

Janina Falkowska

Introduction

The book *Conflict and Controversy in Small Cinemas* explores small cinemas in view of their presentation of the difficult and controversial times we live in today. The authors concentrate on the dysfunctionality of political, economic, and social systems; shifting national identities; the exploitation of women and children; terror and the war on terror; and finally, gender and race stereotypes. These phenomena are studied from the point of view of both interdisciplinary and intercultural studies, social economy, political theory and film studies.

Small, non-commercial cinemas have always had the tenacity and bravery to deal with controversial topics, tackle uncomfortable issues and present them in an uncompromising fashion. Primarily independently funded and not always financed by their governments or big corporations, they can more truthfully address the aforementioned topics compared to Hollywood cinema, which is restricted by its funding policies and political attitudes.

The most distinctive aspect of the book is its timeliness as most chapters deal with controversial and politically loaded subjects and the here and now of lives all over the world in the films that are both frank in content and innovative in aesthetics.

It is worth noting that the two main topics of the book, conflict and controversy, are interpreted in various ways in the selected chapters. The conflicts are not only political in nature as presented in the films (as illustrated in chapters in Part 1), but also they are conflicts between film content and form (as illustrated in chapters in Part 5). Conflicts may be both external and internal, especially in such controversial cases as the presentation of Roma people (in Part 3). Controversies surround the lack of controversy in small avant-garde cinemas; controversies occur in the presentation of gender on the one hand (as analyzed in Part 2) and in the understanding of film genres such as mockumentaries on the other (as discussed in Part 4). We present these areas with full understanding that misunderstanding or hesitation when applying these categories to film analysis may be both annoying and inspiring at the same time.

The chapters we present in the book are first of a kind studies of films that portray events or deal with the facts taking place in the present or in the very recent past. The authors of the chapters point to the new phenomena that have been exposed by film directors. Among the most interesting are the discussions

on Basque cinema; on gendered controversies in post-communist small cinemas from Slovakia, Czech Republic and Hungary; on ethnic stereotypes in the works of Polish filmmakers; on the stereotypical presentation of women in Japanese avant-garde; on post-communist political myths in Hungary; on the separatist movements of Catalonia; and on people in diasporas and during migrations. Some chapters also deal with the aesthetics of small cinemas, such as the aesthetics in Basque cinema or that of the post-industrial landscape in Silesian cinema.

The book is composed of an introduction and five parts.

Part 1, *Politics in Small Cinemas*, deals with super-productions in Catalan cinema; Basque conflicts, Basque nationalism and cinema of stereotypes, and local cinema in the Basque region; interpretive anthropology in examining African culture; and finally, Irish cinema and its political content.

In Chapter 1, *A call for freedom in the Spanish cinema (from a local perspective)*, Iwona Kolasińska-Pasterczyk focuses on independence and separatist tendencies of Catalonia and Basque Country in Spain, as well as on national and ethnic stereotypes in Basque and Catalan identities as expressed in cinema. Two films, *Freedom Trilogy* (*Victoria 1, 2, 3* from 1983 to 1984 by Antoni Ribas), which represents Catalan regional cinema, and *The Price of Freedom* (*Operación Ogro* from 1979 by Gillo Pontecorvo), representing Basque cinema, communicate important independence issues: *Freedom Trilogy* is a historical fresco dealing with separate national and ethnic identity of Catalonia whereas *The Price of Freedom* discusses the independence attempts of Basques and the activity of ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) under the Franco regime.

Karolina Kosińska in *The troubled image: The conflict in Northern Ireland as seen by the Irish and the British* discusses this conflict not only in a political but also in a national, ethnic, religious, and cultural sense. In her chapter, she addresses the following questions: Is “The Troubles” only an Irish matter? Or, maybe it has a lot to do with the post-colonial issues of the British? Do we deal with the “appropriation” of history here or with a difficult experience shared by both nations?

In *Are they terrorist or victims? Basque cinema, violence and memory*, Katixa Agirre discusses the film *Lasa eta Zabala* by Pablo Malo, in which a recent violent past in the Basque Country is revisited on screen. It tells the story of two young ETA militants who become the first victims of the GAL (Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación), the state-sponsored death squad that killed 27 people in the 1980s.

While Basque cinema of previous decades often represented ETA sympathetically, now that ETA is defeated this is a difficult topic to engage with: it tells the story of two victims that were originally *terrorists*. *Lasa eta Zabala*

decontextualizes political violence and ends up being too cautious to really venture into the reasons and consequences of these brutal acts.

Gorka Etxebarria and Josu Martinez in *A traditional stereotype for modern Spanish politics: The Basque pro-independence coalition Herri Batasuna and its depiction in a cinema* analyze the representation made in Basque cinema about Basque “patriotic leftist” politicians. Their hypothesis is that during the last decades, the patriotic left’s politician has been regarded as an element that makes a cynical use of its social bases and ETA militants, being much more fanatic than them and without any romantic halo. They analyze five different films made after the approval of 1978 Constitution in order to consider the reasons for this stereotyping.

Iratxe Fresneda and Amaia Nerekan in *New content and aesthetics in small cinemas: The case of Basque-language films 80 egunean and Loreak* explore how local cinema can become global cinema by analyzing the films *80 egunean* and *Loreak* and examining their content and the aesthetics tied to the production, distribution, and exhibition.

Finally, Paulina Cichoń in *The image of living of local people in the film Timbuktu: Between the literal and the symbol* analyzes *Timbuktu*, a film made by Abderrahmane Sissako, which breaks the stereotypical portrayal of Islamic fundamentalists and their victims. Using poetic depictions, the film’s director translates qualities of other cultures and ways of understanding these cultures into our own language. The unique nature of this intercultural translation consists in the fact that this filmic narration can be compared to Levinas’s “look into the face.” “Islamist fundamentalism” and its victims demonized in the media become subjects. A different way of illustrating local worlds implies the creation of a new narration when attempting to read meanings and senses hidden in the artistic creation of Abderrahmane Sissako.

Part 2, Gender and Sexuality, discusses gender and sexuality in Slovak cinemas, social drama film in Slovak cinemas, and homosexual portrayals in Polish and Turkish cinemas.

Jana Dudková in *Tourists, migrants and travellers: The role of women in reshaping Slovak (cinematic) identity* aims to point out the role of migration in reshaping not only the cinematic images of Slovak identity, but also the Slovak cinema as such. Many of these films were made by female scriptwriters/directors, signaling also the appearance of a completely new gender structure of a small national cinema.

Katarína Mišíková in *Reality of corporeality: Female corporeality in recent Slovak social film dramas* deals with specific ways the experience of female corporeality in crisis is presented by accentuating the relationship between the physical and

the social bodies. She examines depictions of various physical and social aspects of processes that female characters of recent Slovak social dramas are subject to, such as adolescence, aging, pregnancy and motherhood, physical (self-)abuse and violence.

Sebastian Jagielski in *Before coming out: Queer representations in contemporary Polish cinema* discusses dominant and marginalized strategies of the reception of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) films in the social and historical context of Poland. In 2013, the Polish LGBTQ cinema came out of its hiding place, thanks to two important films, *In the Name Of...* made by Małgorzata Szumowska and *Burning Skyscrapers* made by Tomasz Wasilewski, which have not only situated gay themes in the center of cultural debate in Poland but also moved them to the mainstream, the matters discussed by the author in detail.

Bartłomiej Nowak in *To be or not to be yourself: Turkish diaspora and the foreign land – stereotypes, nation and (hetero)norms* analyzes a few films of the German-Turkish and Austrian-Turkish cinema directed by Fatih Akin, Kutluğ Ataman and Umut Dag. He's interested in the functioning of the Turkish diaspora in the German-language societies of the West, in topics of cultural differences, gender, sexual identity, and transformations of the traditional Turkish family. Discussing such problems as honor killings, patriarchalism and homophobia of Muslim diasporas, Nowak tries to answer the question if diasporic cinema is able to change stereotypical perception of ethnic minorities.

Part 3, *Stereotypes and Social Polarities*, includes two striking chapters on the presentation of Roma people in film.

Jadwiga Hučková in *Exposed and concealed Roma conflict: Representation of contemporary Roma conflicts in Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary* discusses Roma conflict as one of the dominant issues that societies and cinemas of Eastern Europe should face. Recently, a variety of deeply touching fiction films have been created like *Just the Wind* by Benedek Fliegauf and *Judgment in Hungary* by Eszter Hajdu. Hučková discusses three films in detail: *Moving a Settlement or The Roma King* by Viliam Poltíkovič, *Koza* by Ivan Ostrochovský, and *The Queen of Silence* by Agnieszka Zwiefka, and presents various variants of the representation of Roma conflict in these films.

The topic of Chapter 12 by Iwona Grodź presents stereotypes, antagonisms and signs of intolerance related to ethnic minorities in Poland. The references used for this chapter include the film by Krzysztof Krauze, *Papusza* (where he presents Roma minority). First, the author pays detailed attention to the director's body of work in view of his interest in social problems, conflicts, and controversies in the presentation of minorities. In the later part of the chapter, the author deals with the ways stereotypical presentations are changed in the aforementioned film.

Part 4, Theory and Small Cinemas, deals with avant-garde in Japan, mockumentary cinema of Michael Moore, and migrants and exiles in Polish cinema.

A methodological starting point of Chapter 13, *Migrants and exiles in the films by Katarzyna Klimkiewicz*, by Krzysztof Loska is transnationalism as understood by Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim who claim that the concept does not only refer to co-production or global distribution but also include political, cultural, and social factors that help promote understanding contemporary cinema and the world around us. This is the perspective the author of the chapter assumes when analyzing the films by Katarzyna Klimkiewicz who mainly focuses on ethnic minorities and their problems. Based on the analysis of Klimkiewicz's two films, the author proves that contemporary cinema tackles "a migrant issue" in different ways.

Agnieszka Kiejziewicz in her chapter *From controversy to contemplation* focuses on the question: why the new generation of the Japanese filmmakers tries to be politically correct while stating that they follow (and even improve) the postulates of the old masters? Analyzing the chosen films, she shows that the lack of controversy can also be controversial, if it is compared to the achievements of the previous generations.

Janina Falkowska in *Mockumentary cinema and its political might* analyzes Michael Moore and Sacha Baron Cohen who make their films in the manner of mockumentary, each of them using their investigating personas to remake the news across "their own image and agency." Eventually, they create politically powerful and boisterous carnivalesque films far exceeding the effect of a mere presentation of fact. The author is especially interested in the ways these films cross genre boundaries and emerge as a separate small cinema with its own semantics and syntax on the border between documentary and fiction film.

Part 5, Aesthetics of New Small Films, deals with the portrayal of the personal and the nation in American aboriginal cinema, social exclusion in Polish cinema, political myths and restorative nostalgia in Hungarian cinema, and post-industrial landscape in the newest Silesian film.

Phil Mann in *De-Centered subversion: Huckle and the challenging of revisionist historiography* seeks to examine the ways in which György Pálfi's *Huckle* challenges the politics of memory in contemporary Hungary. Through the film's penetrative cinematography and heightened, manipulated audio, the author argues that *Huckle* invites its audience to examine its seemingly bucolic representation of rural Hungary more closely. He views the aesthetic treatment of *Huckle* as a metaphor for the manner in which history has been remembered in post-communist Hungary.

Chris LaLonde in *"I don't know": Linking past and present, the personal and the nation, and movement in Sterlin Harjo's This May be the Last Time* proposes to discuss how, in the documentary *This May be the Last Time* (2014), Muscogee Creek-Seminole filmmaker Sterlin Harjo brings together personal history, local history, the history of removal, World War II, the Vietnam War, and congregational line singing in order to articulate connections between past and present and between song and loss in the name of what Gerald Vizenor terms *survivance*. The stories of movement help link the personal with something larger – a critique of the nation, a recognition of connections, and a celebration of adaptability and community.

Ilona Copik in *Post-industrial landscape in the "Silesian cinema": Between the aesthetic and cultural experience* discusses contemporary fiction films which represent a particular aspect of Polish cinematography, e.g. "Silesian cinema." The main purpose of the author's analysis is the nature and look of landscape in a small cinema. The author ponders the question how a small cinema reflects on the "local aspect" of landscape and in what sense cultural stereotypes and visual conventions still dominate this landscape.

Marta Stańczyk in *Once upon a time there used to live a people ... Neighborhooders and The Heritage as fairy tales about the Polish "excluded"* mainly deals with the ways of expression and the poetic language used, including the grotesque, mythologization of discourse, universalization of space, and the use of anachronistic narrative formulas (syles, fairy tales, and ballads) in the presentation of lower classes in Poland. The author looks at two films, *Neighbors* by Grzegorz Krolikiewicz and *Ghosts* by Andrzej Baranski, and focuses on a new language of expression to portray the fate of a lower class.

All the aforementioned authors deal with their objects of study in the theoretical framework valid for a vast array of debates in today's world: national identity, ethnic identity, stereotypes, appropriation of history, political violence, international mobility, homophobia, transnationalism, multiculturalism, racism, and discrimination. Supported by thorough research, these unique chapters shed light on contemporary areas of controversy. Their writers show real courage, expertise, knowledge of subject matter, insightfulness, and intelligence when tackling their subject matter.

The book we present for publication has been inspired by the conference on small cinemas in Krakow. The conference in Krakow is the seventh conference in a series of conferences on the same topic. Six conferences have already been organized relating to the subject of small cinemas in Canada, Europe, South America, and the United States. Previous international conferences took place as

follows: (1) 2010 – *European Visions: Small Cinemas in Transition*, Department of Film Studies, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, 29 June-2 July; (2) 2011 – *Small Cinemas: Small, Smaller, Smallest*, The State University of New York at Oswego, New York, 16–18 September; (3) 2012 – *Small Cinemas: Promotion & Reception*, Timisoara, Romania, 1–3 June; (4) 2013 – *Small Cinemas. Crossing Borders*, Florianopolis, Brazil, 4–6 September; (5) 2014 – *Crisis in Film and Visual Media*, Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania, 19–20 September; (6) 2015 – *Filming Locations. The Fabric of Culture, Myth & Identity*, Valletta, Malta, 24–26 September. The six previous conferences concentrated on their themes, aesthetics, and conditions of production. An important outcome of all these conferences was the publication of two books, *European Visions: Small Cinemas in Transition*, eds. Janelle Blankenship and Tobias Nagl (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2015) and *Small Cinemas in Global Markets: Genres, Identities, Narratives*, eds. Lenuta Giukin, Janina Falkowska, and David Desser (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015). We hope to continue this trend with the publication of the present book after the conference in Krakow.

