity formation and the challenges to national-ethnocentric myths brought forward by diasporic and migrant filmmakers have been crucial to "redefine understanding[s] of European identity as constructed and narrated in European national cinemas" (2). *Turquaze* fits aptly in the scenario outlined by Berghahn and Sternberg's volume, as the main purpose of the film—in spite of Balci's detachment from the "diasporic" label—seems to envision the reconciliation of fractures within Belgium's plurinational and multiethnic identities as an optimistic actuality rather than a mere potentiality. Films such as Oscar-nominated crime drama *Rundskop/Bullhead* (Michaël R. Roskam, 2011) presents the split between the Francophone and Flemish souls of Belgium's ethnoscape as a critical tool to rethink mono-nationalist understandings of identity and gender to the detriment of the male subject's survival. Conversely, a film such as *Turquaze* champions the acceptance and restoration of identity fissures as positively embodied by Timur and the metaphor of musical harmony the character carries within.

In *Studies on the Origin of Harmonic Tonality*, German musicologist Carl Dahlhaus defines harmony as follows:

"Harmony" implies an agreement [*Zusammenstimmen*] of disparate or contrasting elements. Up to the 17th century (following the Pythagorean-Platonic tradition, scholars looked to numerical proportion to provide an explanation of, and a basis for, harmony. In music, the concept of harmony has included since the early Middle Ages: (1) the combining of tones into a sequence of tones, or even groups of tones into a melody; (2) the agreement of the two tones in a dyad or of the tones and intervals in a triad; (3) the connecting dyads into an intervallic progression; (4) the relationship among the voices of a polyphonic composition; and (5) the joining together of chords into a chord progression. (18-19).

Dahlhaus' wording is especially suggestive with respect to *Turquaze*. Terms such as "combination," "agreement," "relationship," and "joining," point towards the idea of harmony as a form of reconciliation that can be extended beyond the musical realm. As Thomas Elsaesser notices in his chapter "Real Location, Fantasy Space, Performative Place", along with the cinema music is one of the most notable media for the self-representation of hyphenated subjects struggling with their simultaneous belonging to different geopolitical contexts and identities (51). Accordingly, the notions of accented musicality and harmony are mobilized in my analysis of *Turquaze* so as to understand the role played by the film's protagonist in bringing together several, seemingly dissonant, identities within one "polyphonic" body. In his first, clumsy encounter with the director of Ghent's marching band, Timur is, in fact, enthusiastically reminded that: "It is thanks to you [the Turkish people] that we [the Flemish people] have harmony. It is the Ottomans who have created harmony, with their cymbals and horns and drums..." Such a claim contrasts however with George Grove's assertion that "[t]he earliest attempts at harmony of which there are any examples or any description, was the Diaphony or Organum which is described by Hucbald, a Flemish monk of the tenth century, in a book called 'Enchiridion Musicae'" (669, 2009). Despite its historical inaccuracy, the statement of the band director establishes an interesting link between Timur and his function as the bearer of harmony in the film—a role that the character seems unaware of at the narrative level, but the film endorses at the textual one.

Timur's inner ability to reconcile internal and external dissonances is played out in the film through modes of temporal and spatial mobility, which refer to the geographical movement of the character across international borders, but also to his temporal movement across dimensions of migratory/diasporic past and present life. Avtar Brah's concept of "diaspora space", as applied by Berghahn and Sternberg to practices of diasporic and migrant filmmaking, is particularly useful in this sense (17). According to the authors, such a space enables the cinematic convergence of "minority memories" from the homeland and cultural memories from the hostland. The articulation of these different and yet intertwined memories within the context of diasporic filmmaking is at the center of Timur's experience. Memory is crucial in *Turquaze* from the film's inception, a brief edited sequence that juxtaposes images of the Spiegel String Quartet playing the *leitmotiv* of Timur and Sarah's love story (composed by Flemish musician Bert Ostyn as part of the film's original soundtrack), and a backward tracking shot of Timur sitting in the Museum of Modern Arts while the voice-over of his dead father recollects dreams of playing in a marching band, but having to give up his passion for a more steady job in Belgium.

For Timur, the most mobile of the three brothers,¹¹ sentiments of nostalgia and cultural disorientation triggered by the loss of the paternal figure and the temporary absence of the maternal one are the primary source of internal conflicts. In the film's narrative, the struggle to reconcile his present life in Ghent with the memories of his family's past in Istanbul prevents the character from moving forward in his relationship with Sarah, as well as from fully embracing the porous condition of his diasporic settlement in Flanders. At the level of the film's formal elements, however, the editing and sound design disprove such a conflictual separation of Timur's national cultural identities, as they intervene to situate the homeland and the hostland on a plane of temporal and spatial synchronicity. As evidenced

by the analysis of two specific scenes in the film, *Turquaze's* narrative and formal configuration generates the illusion of contemporaneity between events in Ghent and Istanbul, thus translating in audiovisual terms the coexistence of identities, spaces, and times within one character. Such a cinematic sense of synchronicity is therefore central to the configuration of Timur as an accented and intersectional subject.

The role of music, both diegetic and extra-diegetic, is particularly compelling in this respect, as it reconfigures Timur's subjectivity as a condition of multiplicity, in contrast with the "split" suggested by the character's storyline. In one of the film's initial scenes, Timur returns from Istanbul after his father's funeral and is reunited with his girlfriend Sarah. After a quick coffee together, Timur departs to have dinner at Ediz's house—a routine he follows scrupulously—and then surprises Sarah by showing up at her apartment. While the two characters make love, the camera cuts on the detail of a record-player playing the Turkish song that can be heard in the background of the scene. A slow lateral pan reveals, however, that the player is not located in Sarah's bedroom in Ghent, but rather in that of Timur's mother in Istanbul. The scene marks a transnational connection between two different geopolitical spaces, but it also suggests the proximity of Timur's plural identities even before the character is made aware of it. Such proximity is, however, not conceived as a matter of homogeneity. The formal composition of the film makes it clear that it is upon the coexistence of differences, rather than their assimilation, that diasporic lives can be productively reframed in the diverse scenario of Belgium's ethnoscape.¹²

Analogous instances of textual continuity between homeland and host nation return later in the film, when Timur decides to go back to Turkey after an unsuccessful encounter with Sarah's apprehensive parents—which interestingly takes place during the Spiegel String Quartet concert shown at the beginning of the film. The decision to leave Flanders seems to underline the depth of Timur's identity split, and his need to reconnect with a past that is not only represented by the attachment to the homeland, but also by the memory of a dead lover and prospective wife buried in Turkey. In the sequence that precedes the character's departure, another spatial-temporal juxtaposition is introduced in the film and situates the main locations of Ghent and Istanbul, once again, on a plane of simultaneity. While his mother is nostalgically browsing through an old album of family pictures in Istanbul, Timur is shown playing the trumpet in his modest room in Ghent. A close-up of the character's face suffused in a warm, golden light catches him in a state of distress. As Timur seemingly takes his definitive decision and presses the keys of his musical instrument, the light turns from gold to blue. The same color palette allows the transition from this shot to the following shot, showing Timur on a ferry to Istanbul.

The fluidity of border-crossing movements and spatial-temporal synchronicity displayed in the above analyzed sequences is, however, disrupted soon after Timur's departure when Sarah decides to inquire about his absence and join him in Istanbul in an attempt to save their relationship. After consulting with both Bora and Ediz, Sarah literally materializes at Timur's dead lover's grave, where the character is sitting alone, lost in contemplation. By avoiding the use of establishing shots to track the character travelling from one location to the other (the only shot of a plane taking off appears at the beginning of the film), the editing seems to translate Sarah's willingness to move freely across dimensions of

geographical and cultural belonging, as the necessary condition of acceptance and existence of her relationship with Timur.

In the montage sequence that follows their encounter at the cemetery, the couple is shown wandering around Istanbul, while the melancholic music that functioned as a *leitmotiv* for Timur's return to the homeland is replaced by Bert Ostyn's original song "Little Rascal," a catchy electronic track that blends a seemingly Middle Eastern melody with English lyrics about an ephemeral encounter between two lovers. Although textually unrelated to the actual dynamics of their relationship, the song functions as a conduit for Timur and Sarah to encounter each other in a shared space, which happens to be for once familiar to the diasporic character, and foreign to the Flemish one. The transitory moment of bliss is, however, tainted by uncertainties and doubts, as Sarah returns to Flanders without knowing if her romance with Timur will have any future (a melancholic farewell takes place this time in the non-place of Istanbul's airport).

Even so, Sarah's unexpected entrance into the homeland forces Timur to reconsider the depth of his feelings for her and, more importantly, his potential role as the gatekeeper of multiple, but not necessarily contradictory, national and cultural identities. Such a realization has to move through instances of self-destruction before being put into practice, as Timur is caught into a fight with some strangers in Istanbul and decides to return to Ghent only afterward, bringing his mother back with him. The family is eventually reunited when Bora is involved in a car accident after stealing a motorbike, and remaining conflicts between Timur and Ediz are resolved in the mutual understanding of each other's identity and gender struggles. The definitive reconciliation, however, takes place in the final scene of the film, when Timur leads Ghent's marching band outside the same laundromat he met Sarah in for the first time. Here, he plays for her, using music once again as a privileged form of expression of his feelings. No longer a boundary, the glass window between the two lovers thus becomes a thin wall that unifies rather than separates, an osmotic membrane through which differences and dissonances are not erased, but eventually shared, embraced and harmonized.

While Timur's narrative arc is mostly focused on the negotiation of his national and ethnic identities, Ediz's storyline delves more explicitly into questions of negotiated gender dynamics in relation to the character's diasporic condition. Ediz is depicted in the film as the most conservative of the three brothers, as well as the one who most forcefully and loyally adheres to the expectations and codifications of his traditional gender role — or what he believes as such. The character's attempt to act as a surrogate father after the death of the actual one is carried out through a rigid enforcement of mono-cultural behaviors that seem to reject the plurality of the diasporic condition altogether. The refusal to speak Flemish in the household— thus preventing both brothers and wife from doing the same—is accompanied by the imposition of regular dinner gatherings and conversations about Timur's prospects of marriage with a Turkish woman. The success of Ediz's paternal re-enactment is doomed not only by the rigidity of his mindset, but also by his inability to be a father in the most literal sense, as the character's sterility is revealed later in the film.

Whereas for Timur the main source of anxiety was to find a balance in his belonging to different geopolitical spaces and temporalities, Ediz's defining conflict is the inability to fulfill

the standards of masculinity expected in the homeland and restaged in the host nation. In this sense, Ediz's character complies with the categories of transnational masculinity elaborated by Ernesto Vasquez del Aguila in the conclusion of his book *Being a Man in a Transnational World*. Herein, the author maps three main social representations of manhood tailored to the experience of Latin American, and more specifically Peruvian, men: the winner, the failed and the good enough man. Moving away from the geopolitical framework adopted by Aguila in his research, the same patterns of masculinity can be used to analyze the trajectory of Ediz in *Turquaze*, which moves from "winner" to "failed" to ultimately embodying (or envisioning) the "good enough man."

Ediz's conservative demeanor at the beginning of the film responds to his desire to accomplish the position of the winner migrant, which Aguila describes as "hegemonic masculinity that achieves the 'migrant's dreams': personal achievement and fulfillment of family's expectations in the host country" (224). A wife, a stable job, a house, and a seemingly cohesive nuclear family: these are the pillars of Ediz's self-assertion as the winner man. However, the character's inability to achieve paternity—that is to ultimately prove himself a "functional" male subject—situates him along the lines of the failed man, who "suffer[s] from emasculation among [his] male peers and also with women" (224). Ediz's struggle is not just a matter of gender inadequacy, but points more widely towards the ways in which forms of diasporic displacement and socio-cultural hybridization affect perceptions and practices of manhood. The failed performance of masculinity, as Aguila extensively argues, cannot be separated from the geopolitical environment that surrounds the male subject, and in the specific case of the male characters in *Turquaze*, nor even separated from the shifts in family dynamics that occur throughout the film.

Timur's capacity to bring identities and cultures together affects Ediz's trajectory, as the character is brought to reconsider the nature of his gender role, as well as that of his interactions with his wife Zehra, in more flexible terms. There cannot be only one univocal way of understanding identity either in gendered or national terms: both are predicated on the basis of complexity, sometimes contradiction, but ultimately negotiation. Aguila's concept of the "good enough man" is the most productive for the purposes of this analysis, as it is used "to describe the outcome of men's attempt to reconcile the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in masculinity" (225). Instead of conceiving hegemonic masculinity and male failure as the opposite pole of the same gender spectrum, Aguila's framework advocates for the coexistence of different dimensions of masculine capital and for the non-homogenizing reconciliation of contradictory instances of male performance, in a similar fashion to the negotiation of national identities achieved by Timur throughout the film. The capacity to accept the uncertainties and complexities of masculinity, as well as of the diasporic condition, becomes eventually more relevant than the fulfillment of supposedly univocal standards of biological and gendered "functioning." Indeed, it is precisely by acquiring such a capacity that Ediz's character can accept to display his vulnerability outside of the seemingly safe space of his own solitude, and instead share it with a companion who is ultimately equal and no longer subordinated or neglected.

Boys in the Hood: *Image*

The positive outcome of national-cultural renegotiation portrayed in *Turquaze* is denied to the male protagonist of my second case study, El Arbi, and Fallah's *Image*. In the filmmakers' first feature, the reality of migrant lives in Brussels is caught through the lens of media exploitation. Eva (Laura Verlinden), an ambitious reporter from Ghent working for a tyrannical anchorman (Gene Bervoets), is determined to shoot a documentary on Moroccan immigrants living in Molenbeek in an attempt to rehabilitate their public image. While scouting for locations and "insiders," she encounters Lahbib (Nabil Mallat), a young Moroccan man who offers to guide her to discover the neighborhood. The relationship between the two is, however, challenged by Eva's obsession with journalistic truth, and by Lahbib's efforts to maintain his reputation within the "hood", while at the same time questioning his own line of conduct.

As explained in the introduction to this article, the work of El Arbi and Fallah holds specific relevance with respect to the (mis)representation of migrants and diasporic subjects in Europe, Belgium and Flanders, especially with the intensification of xenophobic waves in the aftermath of the European migrant crisis of 2015, the November 2015 attacks in Paris, and the March 2016 bombings in Brussels. Already in their 2011 short film *Broeders* ("Brothers"), funded with VAF's Wildcard,¹³ the Flemish-Moroccan duo reflected on the divided perception of Belgian-based migrants, laying the ground for a deeper engagement with the subject matter in the following features *Image* and *Black*. Narrated as a reversed fairy-tale, *Broeders* portrays the parallel trajectories of the two titular brothers, Karim (Nabil Mallat) and Nassim (Moraad El Kasmi), living in the same neighborhood, but following opposite lifestyles. Karim works hard to keep children off the street and complies with the same precepts of kindness and respect in his everyday life, while Nassim behaves recklessly as a womanizer and a drug dealer. An unexpected turn of events forces them to switch moral sides, causing tragic consequences. The film's unhappy ending stages the simultaneous killing of the two brothers, who lie on the opposite sides of a street line while the narrating voice asks (in Arabic, although the film is subtitled in both Flemish and English): "A question: who is going to heaven and who is going to hell? Karim, who was on the right track all of his life, but was about to kill? Or Nassim, who was on the wrong track all of his life, but was about to save a life?"

An echo of the same lines returns in the final moments of *Image*, where Eva concludes her documentary on Lahbib by stating: "In this world, there is only one question. If you do the wrong thing for the right reasons is that a good deed?" Both *Broeders* and *Image* trigger analogous questions surrounding the self-perception and construction of the migrant image. That is, what possibilities are there for migrant subjects in Belgium to escape stereotypical and biased representations? Do migrant and diasporic subjects exist only as split individuals caught within Manichean dimensions of ethics, spaces and temporalities? Or is there a way to offer a more prismatic representation of their national, ethnic and gender identities?

Expanding on the limited framework of the short film, *Image* abandons the clear-cut separation of good and evil employed in *Broeders'* narrative to give space to a more nuanced characterization of both the migrant figure (Lahbib), and the Flemish "native" (Eva), whose

ethical stances are purposely ambiguous and highly problematized throughout the film. Such a nuanced perspective is attested by the passage from a fable-like narration to a less archetypal engagement with the portrayal of immigrants in the media, which is conveyed through a *mise-en-abyme* of different screens and points of view. Using the multiplication of devices and instances of news reporting, *Image* works on the meta-textual level to reinforce its critical standpoint towards the stereotypical representation of migrant subjects, without resorting to their equally unproductive victimization.

The film's opening sequence is particularly emblematic in these regards. The camera functions as an omniscient narrator, moving forward from the establishing shot of a blurry television screen into the screen itself, where fragments of a video interview *in medias res* suddenly appear. As the television is expanded to occupy the entire frame, the interpolation of video and film image is resolved in favor of the latter, implying a movement from the meta-filmic prologue to the actual film narrative. The interviewee looks into the camera while talking to Eva and her two cameramen—who remain out of frame—generating the impression that the documentary itself constitutes the first and main layer of the film's narration. The illusion is maintained until a group of immigrants surrounds the reporters' car, forcing them to turn off the camera and bringing the viewer back to the "reality" of the primary film narrative. Lahbib is introduced for the first time as he enters the car and convinces Eva that if she really wants to get a taste of what Molenbeek is truly like, it is him that she needs to hire. Once the business transaction between the two is completed, Eva asks Lahbib where they should go. The editing cuts to the film's opening credits, a montage sequence of newscasts and voice-overs of news reporting (in Flemish) about immigrant criminality in Brussels.

The sequence sets the tone for the meta-textual reflection prompted by the film as a whole, which departs from the narrative pretext of a loose crime-based plot in order to address the mediated representation of migrant subjectivities as its most pressing concern. The main storyline follows Eva as she struggles to defend the integrity of her project, as well as her future career, against the unethical plans of her boss Herman Verbeek to remain in charge of his own news show. Whereas Eva is convinced that a less biased approach to Lahbib's life is necessary to understand his character—although her objectivity is eventually compromised by her deeper relationship with the subject—Verbeek follows the cannibalistic rules of news reporting and hijacks Eva's film in order to show the most sensationalistic aspects of Lahbib's criminal figure. The documentary becomes the bone of contention between the two characters and their opposite stances towards the ethics of journalism, dramatically resulting in the killing of Verbeek at Eva's hand during the premiere of her film. The murder eventually solidifies the bond between Eva and Lahbib, who become accomplices and run away together, only to return in the film's closing scenes in the mediated form of news reporting. Footage of the two fugitives is shown along with Verbeek's obituary and the ambiguity of the characters' relationship ("Are they together? Has she been abducted?" the reporters in voice-over wonder) leaves no space for Lahbib's redemption in the eyes of the media, closing the film's circular structure on a bitter note.

Is Lahbib a criminal or the victim of circumstances? *Image* seems less concerned with finding a univocal answer to the question, and more interested in positioning the character's

subjectivity at the crossroad of diverging instances of self-representation and external perception. Lahbib's configuration as a multifaceted subject is, in most cases, produced by others, either through the filmmakers' omniscient gaze, Eva's perspective, the media apparatus surrounding the narrative, or a combination of all three. When Eva is not following him around to collect material for her documentary, it is through the lenses of the film's multiple cameras that Lahbib's image is constructed in both positive and negative terms. The character is shown harassing a stranger in Brussels' metro, stealing from a liquor store, and beating almost to death an alleged pedophile who offered him protection when in prison. However, he is also portrayed helping a kid overcome his fear of the razor at the local barbershop and recording a song for Eva. These instances are offered to the viewer as the privileged spectator of Lahbib's life outside the determined framework of Eva's documentary or the biased staging of migrant criminality in the footage that opens and closes the film. This does not, however, mean that Lahbib has no consciousness or agency over the complexities at play in the articulation of his public and private persona. On the contrary, the character is very much aware of the rules established within the neighborhood in terms of masculine and socio-cultural capital, and acts in accordance with them, complying with expected models of hegemonic and violent masculinity to the detriment of his own sensibility.

As in *Turquaze*, the privileged point of access for understanding the (self)articulation of Lahbib's multiple identities is music. One early scene, in particular, epitomizes the split consciousness of the character's gendered and cultural subjectivity. As part of the research for her documentary, Lahbib invites Eva to see his apartment. Once seated, Lahbib starts playing a ballad on his guitar, and suddenly stops when Eva takes out her camera and starts filming him. When asked why he does not want to be recorded, Lahbib replies that what he is doing "is personal", and whereas he can play "gangsta rap" music with his friends, he could never do the same with Arab lyrical poetry, since the risk of being considered weak by his peers would be too high a price to pay. Even in the security of his home, Lahbib cannot escape the constrictions of his character—the "thug" that can procure any weapon if need be, and whose reputation is built on the myth of a reckless criminal past. The control exercised by Lahbib over the construction of his own persona is therefore carefully calculated, but not necessarily embraced to the fullest, as the character's behavior is more often than not subsumed to the fulfillment of social expectations, but not to their willing acceptance. As Lahbib himself raps later on in the film, when performing a freestyle song in a hip-hop club under the careful scrutiny of Eva's camera, "The street is no movie and I don't want this role."

The multilayered structure of *Image's* mise-en-abyme thus serves to underline that although it is the media's responsibility to provide a realistic image of migrant existence, the migrant subjects themselves participate in the construction of a public image shaped on internal pressures within the neighborhood's space. This point seems to resonate with Floya Anthias' contention that "diasporic or racialized groups (like all subordinated social groups including those of class), may be subjected to two sets of gender relations: those of the dominant society and those internal to the group" (572-573). In her evaluation of ethnicity and race as non-exhaustive categories of inquiry for understanding diaspora as an intersectional phenomenon, Anthias argues indeed that gender dynamics affect diasporic and migrant

subjects in different ways on a transnational and a local scale. Similarly to Ediz in *Turquaze*, but more violently so, the ambiguity and complexity of Lahbib's negotiated image have to deal with the entanglement of gendered and cultural codes embedded in the migratory experience at the macroscopic level of transnational displacement and at the microscopic level of life in the "hood". Unlike the characters in Balci's film, however, Lahbib holds no visible ties with his homeland, nor with his migratory past: Brussels, or rather "BX", is the only space he recognizes as his own, and it is precisely within such a microcosm that intertwined rules of homeland and host nation are played out.

Although distant in tones and outcomes, *Turquaze* and *Image* are similar in the way they provide with alternative spaces for the articulation of cultural, ethnic and gender identities in the Flemish context. Rather than using cross-regional and intra-national tensions to think about identity splits, diasporic and migrant films employ the city and the neighborhood as alternatives to the region. Produced with a budget of €289.161.70 coming almost exclusively from Flemish sources (VAF, Eyeworks Film Production, and the Belgian tax-shelter), *Image* is shot only partially in Ghent, and almost entirely in the Molenbeek municipality of Brussels. The geopolitical space of the "hood" is, therefore, crucial to understand the microscopic ramifications of national, regional and local identities within Belgium's fragmented scenario. This is reflected in the film at both the geographical and the linguistic level—the two dimensions being deeply intertwined in the historical development of the Belgian nation-state and its division into semi-autonomous regions.

Whereas Flemish is used sporadically, Arabic and especially French take the lion's share of the film's linguistic component, which resonates with Miriam Ben-Rafael and Eliezer Ben-Rafael's study of Brussels' linguistic landscape (LL) as a "focus of multiple contradictions" and ethnolinguistic antagonisms (402). The authors explain that "[t]o be the capital of Belgium implies French-Flemish bilingualism since both languages are official in this region... as the capital of the Flemish region, Brussels should, however, reveal a preferential approach to Flemish" (402). In opposition to the latter claim, the research shows nonetheless a consistently marginal use of Flemish in most of the city's municipalities. Within the Arab-Muslim neighborhoods, in particular, French is used extensively either unilingually or in conjuncture with Arabic, Flemish, and English, while Flemish only is almost absent despite the alleged bilingualism of the city/region (as Lahbib sarcastically notes at the beginning of the film, "À quoi le Flamand?" "What is the point of speaking Flemish?"). *Image* thus deflects from the monolingualistic assertion of Flemish national identity as the congruence of territory, community and language (Blommaert), and instead points towards a diverse and more articulated network of identities at play in the configuration of national belonging in Flanders, using Brussels as the converging ground of supranational, national, regional and ethnic tensions. Along with a larger corpus of accented films made in Flanders, *Image* allows us to think about nationhood in Flemish cinema not only within a regional and national framework, but also, and more interestingly, within the complex microcosm of the diasporic and migrant space—a space that invites a more nuanced engagement with issues of national and cultural identity within the Flemish context.

Notes:

¹ Ian Traynor, "Molenbeek: the Brussels borough becoming known as Europe's jihadi central," *The Guardian*, 15 Nov. 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/15/molenbeek-the-brussels-borough-in-the-spotlight-after-paris-attacks>. Accessed 21 Nov. 2017.

Chams Eddine Zaougui, "Molenbeek, Belgium's 'Jihad Central'," *The New York Times*, 19 Nov. 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/opinion/molenbeek-belgiums-jihad-central.html>. Accessed 21 Nov. 2017.

² "A term used to get away from the idea that group identities necessarily imply that cultures need to be seen as spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or ethnically homogeneous forms" (182), Appadurai's notion of "ethnoscape" is employed here on a reduced but not reducing scale. Whereas it does not address the impact of media circulation and people migration on the post-national structure of the globalized world, the term is applied to the Belgian case so as to comprehend the mobility of cultural, linguistic, and geographical notions within the Belgian context and beyond the limitations of its nation-state framework.

³ Entering the 30th position of the box office ranking for 2015 with a total gross of \$1,612,781 in Belgium and Luxemburg, *Black* surpassed Hollywood productions such as *Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb* (2014, Shawn Levy), *Magic Mike XXL* (Gregory Jacobs, 2015) and *Spy* (Paul Feig, 2015), as well as the domestic "competitor" *D'Ardennen/The Ardennes*. ("Belgium and Luxembourg Yearly Box Office," *Box Office Mojo*, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/belgium/yearly/>). With a budget of €1,842,500 coming from Caviar films, VAF, tv-coproduction, Bruxellimage and the European MEDIA + program, *Black* also recuperated a significant portion of the invested capital. (Karla Puttemans, head of production at VAF, provided the financial schemes for the films discussed in this article via email conversation and with the permission of the films' producers).

⁴ The film premiered at TIFF40 in September 2015, where it received the Discovery Award for "directors to watch."

⁵ I borrow the concept of "national belonging" from Jerry White's 2004 article "National Belonging, Renewing the Concept of National Cinema for a Global Culture." Herein, the author proposes to disentangle national cinema from its historical affiliation with nation-state structures and concerns, and rather advocates for a more flexible and "composite" notion of what can constitute a national cinema in terms of film practices, locations, and audiences. White champions the sense of "national belonging" over the notion of identity in order to circumnavigate the limitations of national cinema as tied to cartographical configurations of the nation-state.

⁶ Based on the seminal work of Juan Liz on minority identities in Spain and the elaboration of self-identification categories (Linz), the question was employed by Luis Moreno in 1986 as the key methodology of his doctoral dissertation, *Decentralization in Britain and Spain: The cases of Scotland and Catalonia*, in order to evaluate the degree of belonging to national identities in the Catalan/Spanish and Scottish/British context.

⁷ The breakdown for Belgium being: 1) Only Belgian, 2) More Belgian than Flemish-Walloon, 3) Equally Flemish-Walloon and Belgian, 4) More Flemish-Walloon than Belgian, 5) Only Flemish-Walloon. (Keating 87, Source: 1995 General Election Study, Belgium). The data presented in Keating's book for the Belgian context are already problematic, as the opposition of hyphenated Flemish-Walloon identity to the Belgian one does not give a sense of the wider variety of regional-national (let alone ethnic) identities operating within Belgium's geopolitical landscape.

⁸ This idea bears similarities with Thomas Elsaesser's notion of "double occupancy", which the author employs to describe the condition of hyphenated subjects living in Europe, particularly through cinema and music as privileged means of expression. These subjects, as Elsaesser explains "are hyphenated nationals, whose identity comes from a double occupancy which here functions as a linked but constantly and sometimes violently tested allegiance: to the nation-state into which they were born, and to the homeland from which (one or both of) their parents came" (51). The idea of double occupancy, along with that of hyphenation as a kind of counter-metaphor to the metaphor of "identity" (48), thus comes in handy to understand the position of the characters analyzed in this article in relation to their plural identities and the tension between their homeland and host nation.

⁹ As Karla Puttemans pointed out via email exchange in the Fall 2015: "Films can be shot anywhere as long as 100 % of our support on the film is spent in the Flemish Community (meaning f.i. salaries, fees, postproduction,

etc. etc.). We feel that the film should be coherent, so if the story requires a decor/landscape/place that is not linked to Flanders, so be it. (...) the main criteria to consider a film Flemish is that the director is Flemish. The language used is often Flemish, but if the story requires a different language, we accept that also. Again, the coherence of the film prevails.”

¹⁰ As Willems and Smets remark in their article, Balci himself discarded the interpretation of *Turquaze* as first and foremost an example of diasporic filmmaking. In the attempt to reach out to a larger public, both director and producers commented on the romantic sub-plot of the film as more central than its cross-cultural concerns (Willems and Smets 98).

¹¹ Marginal importance is given in the narrative to Bora, the youngest sibling, which explains my minimal engagement with the character in the reading of the film. Apparently the best integrated of the three brothers; Bora mostly functions as a catalyzer for the familial reconciliation at the end of the film.

¹² As Brinker Gabler and Smith argue in *Writing New Identities: Gender, Nation, and Immigration in Contemporary Europe*, neo-colonial practices of “integration” and “assimilation” are frequently employed to exert control over the potential disruption of national identity as a matter of cultural and ethnic homogeneity. However, assimilation is especially dangerous: “[g]rounded on the discourse of universalism, it operates always unidirectionally. It assumes the resolvability of difference, its erasure in the becoming like, becoming the same. A stable, essential, unified national identity absorbs, refines, and neutralizes difference, but remains itself unchanged by those differences. Yet in the cultural imaginary differences may never be fully resolvable.” (9)

¹³ Since 2007, graduate students from film schools in the Flemish region can apply to win one of four Wildcards offered by VAF to sponsor fiction feature films (up to €60,000,000), documentaries (€40,000,000), animation projects (€60,000,000) and FilmLab (€25,000,000) (“VAF Wildcards”, *VAF Flemish Audiovisual Fund*, <https://www.vaf.be/talentontwikkeling/vaf-wildcards> Accessed 2 August 2018).

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