

## **Part 2: Gender and Sexuality**



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## 7. Tourists, migrants and travellers: The role of women in reshaping Slovak (cinematic) identity<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The chapter focuses on changes in representations of (or attitudes to) journeying and international mobility as seen through post-socialist phase of the Slovak cinema, namely its fiction film. These changes were made more visible especially through generational exchanges, thanks particularly to debuts and second films by debutants of the respective decades. What is particularly interesting here is, nevertheless, the role of women in shaping new attitudes to international mobility. Due to the crisis of Slovak cinema during the 1990s, many male directors ended up in advertising industry, leaving the space for the emergence of the first two strong generations of female directors in the history of Slovak cinema. The chapter examines how these women responded to the image of national cinema built up by debutants of the 1990s, how they abandoned (but at the same time made indirect homages to) generations of their teachers and how they intuitively used their female, cautious and existential stance to the new possibilities of East–West mobility – but at the same time indirectly helped to establish more assertive images of international travellers.

**Keywords:** Women directors, images of journeying, international mobility, post-socialist cinemas, Slovak cinema, generational exchanges, debuts

The negative experience of travelling, migration and international mobility is a common feature of most of the cinemas of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. In some cases, the concept of migration as a traumatic experience, together with unclear regional identity (mostly shaped by Western optic and even Western travelogues), paradoxically leads to a frequent exploitation of journey, travelogue or diaspora narratives.<sup>2</sup> In others, the traditionally sedentary way of life motivates the hesitation to travel.

In her article “Staying Home and Safe: Czech Cinema and the Refusal to be Transnational,” film scholar Petra Hanáková points out “the notable and surprising

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2 Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames. Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), p. 263.

absence or a conspicuous stigmatisation of motifs and themes dealing with international travel or migration in Czech, or more broadly Czechoslovak, cinema,” and suggests a peculiar tendency to employ “confused wandering and even an essential disposition towards stasis” as “the core of the movements and travels” depicted already in the films of the Czechoslovak new wave in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, I would like to examine the topic of international migration and travelling in Slovak films after 1989, especially with regard to the role of women in reshaping the Slovak cinema. The reason is that the more positive approach to travelling appears not earlier than in new millennium, with emergence of a new generation of female debutants. At the time when international travelling starts to be perceived as more natural by younger generations of Slovaks, most of the male directors move to television or advertising industries. Nevertheless, even the female stories share some marks of hesitation to travel typical for older, almost exclusively men-directed narratives. Thus, even these stories prove the dominance of traditional, at the same time patriarchal and isolationist rhetoric of Slovak cinema.

On the one hand, it is tempting to link this hesitation to see international mobility and travelling as a positive experience with post-World War II history of the region when travelling abroad was often politically stigmatised. But as Petra Hanáková suggests, the more important roots of it could be found in historically much deeper patterns of thinking, including the revivalist imagination with its figure of a nation as a garden and intellectual/artist as a gardener.<sup>4</sup>

The most explicit example of the interrogation of this tradition, within the whole “Czecho-Slovak” film context, is the 1995 Slovak film *Záhrada* (*The Garden*) by Martin Šulík with its intertextual references to various national revivalist texts as well as to famous figures of “western” European modernism (Rousseau, Wittgenstein, St. Benedict, etc.).<sup>5</sup>

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3 Petra Hanáková, “Staying Home and Safe: Czech Cinema and the Refusal to be Transnational,” in: *European Cinema after the Wall: Screening East-West Mobility*, eds. Leen Engelen and Kris van Heuckelom (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), p. 113 and onwards.

4 Hanáková, “Staying Home.”

5 For more about this topic see Zuzana Gindl-Tatárová, “The Garden,” in: *The Cinema of Central Europe*, ed. Peter Hames (London, New York: Wallflower Press, 2004), pp. 245–253; for more about the idyllic nature of the central spatial metaphor in Šulík’s third film see: Vlastimil Zuska, “Topos zahrady v Zahradě a jeho časoznakové implikace,” in: *Svet v pohyblivých obrazoch Martina Šulíka*, ed. Marián Brázda (Bratislava: Slovenský filmový ústav, 2000), pp. 122–147, and Jana Dudková, *Slovenský film v ére*

Similar to other post-socialist cinemas, the Slovak one also appeared sceptical when it came to a more positive embracing of the topic of international mobility even after the “opening of borders” in 1989. An entire generation of debutants from the 1990s reacted to the new travel opportunities with particularly strong scepticism, most systematically expressed in the films by Martin Šulík but obvious also in most of the other debuts of the decade. This is partly due to the fact that the first debuts still mirrored a feeling of inner paralysis typical for the late socialism and chaos of transformational times. That applies not only to those debuts that were indebted to dramaturgical plans of the ending 1980s (i.e. 1990 *Okresné blues – District Blues* by Juraj Bindzár and *R.S.C.* by Martin Valent), but also to Martin Šulík’s debut *Neha (Tenderness)*, 1991). Nevertheless, a more positive approach to travelling wasn’t introduced into following debuts either, which can be interpreted also as a result of identification with a new “lost generation.”<sup>6</sup> In fact, the rest of debutants already entered a collapsing industry,<sup>7</sup> in times of the increasing nationalism and political isolationism of authoritative Vladimír Mečiar’s government (1992–1998, with a short pause in 1994). What appears striking here are, nevertheless, gender and generational differences (but also similarities) in approaching the topic of international mobility, as well as the case of what we can label as “symbolic capital” of feature-length fiction debuts.

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*transkulturality* (Bratislava: Drewo a srd – Vysoká škola múzických umení, 2011), pp. 46–55; and for more about the impact of Šulík’s conception of the garden on the contemporary Slovak cinema, see Jana Dudková, “Between the Center and the Margin: The Notion of Central Europe in Slovak Cinema After 1989,” *Illuminace*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (2013), pp. 7–94 (especially the section “From Irony to Cynicism: From Gardens to Non-Places,” pp. 82–87).

- 6 The term is, nevertheless, suggested by a journalist Miloš Krekovič post-festum, e.g. in a 2010 and 2012 articles on the phenomenon: Miloš Krekovič, “Stratená generácia?” *SME* (2010), 11 July 2017, <https://kultura.sme.sk/c/5264969/stratena-generacia.html#axzz4mXXL3U9j>; and Miloš Krekovič, “Ako vzniká hit: Na krásnom modrom Dunaji,” *SME* (2012), 11 July 2017, <https://kultura.sme.sk/c/6333328/ako-vznika-hit-na-krasnom-modrom-dunaji.html#axzz4m5AGELA6>.
- 7 Slovak cinema was in transparently privatised since 1991 – with Šulík’s debut as the last one produced by the state-run Koliba Film Studios. For more on the topic of political and economic history of privatisation of “Koliba,” see Václav Macek, “1 297 254 000 Sk,” *Kino-Ikon*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2010), pp. 125–154; and Martin Šmatlák, “Slovak Audiovisual Fund – A Brief History of Prolonged Time,” in: *Transformation Processes in Post-Socialist Screen Media*, eds. Jana Dudková and Katarína Mišíková (Bratislava: Vysoká škola múzických umení v Bratislave – Ústav divadelnej vedy SAV, 2016b), pp. 11–20.

In the group consisting of altogether nine debuts<sup>8</sup> and four “further” films by 1990s debutants made during the period 1990–2000 (actually, all of the latter being directed by Martin Šulík), the only film made by a woman is 1997 *Modré z neba* (*Blue Heaven*) by Eva Borušovičová, conceived as a female variation on the plot of Šulík’s third film *The Garden*.

Most of these films depict isolated and elitist social groups (artists, intellectuals, students, bohemians, flaneurs), and are driven by a hesitant or sceptical attitude to new possibilities of international mobility – expressed explicitly, indirectly by the plots (about voluntary isolation), or by introducing metonymical and thus unreal presence of supposed emigrants – such as Andy Warhol who appears as a symbolic “Slovak”<sup>9</sup> ex-patriate in no less than two films, Šulík’s second film *Everything I Like* and Semjan’s debut *On the Beautiful Blue Danube*.

The most explicit expression of a hesitant stance towards international mobility can be found in Šulík’s *Everything I Like*, where generational dilemmas of people who grew up in socialism are explained through the cameo role of writer Rudolf Sloboda who, in several staged pseudo-documentarian monologues, refers to unnecessary, tiring or even dangerous nature of travelling, while combining examples of Goethe or Immanuel Kant with experiences of his own acquaintances, or even his own catastrophic dreams (e.g. about getting lost and robbed in New York).

However hesitant the directors may be about the topic, Slovak cinema of the 1990s, nevertheless, does offer motives related to international mobility, travelling or intercultural exchange. It is just that most of them appear in films by older directors who managed to make their debuts in various periods before 1989.<sup>10</sup> A star of the 1960s’ Slovak New Wave, Juraj Jakubisko, in his *Lepšie byť bohatý a zdravý ako chudobný a chorý* (*It’s Better to Be Rich and Healthy than Poor and*

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8 As a matter of fact, two of the 1990s’ debuts were prepared in the pre-1989 period: *District Blues* and *R.S.C.* As the first genuinely post-communist debut, there appears Martin Šulík’s debut *Neha* (*Tenderness*, 1991), followed by *Na krásnom modrom Dunaji* (*On the Beautiful Blue Danube*, 1994, dir. Štefan Semjan), *Vášnivý bozk* (*Passionate Kiss*, 1994, dir. Miroslav Šindelka), *Hazard* (1995, dir. Roman Petrenko), *Modré z neba* (*Blue Heaven*, 1997, dir. Eva Borušovičová), *Tábor padlých žien* (*The Camp of Fallen Women*, 1997, dir. Laco Halama) and, finally, *Všetci moji blízki* (*All My Loved Ones*, 1999, dir. Matej Mináč).

9 Andy Warhol is, nevertheless, an ethnic Ruthenian and his discovery by “patriotic” post-1989 public discourse in Slovakia is mocked in both of the films.

10 The only exception among the debuts is Martin Valent’s *R.S.C.* which, in the manner of late socialism, refers to the decadent nature of East-West mobility, and to the topic of gasterbeiters abandoning their children, who, despite living in relative luxury, turn to moral decay.

Ill, 1992) confronts emigration before and after the fall of the “iron curtain.” In each case, it is motivated by the adventurous and fickle nature of the main male protagonist, albeit being justified by political attempts at restricting human freedom, including the rise of nationalism in public life at the beginning of the 1900s.

On the other hand, the box-office hits by Dušan Rapoš, *Fontána pre Zuzanu 2* (*The Fountain for Suzanne 2*, 1993) and 3 (1999) are also fixated on the topic of travelling. The first film transforms the original 1985 story of a socialist housing estate beauty Suzanne into a tale of truck drivers who are permanently on the road, including even a trip to Russia, while the second sequel offers a quasi-colonial narrative on Suzanne’s journey to Africa with an “African-turned-Slovak” who tries to avoid his prearranged marriage with a local girl.

It is important to understand these are no exceptions. The entire decade is, in fact, characteristic for its absence of images of travelling as a *natural* phenomenon. In general, filmic Slovaks of the 1990s still do not feel like travelling, they search for freedom in their private, closed worlds. The topics of a life-on-the-road, migration or even emigration concern only adventurers or foreigners, who are clearly different from the rest of the population literally at first sight or by their accent (typical examples include the character of English lover from *Everything I Like*, or the “black-skinned” character portrayed by dancer and singer Ibrahim Maiga in *The Fountain for Suzanne 2* and 3). The idea or prospect of moving to a different country is interpreted as a traumatic dilemma, a crisis, overcoming of which usually results in the decision to stay put (*Tenderness, Everything I Like*).

## Lightness of tourism with a touch of trauma

This situation changes only at the turn of the millennium. Starting with *Vadí nevadí* (*Truth or Dare*, 2001) by Eva Borušovičová, the attitude to travelling and mobility frees itself from stories of hesitation, albeit not from the potential of trauma.

*Truth or Dare* continues in the almost forgotten direction of Štefan Semjan’s debut *On the Beautiful Blue Danube*. Its characters are young bohemians living in loose, open relationships, but tied to the capital city and mostly its night life. Characters of Borušovičová’s film are, nevertheless, constantly confronted with the topic of emigration or tourism. They share a flat with a couple of never-present globetrotters, or, as a part of film’s crime plotline, make verbal jokes about running abroad from the law.<sup>11</sup>

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11 This could be understood as a continuation of the socialistic paradigm, when the characters travelling abroad were often associated with crime or moral decline (as Petra

This, however, also means that none of the characters depicted in the film really travels. During the first decade of the new millennium, the films by upcoming generation of female directors offer a symptomatic paradigm where desire to travel occurs more naturally than in films by 1990s' male debutants, but, on the other hand, travelling itself remains either imagined (as in *Truth or Dare*) or presented as a carefree whim inevitably followed by a harsh fall. In her second film *Nebo, peklo ... zem* (*Heaven, Hell ... Earth*, 2009), Laura Siváková for example tells the story of a ballet dancer who receives an offer to dance in one of the best ensembles in the world – but, shortly before making the trip, she breaks her leg and spends long months re-evaluating her past life and her attitude to men. The film itself is thus constructed as a narrative about a long process of reconciliation and self-reflection, and the scenes of heroine's leaving the country appear not earlier than in its finale.

A debut by another young female director Katarína Šulajová, *O dve slabiky pozadu* (*Two Syllables Behind*, 2004), offers an autobiographically motivated main character (portrayed by the director's sister) hysterically fluctuating between middle-European past of her city and more globalised world she tries to integrate in. Her travelling to Paris for a weekend, which should signal a carefree lifestyle of the youth, becomes the beginning of a traumatic experience instead: confronted with disillusion in her Parisian love affair, the heroine blames her post-socialist identity as the basis of her uprootedness in the Western world.

What is common for all of the three films is that they are all made by young graduates of Dramaturgy and Scriptwriting from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava (VŠMU). All of the mentioned films are also part of a trend branded by Slovak film critics as “urban lifestyle film,”<sup>12</sup> usually taking place in urban settings of country's capital and focusing on art students or the upper middle class often employed in show business, television or advertising industry. According to Martin Šmatlák, this type of film “does not attempt to portray either the contemporary or the historic social context”; at the same time, it is emphasising

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Hanáková shows taking the example of Czech cinema, see Petra Hanáková, “Staying Home and Safe: Czech Cinema and the Refusal to be Transnational,” in: *European Cinema after the Wall: Screening East-West Mobility*, eds. Leen Engelen and Kris van Heuckelom (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), pp. 113–124).

- 12 This term was for the first time coined by Juraj Malíček in his review of Katarína Šulajová's debut film (Juraj Malíček, “Pop po domácky,” *Slovo*, Vol. 7, No. 9 (2005), p. 16), and soon after re-used by several other authors, e.g. Martin Šmatlák, “Hľadanie vlastnej cesty,” *Kino-Ikon*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2008), p. 135–147; Jana Dudková, *Slovenský film v ére transkulturality* (Bratislava: Drewo a srd – Vysoká škola múzických umení, 2011).

“music-video-style” or visually segmented storytelling, as well as “several other *external characteristics* (emphasised by J.D.) of contemporary world, such as cars and drugs, businessmen and bars, ubiquitous telly, dubbing or intrusive adverts, well-known city figures, socialites, petty celebrities and local wannabes [...]”<sup>13</sup>

Even if more conservative critics and historians like Šmatlák perceive the trend as detached from life and meaningless, the trend actually meant a progressive distancing from even more “detached” films of Martin Šulík and his epigones, usually taking place in isolated, heterotopic or idyllic places – gardens and countryside family residences.

In other words, the transition to urban lifestyle films was the result of the need to change the dominant paradigm of Slovak art-house cinema represented predominantly by early Martin Šulík’s films and oriented more to the festival audiences and universal artistic values but ignoring “the pulse of the times.”<sup>14</sup>

This can be interpreted as a generational gesture (since these films usually deal with generational dilemmas of young artists), as well as an attempt to transform the Slovak cinema in order to be more attractive to (young) domestic audience. That is why these films often resemble Czech commercially successful ones,<sup>15</sup> even though their success with the audience was actually negligible. It is important to stress that the trend of “urban lifestyle film,” which starts in 2001, with Eva Borušovičová’s *Truth or Dare* and her classmate Vladimír Adásek’s *Hana a jej bratia* (*Hannah and Her Brothers*), did not become the domain of female directors, and not even of the new generation of debutants. Miroslav Šindelka, one of the debutants from the 1990s, made his second film in this fashion (*Zostane to medzi name – It Will Stay Between Us*, 2003) and even Miloslav Luther, who usually makes classical historical narratives, made his *Tango s komármi* (*Mosquitoes’ Tango*, 2009) as an “urban lifestyle film.”

The style, however, appeared during the continuing crisis of Slovak cinema when many young male directors ended up in advertising industry or television, and when more persistence in their film-making efforts was demonstrated by young female graduates. As I already pointed out, all of them were graduated scriptwriters,<sup>16</sup> faced with the lack of potential directors who would share their sensibility or generational perspective, and finally encouraged by their teachers to

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13 Šmatlák, “Hľadanie vlastnej cesty,” p. 145.

14 Malíček, “Pop po domácky.”

15 For example, *Truth or Dare* shares similar motifs with David Ondříček’s cult movie *Samotáři* (*Loners*, 2000).

16 Eva Borušovičová is the only one to have graduated also in directing from the same school.

direct their own scripts<sup>17</sup> (in a similar fashion, yet another graduated scriptwriter, Zuzana Liová, became a pioneer of another genre – social drama).

What is, nevertheless, quite symptomatic here, is the fact that some of them, i.e. Eva Borušovičová and Laura Siváková, even debuted within the very paradigm of *The Garden*,<sup>18</sup> using the element of an isolated family settlement as the dominant topos.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the “urban lifestyle film” didn’t appear as a radical opposition to cinema of the 1990s. In a way, behind it even stayed some of the most prominent creators of the 1990s’ paradigm of “hanging gardens”<sup>20</sup>: Peter Šulaj, one of the scriptwriters of *The Garden*, who is not only the father of the debuting Katarína Šulajová but, together with Martin Šulík, was also one of the most prominent teachers at the Academy of Performing Arts at the time when the mentioned generation studied there; or Rudolf Biermann, who appeared as the producer of Eva Borušovičová’s and Laura Siváková’s debut films *Blue Heaven* and *Quartétto*,<sup>21</sup> in response to which both female directors continued their careers in a different, “urban lifestyle” trend. The most prominent filmmakers of the 1990s not only shared their know-how or co-workers with their students but also, indirectly, encouraged some major changes in Slovak cinema,<sup>22</sup> including its metaphors and allusions representing the relation between the search for national identity and the opening to the world.

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17 The only exception is once again Eva Borušovičová and her directorial debut whose script was written in collaboration with a young graduate from scriptwriting, Jana Skořepová, according to Skořepová’s autobiographical master’s script.

18 This is true namely for Borušovičová’s debut *Blue Heaven* as a direct female reaction to *The Garden*, but also for Siváková’s *Quartétto* (2002) as an inter-generational family drama of a dying mother and her three daughters, who meet in an isolated family residence.

19 A similar topos is characteristic also for the post-November Czech cinema – emphasised e.g. by Jan Čulík, *Jací jsme: Česká společnost v hraném filmu devadesátých a nultých let* (Brno: Host, 2007).

20 The term was coined by Zuzana Tatárová in her review of *Blue Heaven*, as a reference to the ironic attitude of some critics to a trend fostered by Martin Šulík’s early films. See Zuzana Tatárová, “Visuté záhrady Slovenska,” *Kino-Ikon*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1998), pp. 75–76.

21 Biermann produced Šulík’s films for more than 10 years (starting already with Šulík’s debut *Tenderness*, still within the frame of state-run cinema, and continuing as an independent producer). Besides this, he also produced some other debuts that followed Šulík’s powerful garden metaphor, such as Miroslav Šindelka’s 1994 *Passionate Kiss*, prepared and released in the time when Šulík already worked on *The Garden*.

22 Martin Šulík was considered even as the potential director of the television film *Ticho* (*Silence*, 2005) which eventually became the directorial debut of Zuzana Liová, and

In contrast with debutants of the 1990s who question the sense of leaving the country, female debutants of the 2000s represent travelling abroad as a natural part of the new lifestyles. Unlike early films by Martin Šulík, millennial debuts and second films by young filmmakers also shift their focus more to young female or even transgender characters (e.g. the playfully semi-autobiographical character of a transgender singer Hannah played by the director himself in Vladimír Adásek's debut *Hannah and Her Brothers*). The decade of reconciling with societal changes influences also the works of older directors at least in the sense of accepting the international mobility as a basis of changing social environment with increasing presence of immigrants from various parts of the world (mostly the "third" one, though: e.g. in films such as *Mosquitoe's Tango*, *Ženy môjho muža – My Husband's Women*, 2009, dir. Ivan Vojnár, but also *Two Syllables Behind*).

On the other hand, the millennial debutants reproduce two important features that are characteristic also for the films of Šulík's generation: isolation of the cultural elite, and perception of the new travel opportunities as a test or even a trauma. In all of the "urban lifestyle films," there is a remarkable focus not only on artists, art students and creative industry workers, but also on the upper class or members of show business. Unlike the films of a bit older directors who also embraced this style, films by upcoming debutants such as *Truth or Dare*, *Hannah and Her Brothers* and *Two Syllables Behind* go beyond this attractive surface and suggest the intergenerational solidarity between artists,<sup>23</sup> thus modifying the idea of intellectual as a gardener (whose role is to cultivate and protect the real humanistic values despite the disfavour of the political establishment) – and propose an idea of an isolated professional community instead.

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together with his own *Snečný štát* (*The City of the Sun*, 2005), the first Slovak contemporary social drama.

- 23 For example, the cast of *Truth or Dare* and *Hannah and Her Brothers* include numerous classmates or teachers of their authors from both Theatre and Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, while, in its conclusion, *Two Syllables Behind* features one of the most respected authors of psychological drama in Slovak cinema between 1962 and 1989, the director Martin Hollý (1931–2004) in a cameo role of an empathetic dubbing director. The relationship between the film's heroine, a dubbing actress, and Martin Hollý refers to an unfulfilled need of debuting generations of film authors, a need to stay connected to or even taught by professionals of the previous era, since most of the older directors got completely lost after the collapse of post-1989 Slovak cinema, occasionally working in other spheres of the industry like in the aforementioned dubbing.

## Every day in the lives of the uprooted ones

Within less than a decade, the situation changes again, and – peculiarly enough – again the change is mostly brought about by female directors and their films about young heroines in search of their place in the world. But instead of “urban lifestyle film,” the new debuts place emphasis on “minimalistic” narration that fares better with international festival trends (abandoning thus the idea of focusing predominantly on domestic cinemagoers) and draw attention to the social, existential and economic aspects of migration: to issues of poverty, and conception of journeying as a metaphor of essential uprooting in contemporary world.

In 2009, Prague-based FAMU (Filmová a televizní fakulta Akademie múzických umění v Praze) graduate Mira Fornay makes the first “Slovak” debut<sup>24</sup> to have made it into the official selection at a major film festival (namely, IFF Venice). *Líštičky (Foxes)* is also the first film that deals predominantly with the experiences of Slovak economic migrants. It tells the story of two sisters trying to integrate in Ireland: the older, Tina, is getting married to a successful Irish businessman while having also a love affair with a young Pakistani, and the younger, Betka, still tries to find her place while at the same time furiously refusing the sister’s help. The film demonstrates not only solidarity among the uprooted ones,<sup>25</sup> but also mutual exploitation between minorities (e.g. Betka becomes a throwaway toy in the hands of a “negro” businessman). Within Slovak cinema, *Foxes* is the first example of a film that thematises uprooting of Slovak economic émigrés, their feelings of frustration and tenacious efforts to be included into the new society.

In her cinematic debut *Dom (The House)*, (2011), Zuzana Liová uses the topic of a generational conflict between the desire to support a family – literally to build a house for each child – and the desire of a young protagonist to move to England. The film ends with a hint at a reconciliation between a father and a daughter, opening up the possibility the daughter will finally manage to leave her birthplace. On the other hand, focusing on the *desire* of moving away – and not on the moving away *itself* – can be interpreted as a sign of a continuing paradigm, in which each journey is preceded by a long process of deliberation, long (and often hidden) preparations, and inter-generational negotiations.

Iveta Grófová’s debut *Až do mesta Aš (Made in Ash)*, (2012), a combination of live-action, documentary and animated film, returns to the topic of Slovak economic migrants living “west” of their homeland. It, however, does not offer a confrontation

24 In fact, it is a Czecho-Slovak-Irish co-production.

25 For example the relationship of a Slovak girl and a Pakistani, or the Polish-Slovak-Czech attempts at establishing a contact.

with the well-functioning, metropolitan world, as is the case in *Foxes*, but rather a continuous picture of social decline at a periphery, regardless of the point of reference. The main character Doroška moves from a Romani settlement to a borderline Czech city of Aš (pronounced as “ash”). Despite of her Romani origin, here she becomes literally referred to as one of the many other “Slovak” girls and many more from the East (i.e. from former Soviet republics, or even Mongolia) who, after losing their poor jobs in the declining textile factories, end up in the hands of pimps or elderly German men looking for a second chance before their retirement.

*Made in Ash* suggests a meaning of the journey as an attempt to escape from a hopeless situation one couldn't change in his or her original environment. While Doroška and other immigrants come to Aš looking for work, elderly German men criss-cross the streets in hope of meeting a girl not only for amusement but also in order to have someone to spend their approaching old age with. Instead of fulfilling their dreams, both groups experience rather various forms of displacement, losing the support of their languages, family ties or authentic feelings.

After *Made in Ash*, the topic of international mobility completely moves from “women's” hands and becomes the domain of male directors. A “scenario” from the turn of the millennium is being repeated where stories about women, written and directed by women, only helped to change the dominant paradigm of Slovak cinema – but their continuation was not so dependent on female authorship. What is interesting here, though, is the fact that male films dealing with journeying, mobility or migration are usually made by renowned directors. Despite of that, they still continue to refer to a “symbolic capital” of fiction debuts. In other words, the topic appears exclusively in the first fiction films by documentary directors.

Not all of these films offer the topic of international travelling, but most of them make use of topics of journeying and escape. Already the very first of these “debuts,” *Zázrak* (*Miracle*, 2013) by Juraj Lehotský, brings the story of a girl running away from a detention centre. *Maratón* (*Marathon*), an episode from another live-action debut by documentary director, *Deti* (*Children*, 2014) by Jaro Vojtek, starts as an existential journey narrative and portrays an escape of a Romani prisoner through a snow-covered landscape, in order to embrace his wife and son once more. In both cases, the protagonists are eventually captured and returned to the disciplinary or correction institutions from which they had fled – while at the same time they discover that their dreams of love or family happiness have crumbled, their lovers or wives cheat on them and their children do not even recognise them. Thus, both films continue the paradigm of an existential scepticism typical for the first Slovak “social dramas.” In both of them, trips are conceived as *possible* and even liberating, yet both remain sceptical about the possibility of improvement or happiness as the final goal of moving.

A small step apart from this scepticism appears only in 2015, when the first two Slovak variations on the road movie were made. The first one is *Koza*, a fiction debut by yet another documentary director Ivan Ostrochovský, a fusion of road movie and social drama about the unsuccessful tour of a former Olympic boxer (today an outcast living in a Romani settlement). The second one is a directorial debut by scriptwriter Rastislav Boroš *Stanko*, telling the story of a petty criminal returning to Slovakia with a task to bring along pretty local girls for his Italian Mafioso boss. As a permanent loser, he manages to get only a naive Gypsy girl who believes he will take her to her mother in France.

The journeying theme is also key for another 2015 live-action debut by a documentarian, *Eva Nová* by Marko Škop. In this film, the main protagonist obstinately shuffles between her tediously empty flat in the capital and a family house somewhere in eastern Slovakia in a desperate attempt to reunite with her son, whom she had abandoned years ago. Images of the protagonist in an old-fashioned dress, repeatedly pulling her wheeled suitcase, refer to the burden of the past she carries with her, preventing her from starting anew. Similarly, like *Foxes*, *Eva Nová* introduces the motive of work-related migration. However, instead of the topic of uprootedness in the foreign world, it focuses on the issue of leaving the nest and the decay of family ties.

Instead of a sceptical approach repeated in multiple variations throughout the whole history of Slovak post-socialist cinema, both *Eva Nová* and *Koza* choose a parable of journey as a calvary. *Koza* literally “creates a parallel between Christ’s calvary and the last tour of a former Olympic champion”<sup>26</sup> by using several visual references to the biblical story: before departing to his tour, *Koza* rests with his girlfriend creating a visual paraphrase of Michelangelo’s Pietà; while training, he drags a wheel resembling Christ carrying his cross etc.<sup>27</sup> Similar visual parallels can be found in the trope of dragging a suitcase (= the burden of the past) along in *Eva Nová*.

While in the social dramas from previous period (*Made in Ash*, *Miracle*, *Children* etc.), the journey was still perceived as an unsuccessful (or traumatic – *Foxes*) escape, with the exception of Zuzana Liová’s *The House*, which refers to an even older paradigm of conceiving the journey only as a dream or desire (and not reality), films released in 2015 also break through the sceptical attitude towards the

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26 Katarína Mišíková “The Real Story: Indexing Strategies of Slovak Social Film Dramas,” in: *Transformation Processes in Post-Socialist Screen Media*, eds. Jana Dudková and Katarína Mišíková (Bratislava: Vysoká škola múzických umení v Bratislave – Ústav divadelnej vedy SAV, 2016a), pp. 60–76.

27 See also Katarína Mišíková “Žánrové križovatky a rekordy slovenského hraného filmu roku 2015,” *Kino-Ikon*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2016b), p. 97.

possibility of change and a proactive attitude on the part of their protagonists. All of them are possible to be understood also as stories about revealing of empathy: the Romani girl in *Stanko*, boxer Koza and the former actress and alcoholic Eva Nová are all Christ-like figures who – through their own suffering – bring empathy to the world. During his journey, the main character of *Koza* changes the cynical nature of his manager, the Romany girl alters the character of the petty criminal Stanko, and, in the end, Eva Nová cracks the rejecting mask of her son.

Strangely enough, this transformation of the typical paradigm could be perceived exactly through the lenses of a traditional dichotomy between male rationality and female emotionality. Starting with Eva Borušovičová's debut *Blue Heaven*, Slovak producers continued to invest in female debutants perspective, which, in the end and often in contrast with their original intentions, resulted in overcoming the limits of metaphorical male gardens. But – not surprisingly – all of the crucial and most inspiring transformations of dominant paradigms were actually brought about by abandoning the father/teacher patterns as well as the stereotypical division into “male” and “female.” After 2009, the journey finally starts to be associated with crossing the boundaries, not only those between nations and cultures, but eventually also those between human beings. What is also interesting here is the fact that the latter tendency was preferred more by men – even though it had been provoked by female debutants and their harsh scepticism. So, while “urban lifestyle films” often refer to the aesthetics of “coolness,”<sup>28</sup> and first “social dramas” by female directors are sceptical depictions of cruel, emotionless world (unlike the much more sentimental attempts on the genre by Martin Šulík, i.e. his *Cigán – Gypsy*, 2011), only a new type of debuts – fiction debuts by already renowned documentarians such as the aforementioned *Children*, *Eva Nová*, *Miracle* or *Koza* – bring these two polarities together.

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28 See, e.g. the title of Martin Šmatlák's review of *It Will Stay Between Us* (Martin Šmatlák, “Cool XXL,” *Domino fórum*, Vol. 12, No. 42 (2003), p. 26); for more about the domestic perception of “urban lifestyle films” within the intuitive frame of the aesthetics of coolness, see Jana Dudková, *Slovenský film v ére transkulturality* (Bratislava: Drewo a srd – VŠMU, 2011), pp. 75–76.

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## 8. Reality of corporeality: Female corporeality in recent Slovak social film dramas

**Abstract:** The most distinctive cinematic trend of contemporary Slovak cinema, labeled as social drama, is characterized by current topics, such as racism, relationship between majority and minority, disintegration of family relations, changes in the ethical values of a society undergoing constant economical transformations, prostitution, unemployment, and poverty. Although it is a stylistically rather heterogeneous body of films, it can be described by a prominent realistic tendency. Several of these films are fiction debuts of documentary filmmakers who draw heavily from non-fiction and observational realism conventions, one of these being the portrayal of physical experience. My chapter deals with specific ways the experience of female corporeality in crisis as presented by accentuating the relationship between the physical and the social body. It 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.

**Keywords:** Slovak cinema, corporeality, realism, female characters

Democratic processes of the 1990s in East-Central Europe and following European integration introduced several new topics into Slovak cinema. One of them was reconsideration of traditional female archetypes and stereotypes in the light of gender studies. In times when turbulent transition to market economy lured away many talented filmmakers among male providers into commercial sphere, a significant trend of female scriptwriters and directors came to the forefront. Eva Filová in her “gender history” of Slovak cinema *Eros, sexus, gender in Slovak Cinema* divides the work of female authors who emerged at the turn of the millennium – Eva Borušovičová’s *Blue Heaven (Modré z neba, 1997)* and *Truth or Dare (Vadí nevadí, 2001)*; Laura Siváková’s *Quartétto (2002)* and *Heaven, Hell... Earth (Nebo, peklo... zem, 2009)*; Katarína Šulajová’s *Two Syllables Behind (O dve slabiky pozadu, 2004)*; Zuzana Liová’s *Silence (Ticho, 2005)*<sup>1</sup> and *The House (Dom, 2011)*; and Mira Fornay’s<sup>2</sup> *Foxes (Líštičky, 2009)* – into three groups: “1) lifestyle stories

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1 Liová made her feature-length debut as a TV film produced by the Slovak Television.

2 Although of Slovak origin, Fornay is the only one among mentioned female directors who did not graduate from scriptwriting at the Film and Television Faculty at the

about independent young women, 2) stories of female genealogy, stigmatised by motherhood, 3) stories of *bad girls* – revolting nature of feminist.”<sup>3</sup> Filová explores how this “feminization” of Slovak cinema reflected current feminist trends and brought about new types of heroines, who in various degrees and ways questioned the role of woman-body and woman-mother, and sought to introduce woman subject into Slovak cinema.

My chapter deals in somewhat more modest and less political way with different aspects of female heroines in contemporary Slovak cinema, which concern 1) the relationship between the social and physical female body and 2) the ways of realistic depiction of socially determined emotional and physical states and sensation of female characters by means of poetic tropes. The changed social situation of women in contemporary Slovak cinema is, on the one hand, connected to gradual (however, still somehow gentle) sensitization to gender issues, and, on the other hand, to new economic opportunities of Slovak citizens in the European Union. A traditional role of a woman, tied to land and family,<sup>4</sup> is thus changing and we can witness a growing number of migrating women characters. However, this new female mobility does not only bring positive values in the form of social or economic capital, it is often accompanied by social and physical degradation or destruction of heroines.

The films I am going to analyze are part of the social film drama trend that is currently the most consistent trend of Slovak art-house cinema. Social dramas are not the kinds of films, whose domain is female imagination; they do not primarily concern relationships between women and men or issues of female identity. They are rather concerned with reflection on current phenomena of post-socialist reality: disintegration of traditional family relations, economic migration, socially underprivileged groups, racial intolerance, etc. Therefore, we can hardly describe social drama as a feminist film trend – neither from the aspect of frequent character types nor from the aspect of authorial background. Only three women are active among social drama directors (Mira Fornay, Zuzana Liová, and Iveta Grófová), and although the main characters of their films are usually women (with the exception of *My Dog Killer* [*Môj pes Killer*, 2013] by Mira Fornay),

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3 Eva Filová, *Eros, sexus, gender v slovenskom filme* (Bratislava: Slovenský filmový ústav, 2013), p. 199.

4 The female archetype of a woman grounded in and tied to an enclosed rural residence is prominent in films such as *The Garden* (*Záhrada*, 1995) by Martin Šulík or *Blue Heaven* by Eva Borušovičová.

the reflection on female fate is not their central subject. However, I will claim, that what these films have in common, is a transformational crisis of female characters. Each of them undergoes a series of social and physical transformations, which are an important part of the realistic representation of the actual reality. This distinguishes them from all three groups of female films from the millennial turn as identified by Filová. Those connected female view of reality mainly with the sphere of imagination and dreams and in this way separated it from the public sphere and hence current social situation.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, not all analyzed films are stories of *bad girls*, rather they propose an interpretation of social reality by means of current subject matter and realistically motivated poetic tropes.

### Realism and corporeality

Current social issues are a common thematic motif of realist cinema<sup>6</sup>; however, realism is not easily defined by a certain group of narrative and stylistic devices. Techniques of evoking the reality effect can vary from hand-held camera to extreme long shots, from featuring amateur actors to professionals, and from long shots to jump cuts.<sup>7</sup> A recurring technique of the realist style is the portrayal of emotional states of characters as physical states. Let us consider two examples in which long shot as a seemingly unmanipulated representation of reality evokes an impression of reality. Film *Koza* (2015) by Ivan Ostrochovský about the last tour of a former boxing champion is shot predominantly in static long shots that cue the viewer to take part in physical suffering of the main character. When portraying the physical suffering of the boxer during and after his fights, the camera dwells on the image of the boxer scapegoat,<sup>8</sup> thus cueing the viewer to take part in the protagonist's martyrdom. Similar device is used in the film *Made in Ash (Až do mesta Aš)*, 2012) by Iveta Grófová, when the viewer is indirectly witnessing a real piercing of heroine's lower lip and almost perceives her pain from the needle

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5 See Filová, *Eros*, p. 206.

6 Kristin Thompson, "Realism in Cinema: Bicycle Thieves," in: *Breaking the Glass Armour. Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 197–217.

7 For detailed narrative and stylistic analysis of the social film drama trend, see Katarína Mišíková, "Hľadanie žánru v súčasnom slovenskom hranom filme," in: *Nový slovenský film. Produkčné, estetické, distribučné a kritické východiská*, eds. Katarína Mišíková and Mária Ferenčuhová (Bratislava: Vysoká škola múzických umení, Filmová a televízna fakulta, 2015), pp. 9–36.

8 "Koza" means "goat" in Slovak. It is the nickname of the real-life Roma protagonist of this film, former Olympic boxing champion Peter Baláž.

in the lip in a literary way. These devices emphasize the ontology of cinematic image as an actual image of pro-filmic reality by evoking visceral experiences of characters. Social drama films featuring female characters can provide even more complex instances of demonstrating the relationship between the social and the physical body of protagonists, because they depict emotional and psychological transformations of characters as physical states.

### **Transformational crisis of female characters in social dramas**

The analyzed body of films presents various types of migrating women, who are forced by their social situation to move from one place to another, and in this process, undergo also complex physical and psychological transformations. Their horizontal movement is motivated by problematic family and economic background. Similar to men, they are looking for job opportunities in more prosperous regions of Europe, where they assume economic responsibility of themselves in typical female occupations as caretakers. Betka, the protagonist of film *Foxes* by Mira Fornay, left her provincial birthplace because of the lack of job opportunities and followed her elder sister to Ireland in order to work as an au pair. Similarly, in the film *Eva Nová* (2015) by Marko Škop the daughter-in-law of the main character leaves her drunkard husband and moves to Austria, where she works as a home nurse. Doročka, the heroine of *Made in Ash*, was a good student, but straight after her A-levels she is forced by the social situation of her family living in Romani settlement in Eastern Slovakia to leave for the Czech town of Aš and together with other Eastern European and Asian girls to work as a seamstress in a textile factory. Other characters are forced to leave their homes because of broken family ties or because of problems with alcohol and drugs. A restless adolescent Ela from the film *Miracle (Zázrak)*, (2013) by Juraj Lehotský was sent to the detention center by her mother, who lives with a younger boyfriend. From there, Ela flees to her drug-addicted boyfriend, who sells her as a white slave to gangsters, and after her escape she finds – at least temporarily – peace at the institution for pregnant adolescents. An aging former actress Eva Nová from the eponymous film is leaving the alcoholic rehab for the third time, she goes from one inferior job to another, and in a quest for a renewal of the relationship to her estranged son, she repeatedly travels from the city to her birthplace in rural Slovakia. Eva, heroine from *The House*, is trying to get away from her native home in a small town and from her authoritative father in order to study and work in England.

These female characters are moving not only horizontally but also climb or fall in the social hierarchy. Eva Nová used to be a prominent actress of the socialist era, but after the break-up with her partner and director and after the change of

regime, she fell under the spell of alcohol, which got her to her knees. She has no ambition to get back into the spotlight; she just wants to defend her right to get a second chance, mainly in relation with her son, whom she neglected in her heyday. Inadaptable and aggressive Betka from *Foxes* becomes a second-rate citizen in Ireland, one of many Eastern European girls, who might be useful for work and fun, but are not suitable for the acceptance in society. Heroines of films *Made in Ash* and *Miracle* reach the very bottom of social hierarchy. Dorotka from *Made in Ash* loses her job at the factory and struggles along in bars until her more experienced friend finds a German sex tourist for her. Ela from *Miracle* wants to save her boyfriend from debts and agrees to be sold to gangsters as a prostitute; they rape and beat her and only after her escape she finds out that her boyfriend actually does not care for her at all. Relatively secure is the social situation of Eva from *The House*; however, she manages to fly away from the family nest in the end and has to look for her own place in the world.

As we can see, these are stories of socially motivated migrations, the ups and downs of heroines. All of them are stories of transformational crisis, in which the social and physical frames of migrating women change: they undergo the process of coming of age, aging, pregnancy and motherhood, physical abuse, and violence. In order to emphasize the psychological aspects of these physical transformations, the films deploy a wide array of stylistic devices, from observational realism to complex poetic figures. According to the conceptual metaphor theory by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson as proposed in their *Metaphors We Live By*,<sup>9</sup> poetic tropes provide abstract concepts with factual reality and give symbolic structure to material reality. In these films, the metaphorical images are not only organically integrated into a realistic discourse, but they are also directly connected to the physical and emotional states of the protagonists. In this way, they support Lakoff and Johnson's claims that metaphors enable us to comprehend human experience by means of metaphorical projection, in which we grasp abstract concepts using the concepts that stem from a physical base.

The social film drama trend in Slovak cinema typically concentrates on subjects such as economic transformation of post-socialist reality, multiculturalism, globalization, and disadvantaged social groups. These subjects are predominantly portrayed through stories of decaying family relations: female protagonists lose their safe domestic harbor and have to face their crisis alone. While all these themes of female transformations deal with the impact of crisis on protagonists'

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9 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

psychological and social status, they are rendered through a series of embodied metaphors. The theme of coming of age corresponds to tropes associated with the dialectics of freedom and stability; the theme of violence and (self)abuse is evoked by tropes of victims; the theme of aging is emphasized by images of physical decay of objects; and the theme of motherhood makes use of aquatic metaphors, evoking images of amniotic fluid.

## Coming of age

In the fragile phase of adolescence, the heroines negotiate between the need to be independent and the need to feel safe. Their process of coming of age is marked by conflicts with parents who are reluctant to respect this dialectic.

In *The House*, high school student Eva takes cleaning jobs in order to save enough money for her ticket to England, and she spends all her free time helping her father to construct a house she has no intention to live in. She experiences a brief, but intense love affair with her teacher, and in the end, is able to set herself free from her birthplace and leave for England. The figure of windows cleaning points to Eva's need to broaden her horizons, to see the world with her own eyes. The house in the process of construction is both a complex metonymy and a metaphor. It is a metonymy of a family that suffers from the lack of affection by the father who tries to secure only material needs of his daughter. It is also a metaphor of Slovakia – a country still “under construction.” Finally, the rural residence metaphorically points to the tradition that restrains the character instead of providing her with safety.

The heroine of film *Miracle* experiences a drastically accelerated process of coming of age, when she is separated from her family and soon loses also her somewhat childish ideas about romantic relationships. Ela is still a child and she longs for someone who is going to take care of her. Before she leaves with the gangsters, she asks her boyfriend to teach her to swim, which is something that children are usually taught by their parents. The figure of swimming is an embodied metaphor that describes Ela's situation: she wants somebody to teach her to swim in the deep waters of life, but people on whom she relies only let her drown.

## Violence/(self-)abuse

Prostitution as the ultimate survival strategy of women living on the edge is a recurrent social drama motif; however, it is not the only way in which female bodies are subjected to oppression. Excluded from safe family relations, the disillusioned heroines often undergo the process of self-abuse in an elusive hope for better lives.

In *Foxes*, the protagonist Betka is always getting into conflicts with other people. She is visually compared to stray foxes that wander around the streets of Dublin in search for something to eat and spread dangerous disease. Betka is handled by other people as a stray fox, they rarely miss an opportunity to show her their social dominance: may it be the family she works for, her new boss, or a lover. In a series of violent confrontations, she gradually loses everything and self-destructively tries to defend herself by destroying her sister, the only person who always helped her.

In *Miracle*, Ela experiences a common training of future prostitutes by a couple of gangsters, who test new material themselves before selling it. Her boyfriend drives her to his drug dealer, who traps Ela in a somber apartment, where she is forced to get naked in front of three gangsters, is raped by them, and on the way to another country manages to escape from the car and flee back to her lover.

In *Made in Ash*, Iveta Grófová has combined a documentary footage, shots from security cameras and mobiles phones with staged para documentary scenes, subjective defocused shots, and dream-like animation sequences in order to create a richly structured record of her protagonist's emotions and sensations. In intimate sex scenes, blurred images simulate subjective perceptions of physical trauma. An embodied metaphor of a stripper, "crucified" to a pole, is a representation of many girls, who on the symbolical end of post-socialist world become cheap entertainment for Western sex tourists.

## Aging

While coming of age is an accelerated process of making a place for oneself in the world, aging is a gradual process of becoming irrelevant, almost invisible. Women stripped of their physical attractiveness lose their social roles outside of motherhood.

All analyzed films present young protagonists, the only exception being *Eva Nová*, where the heroine observes her process of aging. The story of once famous actress, who got old and weary in the struggle with alcoholism, and after years spent in rehab, tries to re-establish both her life and relationship with her estranged son, represents her crisis by several embodied metaphors. Škop develops the psychology of her character by recurrent portraits of her face that is constantly confronted with other people, her own reflection in mirrors, and old photographs from her past. Her fate is also embedded in her name: Eva Nová, New Eve. She is already old, but wants to make a new woman of herself. Eva carries the burden of the past, which the narration reveals very sparingly. The carry-on, which she takes with her on several occasions, is a metaphor of this burden. She is well aware

of the fact that she is old and useless just like spoiled fruit she sorts in her new job in a supermarket, but she still tries to carry on with her life and therefore plants new flowers in her flat in place of those that dried completely during her absence.

## Motherhood

Given that the majority of Slovak social film dramas are portrayals of dysfunctional and disintegrated families, one of the recurrent motifs is traumatized motherhood. Only toward the end of *Foxes*, a flashback reveals the true reason for Betka's hysterical behavior: she accidentally gets pregnant by her future brother-in-law and tries to get rid of the baby with a pair of scissors.

In *Miracle*, the underaged Ela is pregnant and decides to give birth to the unwanted child even though her mother warns her of spoiling her life in exactly the same way as she once did. In the end, Ela gives the baby for adoption. The last shot of the film shows Ela looking at the newborn baby that already does not belong to her. Tenderness on her face is a miracle, to which the film's title refers, as she never got any tenderness from anybody.

The most complex portrayal of traumatized motherhood represents *Eva Nová*. Because of her acting career she left her son in the care of her single sister. When she tries to become close with him after years, he refuses her. The film's closing is both a symbolic fight and an embrace of the mother with her son in an inflatable swimming pool. Its circular shape refers to their disintegrated family. The son bought the swimming pool for his wife, who has left him and has a swimming pool in her new Austrian home. This swimming pool is much larger; however, there is no water in it. The water in the inflatable swimming pool metaphorically refers to oblivion that both mother and son searched in alcoholism. In connection to the relationship between the mother and her son, the circular swimming pool also evokes mother's womb with amniotic fluid, in which their bond – at least temporarily – is reborn.

## Conclusion

We can conclude that even though gender and feminist issues are not prominent in the social drama trend, these films present complex portrayals of several gender issues by emphasizing the relation between the physical and social bodies of female characters. Contrary to the feminine trend from the millennial turn, they do not reserve these subjects to the sphere of imagination, but make them a part of realistic representation of actual reality. Even though the stylistics of the films is predominantly realistic, these films do not stay away from poetic tropes, but

deploy mainly figures that have an embodied quality to them and evoke emotional states of protagonists through the portrayal of physical processes and sensations.

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## 9. Before coming out: Queer representations in contemporary Polish cinema

**Abstract:** In 2013, Polish cinema – owing to two popular films: *In the Name Of...* by Małgorzata Szumowska and *Floating Skyscrapers* by Tomasz Wasilewski – came out of the closet, which does not mean that queer issues had hitherto been absent in Polish cinema. The subject of this chapter will be the representations of non-normative men placed within the socio-cultural context of the latest Polish mainstream cinema. First, we will concentrate on popular romantic comedies that attempt to carry out affirmative politics. Next, let us look in detail, at the film *Suicide Room* (2011) by Jan Komasa, a film that directly preceded the premiere of Szumowska's and Wasilewski's movies, which clearly oversteps such identity politics, rejecting the stable and irrefutable identity for liquid identity, which does not come down to a choice between hetero- and homosexuality, but attempts to extract the plurality of its kinds.

**Keywords:** Polish cinema, queer cinema, queer representations, homosexuality, *Suicide Room*

In 2013, Polish cinema – owing to two popular films: *In the Name Of... (W imię...)* by Małgorzata Szumowska and *Floating Skyscrapers (Płynące wieżowce)* by Tomasz Wasilewski – came out of the closet<sup>1</sup>, which does not mean that queer issues had hitherto been absent in Polish cinema. It is worth taking into consideration what preceded such a coming out. The subject of our interest will be the representations of non-normative men placed within the socio-cultural context of the latest Polish mainstream cinema. First, we will concentrate on popular romantic comedies that attempt to carry out – via images of white, asexual and monogamous, well-situated middle class gays – affirmative politics, based on the assumption that the more homosexuals resemble heterosexuals, the easier it will be for society to accept them. Let us look in detail, however, at the film *Suicide Room (Sala samobójców, 2011)* by Jan Komasa, a film that directly preceded the premiere of Szumowska's and Wasilewski's movies, which clearly oversteps such identity politics, rejecting

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1 Michael Brooke, "Poland's coming out." *Sight and Sound* (2014): 1 Feb. 2017 <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/poland-s-coming-out>.

the stable and irrefutable identity for liquid identity, which does not come down to a choice between hetero- and homosexuality, but attempts to extract the plurality of its hues. The rejection by the Polish directors of stereotypical, domesticated, bourgeois images of gays in exchange for representations glorifying the diversity and plurality of sexuality has meant that critics – as I will attempt to demonstrate – have begun to manipulate the subversive potential contained in the texts, to conceal their true content so as to reclaim these films for the wider audience, simultaneously gaining power over them in order to support, and not destabilise, the dominant order.

### Towards emancipation

After 1989, Polish gays and lesbians come out of the closet. Their disclosure, initially timid, over time more and more daring and liberating, is the consequence of the political system transformation. In communist Poland, the issue of homosexuality was devoid of its representation in the public discourse and, without any representation, it did not actually exist in the collective awareness. In the West, we witnessed a linear emancipative narration that led from the essentialist homogeneous movement of the 1950s through the gay-lesbian movement of the 1970s to the constructivist queer theory in the 1990s and 2000s. It was unlike in Poland where “the communist past created different social structures and modalities. Visually, this [the functioning of homosexuals in Poland and in the West – SJ] can be presented as two separated geopolitical and temporal modalities/temporalities/time-images that function in a somehow parallel manner; and when one of them ends in 1989 the other one begins to be universal”<sup>2</sup>. Admittedly, the history of emancipation of lesbians and gays in Poland dates back to the 1980s but it was the early 1990s that brought some liberated animation along with the abolition of censorship. It did not last long, however, because the 1990s “saw the return of the worst kind of nationalistic and religious traditionalism”<sup>3</sup>, and capitalist

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- 2 Joanna Mizieleńska, „Idee pogubione w czasie – polityka LGBT vs teoria queer w Polsce i na Zachodzie“ [Ideas Lost in Time: LGBT Politics vs. Queer Theory and Practice in Poland and in the ‘West’], *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2012), p. 289. See also: *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, ed. Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizieleńska (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011); Łukasz Szulc, “Queer in Poland: Under Construction”, in: *Queer in Europe: Contemporary Case Studies*, ed. Lisa Downing, Rober Gillett (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 159–172.
  - 3 Paweł Leszkowicz and Tomek Kitliński, *Miłość i demokracja. Rozważania o kwestii homoseksualnej w Polsce* [Love and democracy. Reflections on the homosexual question in Poland] (Kraków: Aureus, 2005), pp. 55–56.

Poland turned out to be exclusively male and heterosexual. The second wave of emancipation dates to the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries<sup>4</sup> when the lesbian-gay organisation Kampania Przeciw Homofobii (Campaign Against Homophobia) is established and the first pride parade, called Parada Równości (Equality Parade) takes place, and the first draft law on homo- and heterosexual partnerships is prepared. However, it was first in 2003 that the lesbian-gay issue got into the public discourse with the symbolic collective coming out – the social campaign *Let Them See Us* (*Niech nas zobaczą*) (the slogan itself conveys well the lack of visibility of gays and lesbians in the public space), which consisted of an exhibition of photographs by Karolina Breguła depicting 30 lesbian and gay couples holding each other's hands. The exhibition was intended to be first shown at a gallery and then on billboards in the larger cities of Poland. But following a smear campaign in the press and homophobic attacks by right-wing politicians, who did not perceive the action as promotion of tolerance and equality but as the promotion of homosexuality, galleries withdrew from earlier agreements and the billboards were devastated. Kitliński and Leszkowicz, who took part in the campaign by appearing in one of the photographs, remark, "The photographs displayed that which people were unable to talk about, which was outside the boundaries of the official language and image. (...) The portraits restore visibility to the invisible citizens and fill the ideological schemes with real people"<sup>5</sup>.

We witnessed absolute anti-homosexual panic, the escalation of violence and the language of hatred along with the subsequent Tolerance/Equality Marches that took place – or were illegally banned by city mayors – in Cracow, Warsaw or Poznan. A particularly animated media coverage illustrated the famous 2004 Tolerance March in Cracow supported by the Nobel Prize winners Czesław Miłosz and Wisława Szymborska, during which the participants were attacked outside the Wawel Castle and in the Cracow Main Square by right-wing militants, and the Church called the peaceful march a "provocation"<sup>6</sup>. Politicians noticed that they could gain political capital on homophobic slogans and they were not going to give

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4 Zbyszek Sypniewski and Błażej Warkocki, „Wstęp“ [Introduction], in: *Homofobia po polsku* [Homophobia the Polish way], ed. Zbyszek Sypniewski and Błażej Warkocki (Warszawa: Sic!, 2004), p. 8. "The basic difference between the first and the second wave is the fact that the latter managed to penetrate the public discourse, and not necessarily as an exciting curiosity at that but as political and legal demands".

5 Paweł Leszkowicz and Tomek Kitliński, *Miłość i demokracja*, p. 20.

6 Cf. Błażej Warkocki, „Biedni Polacy patrzą na homoseksualistów“ [Poor Poles watch homosexuals], in: *Homofobia po polsku* [Homophobia the Polish way], ed. Zbyszek Sypniewski and Błażej Warkocki (Warszawa: Sic!, 2004), pp. 151–169.

it up. Especially after 2005, the gay – who according to the right-wing discourse came to Poland from the West and thus was alien to the essence of the Polish national identity – was perceived in the public debate as a national enemy<sup>7</sup>. Right-wing politicians' anti-homosexual actions (the banning of the 2004 Warsaw Equality Parade by Lech Kaczyński, homophobic activity of the then Minister of Education Roman Giertych as well as of other Liga Polskich Rodzin [League of Polish Families] and Law and Justice politicians), attacks by right-wing militants during the peaceful marches (both literal and symbolic, to mention the telling shouts, “We’ll do to you what Hitler did to the Jews”, “Gas the faggots!”, “Lesbians to labour camps!”<sup>8</sup>) and – a bit later (2012–2015) – seven arson attacks on the *Rainbow* (*Tęcza*) artistic construction by Julita Wójcik located in the Saviour Square in Warsaw and symbolising equality of rights of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community, caused that the postulates of the sexual minorities gained allies among the defenders of the broadly understood freedom. Thus, lesbians and gays found themselves in a better social and legal situation than in the early 2000s. They appeared in the social awareness, for which much credit has to be given to the media, above all. The media provided wide coverage of not only the Tolerance/Equality Marches but also the phenomenon of the Polish gay literature (Michał Witkowski, Bartosz Żurawiecki, Marcin Szczygielski) or the high-profile coming-outs of some public persons (Krystian Lupa, Maria Janion, Michał Głowiński). Thereby, after 1989 in Poland, we experience the resignation from hiding, which was characteristic of the communist period, influenced not only by communism but also by Catholicism, for the benefit of overt confrontation and battle of the LGBTQ community for their rights. It seems that only visibility, social activism and defiance – both in the West as well as in Poland – can push forward the emancipatory endeavours of sexual minorities.

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7 Agnieszka Graff, *Rykoszetem. Rzecz o płci, seksualności i narodzie* [By a Ricochet. On gender, sexuality and nation] (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2008), pp. 33–68.

8 Agnieszka Graff, *Rykoszetem*, p. 113. Graff analyses the collocation “gay i.e. Jew” as a code of vernacular culture, a mental shortcut that breeds aggression: “Judaisation of the enemy provides a handy tool because it actuates loads of contempt and fear in people who have similar views. There is no need to build anything – emotions and ‘arguments’ are ready-made. This is also a shortcut to violence: since ‘they’ are like the Jews, then they are everywhere and plotting against ‘us.’ And if so, the you not only can but have to defend yourself. With stones, for example.”

## The gay of fashion

Those events have their part in the changes in the images of the LGBTQ community in Polish cinema. The late 1980s and early 1990s, along with the abolition of censorship and an eruption – albeit momentary, as it was to turn out – of emancipation, brought the increase in the representation of sexual minorities in the Polish cinema. Gays (lesbians were only shown sporadically in the domestic films<sup>9</sup>) marked their presence above all in the heritage films (e.g. *Farewell to Autumn*, *Pożegnanie jesieni*, Mariusz Trelński, 1990; *Horror in Happy Swamp*, *Horror w Wesołych Bagniskach*, Andrzej Barański, 1995), while their appearance in films with contemporary settings was only occasional (e.g. *Time for Witches*, *Pora na czarownice*, Piotr Łazarkiewicz, 1993). The thriving of the gangster cinema and the reign of the strong manhood caused that the images of gays were then dominated by shameful stereotypes, a “faggot” (*Krugerandy*, Wojciech Nowak, 1999), a dangerous deviant (*Deborah*, Ryszard Brylski, 1995; *Weekend Stories: Harlot Charm*, *Opowieści weekendowe: Urok wszeteczny*, Krzysztof Zanussi, 1996) or a suffering decadent artist (*Nocturnal Birds*, *Nocne ptaki*, Andrzej Domalik, 1992; *Egoists*, *Egoiści*, Mariusz Trelński, 2000). Gays disappear from the Polish screens together with the fading away of the momentum of the first wave of emancipation in the mid-1990s, but they return in the 2000s when the macho type was put out to pasture and was replaced by a man who did not fulfil himself in dominance and aggression. The slightly greater visibility and greater diversity in creating queer images were influenced by a lot of interrelated factors. Firstly, the political and social activism of the sexual minorities prompted by the discriminating policy of the Law and Justice (2005–2007, 2015-). Secondly, the transformation of the understanding of the human gender and sexuality, inspired by considerations in the style of gender studies and queer theory developing in the West. Thirdly, the blossoming of the queer cinema and unprecedented diversity of images of the LGBTQ people in the American and West European mainstream cinema.

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9 Representation of lesbians in the Polish cinema after 1989 is definitely less common and typically episodic; however, like gays, lesbians do appear on the Polish screens along with the emancipative waves of the early 1990s and late 2000s, to mention such films as: *Femina* (Piotr Szulkin, 1990), *In Flagranti* (Wojciech Biedroń, 1991), *White Marriage* (*Białe małżeństwo*, Magdalena Łazarkiewicz, 1992), *Two Moons* (*Dwa księżycy*, Andrzej Barański, 1993), *Seven Stops on the Way to the Paradise* (*Siedem przystanków na drodze do rajy*, Ryszard Maciej Nyczka, 2003), *Aria Diva* (Agnieszka Smoczyńska, 2007), *The Perfect Guy for My Girlfriend* (*Idealny facet dla mojej dziewczyny*, Tomasz Konecki, 2009) or *Oh, Charles! 2* (*Och Karol 2*, Piotr Weresniak, 2011).

The fear-provoking, depraved “faggot” or the grotesque old queer occupying railway stations and parks were replaced in the 2000s by other images in the films serving the affirmative policy-telling stories of the coming out of the closet – the independent *Homo Father* (2005) by Piotr Matwiejczyk and the short story *Sleepiness* (*Senność*, 2008) by Magdalena Piekorz. In both of them, homosexual couples resemble ordinary heterosexual couples, in both of them gays are persecuted and in both of them there appear strong accents targeted at the homophobic right wing. But it was not those quasi-emancipative films – of limited distribution, let us add – that showed gays to both Polish men and women. They saw the gay first of all in popular romantic comedies in which he appeared as the bourgeois gay of fashion. He can be tolerated but only when he conforms to the prevailing norm. No way for him to be himself. Marcel (Marcin Bosak) from *Expecting Love* (*Mała wielka miłość*, 2008) by Łukasz Karwowski dresses up in colourful things and when a friend (Agnieszka Grochowska) begins to give birth, he unexpectedly passes out (his maternal instinct is stronger than that of the future mother). The man, as befits a new buddy film, does everything in his power so that his friend may finally find her Prince Charming. But should he find his own Prince Charming is of no interest to the director. Marcel, whose life we know nothing about, only exists to such an extent that is needed by his female friend. In *Female–Male War* (*Wojna żeńsko-męska*, 2011) by Łukasz Palkowski, in turn, the thirty-year-old gay “Pe” (Wojciech Meczaldowski) is – indeed – the best friend to women but only to those with traumatic experiences: forty-year-old Barbara (Sonia Bohosiewicz) and “Baba” in her mid-fifties (Grażyna Szapołowska). What do they have in common? Women after forty, as he explains, have “the same chances of finding a husband as myself in this country.” What is more, he discusses with them ladies’ jackets, high heels and neckerchiefs. He advises them not only on what they should wear (“you look like the Old Town after a bomb raid”, he says to Barbara) but also on how to effectively pick up a man. Also “Pe” himself is successful in this task and he enters a relationship with the bossy Bartek (Tomasz Kot), editor of the *Perverse Magazine for Ladies* in which Barbara achieves success with her column in which she diagnoses men’s personalities based on the size and shape of their penises. “Pe” does his best to keep his lover with him (he irons, cooks, wears G-strings, etc.), however to no avail. Gays, unlike forty-year-old women, are not meant to be happy in this world. In another comedy, *Ladies* (*Lejdis*, 2008) by Tomasz Konecki, the gay character played by Piotr Adamczyk is equally stereotypical and episodic. Artur is a member of the European Parliament and husband of one of the title “ladies”, Gośka (Izabela Kuna), who wants to become pregnant by him. However, the repeated attempts fail. Nothing helps, whether fresh strawberries

or champagne, incense sticks and even, as Goška puts it, “whore thongs”. Artur is ailing and that’s that. At last, Goška realises what it is all about: “Darling, I can’t get a dick of my own”, she says outraged. They split up but Artur soon returns in order to cry on her shoulder because his guy left him. So, the wife brews fresh mint for him. Well, a gay is a woman’s best friend, even if he happens to be her husband too. With Karwowski, the gay of fashion is merely a trinket shimmering with colours; with Palkowski and Konecki, he already has some story, experiences ups and downs but all of this is free of any genuineness, anyway.

The homosexual in the latest popular Polish cinema will either be domesticated and devoured (he will be like the hetero) or he will be no more at all (at the best, he will be degraded to homophobic jokes, as in *Weekend*, Cezary Pazura, 2010). Gays on the screen are thus polite and do not have sex, nay! they do not even kiss. As in the Christmastime *Letters to Santa* (*Listy do M.*, 2011) by Mitja Okorn where Wladi (Paweł Małaszyński) is looking for a girl who would be willing to assume the role of his fiancée during the family dinner on Christmas Eve. At the moment when Doris (Roma Gąsiorowska) leaves him in the lurch, he decides to come out and invites his partner, which is unexpectedly received with full acceptance by the family. Gays here are colourless, stiff and banal, albeit handsome. In the last scene, when love triumphs and all the heterosexual couples appear on the screen, that gay one is missing. As if the image of men in love were to annihilate the joy of the Christmas morning. The filmmakers expelled the gay couple from the film space, which did not prevent them from including the gay anthem *Over the Rainbow* in the soundtrack. Thereby, on the one hand, the domestication of the gay in romantic comedies causes him to be absorbed, devoured by the heteronormative system, but on the other hand, it contributes – despite the stereotypical aspect of those representations – to a greater visibility of homosexuals in the public sphere and thus to a greater social acceptance.

### ***Suicide Room***

It is from the emancipative policy of identity towards the queer-like understanding of diversity that Jan Komasa traverses in his debut *Suicide Room*. The director rejects the essentialist model based on the sharing by all gays and lesbians of a stable homosexual identity – a genesis searched for in common experience: desiring someone of the same sex and social oppression – for the benefit of the queer perspective, destabilising normative identity and questioning any and all actions founded on a stable and rigid identity, and demonstrating that such identities are performatively construed, manufactured, fabricated and generated through rituals

of bodily symbols<sup>10</sup>. Thereby Komasa does not aim so much for the change of the negative approach of the heteronormative society towards gays and lesbians – typical of politics of positive identity – as for the glorification of sexual diversity, so characteristic of the queer perspective.

The central narrative structure here – as in the case of *In the Name of...* and *Floating Skyscrapers* – is the motive of coming out of the closet. Dominik (Jakub Gierszał), the son of a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Finances (Krzysztof Pieczyński) and mother (Agata Kulesza) making career in the advertising industry, is in the final year at secondary school. He lives in a villa, a chauffeur drives him to private school, he often attends the opera (*Orpheus and Eurydice* by Gluck) with his parents. But everything is changed by his apparently innocent kiss with Aleks (Bartosz Gelner), which was meant to be a school-ball joke. However, during a judo training session when the boys' bodies are intertwined, Dominik has an erection. His body, so to say, speaks for him or rather – speaks in defiance of him. Roland Barthes wrote, "I can do everything with my language, *but not with my body*. What I hide by my language, my body utters"<sup>11</sup>. The class, who watched their colleagues' transgression at the ball with amusement and applauded, now humiliate, deride and reject the boy. The homophobic stigmatisation contributes to Dominik's being forced into a new "social constitution"<sup>12</sup>, a new social position – that of subordination. Because an injurious word, as Butler writes, "does not only name something but also, in a sense, performs something, and in particular, (...) performs what it names"<sup>13</sup>. In Didier Eribon's opinion, gay identity is initiated by a stigmatising and excluding "word of insult" (e.g. "You faggot"), "The one who uses an insult makes me realise that they captured me and have power over me and that it is above all the power of injuring. The power of injuring my consciousness by inscribing shame into the deepest corners of the soul. This injured consciousness, being ashamed of itself, becomes the constitutive element of my identity"<sup>14</sup>.

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10 Cf. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

11 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 44.

12 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 18.

13 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 43.

14 Didier Eribon, *Réflexions sur la question gay* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), p. 30.

Gay identity is constituted through a performative act of putting someone to shame<sup>15</sup>. Before he moves to the virtual world of avatars, Dominik will boldly challenge the stigmatisation. He will defy the school persecution with the queer strategy of “combat makeup”<sup>16</sup>. Because, as Butler remarks, “the injurious address may appear to fix or paralyze the one it hails, but it may also produce an unexpected and enabling response”<sup>17</sup>. Dominik’s response will be a provocative rejection of the obligatory heterosexuality. Dark makeup and black nail varnish provide the strategy of resistance staged on the surface of the body, a way of expressing his rebellion, his dissent to the school oppression; it is a way to manifest his self-confidence even if this self-confidence were to be merely a mask hiding pain and fear. The strategy proves effective as no one dares to insult the boy in public, and Aleks does not even look him in the eyes. Queer strategies will prove helpful again when Dominik comes out at the opera. The coming out is here a subversive, strongly theatricalised performance rather than a painful confession: Having confessed the truth, Dominik demonstratively kisses a Greek statue on the lips. This confession is so conspicuous that the parents and their friends accompanying them mistake it for a juvenile prank. The mother talks about “a fashion for gayness” and the father advises him that, if he actually is a gay, he should keep it to himself. Dominik then locks himself in his room, escaping the reality into the world of virtual avatars. This escape essentially closes the gay narrative and opens a narrative that belongs to a heterosexual romance, albeit virtual. Virtual, i.e. unreal. Dominik falls in love with a phantom girl. If they met in reality, the affection would probably burst as quickly as a soap bubble. But the second (heterosexual) part of the film does not by any means negate the first (gay) one, nor does it break with the queer view of the world, which emphasises the instability and fluidity of sexual identity. The director himself talked about it, “I have a problem with the terms homo or hetero. I think this is so fluid. (...) Those who depart from the norm are very many, a certain queer style has formed now. We observed such situations at a school-ballgay narrative. We attended such a ball

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15 Cf. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling. Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 35–66; Heather Love, *Feeling Backward. Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2007).

16 Błażej Warkocki, *Różowy język. Literatura i polityka kultury na początku wieku* [Pink tongue. Literature and cultural policy at the beginning of the century] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013), p. 234.

17 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 2.

before the film and I decided to recreate such things”<sup>18</sup>. But nothing of this kind can be found in reviews published by the papers. There, the *Suicide Room* turns out to be a completely heterosexual film.

It was accurately captured by Błażej Warkocki,

When (...) I was walking out of the cinema after the screening of the *Suicide Room*, my primary thoughts were that I had just seen the first Polish gay film, and not a bad one at that. With a full house and the silent but noticeable approval of the young audience. However, it soon turned out that I was wrong. Listening to the actors' statements, watching the trailer, reading the reviews or interviews with the director, I was convinced that the film was universal. In short, it sounded like this: parents, go with your children to see the *Suicide Room* and you will see the effects of the lack of communication and the dangers lurking on the Internet for sensitive young souls. The gayness has either disappeared altogether or it appeared to be there after all but with absolutely no significance because it is not what the film is about<sup>19</sup>.

An example of the former of the strategies recalled by Warkocki is a review published in the *Kino* [*Cinema*] monthly where the reviewer does not mention the gay thread at all, which is obviously not easy because the entire dramatic structure of the work relies<sup>20</sup> on it. Yet we read, “Because the director asked before the screening not to reveal too many details of the plot, I will but mention that one day Dominik will find himself on a shaky ground”<sup>21</sup>. The reviewer notes that Komasa made an “important” film as it shows the problem of Internet addiction. The gay issue disappears completely from the plot in this approach. The latter strategy, which is aimed at proving that the homosexuality that is present in the film is void of meaning, is excellently illustrated by the review by Tadeusz Sobolewski. Admittedly, the reviewer of the *Gazeta Wyborcza* [*Electoral Newspaper*] daily notices that this thread is essential, “The key but hardly touched upon psychological thread of the *Suicide Room* is related to Dominik's ‘gayness’ sealed

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18 This comment is taken from TV programme shown on TVP 2, recorded soon after the Gdynia Film Festival, where the *Suicide Room* won the Silver Lion prize. In earlier interviews, the director was silent about Dominik's sexual identity.

19 Błażej Warkocki, *Różowy język*, p. 232.

20 Also the film distributor did of great job here when he wrote in promotional materials, “Dominik (...) has a lot of friends, dates the prettiest girl at school (...) and one day one kiss changes everything.” These materials, deliberately of course, mislead the spectator suggesting the hero's heterosexuality. In the film, there is no mention of Dominik having a girlfriend. These materials deliberately fail to inform that the said kiss is not heterosexual.

21 Piotr Śmiałowski, „Sala samobójców“ [*Suicide Room*], *Kino*, No. 3 (2011), pp. 70–71.

with a sort of rape – to what extent assumed and to what genuine?”<sup>22</sup>. The word “gayness” was put in inverted commas, which suggests to us that the gayness was only pretended here; that it is a mask covering something else; that it is just a pretext. “Well, indeed”, continues Sobolewski, “Here lies the heart of the drama: the moment when the immature boy, deprived of any contact with his father, assumes the homosexual role imposed upon him by the milieu; what is more, he attempts to play the game in his rebellion against his parents”<sup>23</sup>. Thus, homosexuality turns out to be a mere game and a way to attract the parent’s attention. According to the critic, Dominik does not fall in love with his classmate; quite contrary, he experiences “genuine love” for a girl: “The desperateness of his situation (...) consists in that taking part in an insane game [the virtual reality of avatars – SJ], the boy experiences genuine love, such as he never experienced in the real world”<sup>24</sup>. The reader of Sobolewski’s review has thus no doubts any more. A film that became a box-office hit in Poland could not be gay after all. The gay reception of the *Suicide Room* is altogether different. Krzysztof Tomasik asserts that Komasa has treated the gay thread schematically and marginally to abandon it in the middle of the film in favour of “lengthy computer animations”<sup>25</sup>. Thus, the columnist did not find in this film the expected traditional gay narrative. Warkocki, in turn, commented on the film, “we received a not so bad Polish semi-gay film with a queer solution and one leg in the closet”<sup>26</sup>. The literature reviewer criticises the metamorphosis of the gay narrative into a universal narrative but, contrary to Tomasik, paradoxically points to its advantages: “A universal film is likely to attract more people than a gay one. School homophobia (...) can be defined as a universal problem. And this is at least something – in circumstances where Polish pedagogues just wash their hands”<sup>27</sup>.

## Conclusion

The Polish cinema increasingly less commonly puts the gay to death, increasingly less commonly punishes and stigmatises him. And it less commonly makes fun of him. However, both the depraved “faggot” and the dandified gay of fashion are

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22 Tadeusz Sobolewski, „Emo hipnotyczny i martwy“ [Emo hypnotic and dead], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 3.03.2011, p. 14.

23 Tadeusz Sobolewski, “Emo hipnotyczny,” p. 14.

24 Tadeusz Sobolewski, “Emo hipnotyczny,” p. 14.

25 Krzysztof Tomasik, “Sala samobójców” [Suicide Room], *Replika*, No. 30 (2011), p. 24.

26 Błażej Warkocki, *Różowy język*, p. 236.

27 Błażej Warkocki, *Różowy język*, p. 236.

equally unrepresentative. The ideal, thus, is such diversity that would reflect the complexity of the non-normative experience<sup>28</sup>. Even if the Polish cinema more and more frequently assimilates queers, it does so on its own (normative) terms. In Magdalena Podsiadło's opinion, "the society of ostensible tolerance (...) would be happy to get rid of the queer but it falls victim to the schemes and norms – including the declared tolerance of the post-emancipative society that is merely a theory while people know better anyway"<sup>29</sup>. The fashionable gay, well, why not, but only as a walk-on part; on the other hand, a story about gay-bashing will probably be touching to the more enlightened part of the audience sensitive to harm done to others. There's not a scintilla of truth in it. But at least no one will be able to accuse the Polish cinema of promoting homophobia.

Thus, what is the epochal character of Szumowska's and Wasilewski's films actually based on? Above all, *In the Name Of...* and *Floating Skyscrapers* are films that place gay problematics at the centre of narration and are brimming with – particularly in the case of Wasilewski's film – gay stylistics and erotica. The central narrative structure of both films presents the process of coming out of the closet. Coming out, on the one hand, signifies recognition of the truth about oneself, the truth hidden thus far, forced out or altogether subconscious or barely sensed, and on the other hand, it signifies the revealing of the truth about one's own sexuality before others. Because queers, in order to avoid being excluded and stigmatised (or sentenced to prison), were for years forced to hide their sexual identity<sup>30</sup>. The

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28 Harry Benshoff, "(Broke)back to the mainstream: queer theory and queer cinemas today," in: *Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies*, ed. Warren Buckland (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 193.

29 Magdalena Podsiadło, „Kochający inaczej. Homoseksualizm na ekranie“ [Those who love differently. Homosexuality on the screen], in: *Odwieczne od nowa. Wielkie tematy w kinie przełomu wieków* [The timeless anew. Great topics in the cinema at the turn of the century], ed. Tadeusz Lubelski (Kraków: Rabid, 2004), pp. 143. Cf. also: Suzanna Danuta Walters, *All The Rage: The Story of Gay Visibility in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 161; Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *Queer Images. A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), p. 261.

30 Tomasz Basiuk, "Coming out po polsku" [Coming out the Polish way], in: *Queer studies. Podręcznik kursu* [Queer studies. Course handbook], ed. Jacek Kochanowski, Marta Abramowicz, Robert Biedroń (Warszawa: Kampania Przeciw Homofobii, 2010), pp. 115, 121. Basiuk notes that, "a coming out typically has a narrative character, even dramatic – it is a confession of a breakthrough, describing the discovery of the truth about oneself where this truth concerns sexuality." It is no wonder then that the gay and lesbian cinema based its narrative structures above all on the formula of coming

action of *In the Name of...* is set in motion by the scene in which the priest Adam (Andrzej Chyra) is watching from a concealed place as his pupils are having sex. After this shock, he falls into alcoholism, seeks assistance in a church but this is locked, weeps to his sister, who knows better that he cannot be a “faggot” because he always used to like girls. It is first an ordinary lad from a village in the Masurian Lake District, nicknamed “Dyńia” [lit. “Pumpkin”] (Mateusz Kościukiewicz), that gets him out of the crisis and unexpectedly follows in his footsteps. So, there will be no happy ending: although it would be consistent with the emancipative narration, it would not prove likely in the Polish provincial reality. In the last scene we see “Dyńia” in a seminary.

The *Floating Skyscrapers* in turn tells the story of a traumatic coming out of the closet of two boys in love with each other: Michał (Bartosz Gelner) and Kuba (Mateusz Banasiuk). But the profound pessimism of the film is not so much related to the overt homophobia depicted here but rather to the lack of space for expressing oneself, one’s emotions and desires. A quick fellatio in the swimming pool toilet, anal sex in an archway (shown explicitly and not merely suggested), passionate kisses in front of the block of flats but never inside flats where it is only heterosexual love that can be pursued. Even Michał’s conversations with his mother about his sexuality, which precede the coming out before his father, take place in a car. For the LGBTQ there is no place anywhere. Poland, the director seems to suggest, is not a place for queers.

However, the ground-breaking character of *In the Name Of...* and *Floating Skyscrapers* is also based on the fact that the movies actually made it into the mainstream. Mainly due to their awards at international festivals (Teddy Awards at the Berlinale for the film by Szumowska, the Grand Prize at the East of the West competition at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival for Wasilewski) and the distribution and reception abroad, thanks to which they could not be ignored. These films may be banned (the right-wing party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [Law and Justice], after regaining power in 2015 and taking control over the public media, forbade the film by Szumowska to be shown on public television) but they cannot be passed over in silence. Furthermore, Wasilewski and Szumowska were followed by other directors. Since the premieres of *In the Name of...* and *Floating Skyscrapers*, there have appeared several important and esteemed films that place non-normative sexuality and non-normative lust – especially, which

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out of the closet. A coming out is usually depicted as a liminal and breakthrough moment, and thus “burdened with risk and requiring courage.” However, the revealing of the truth about one’s own sexuality usually bears the fruit of social integration and acceptance, however uneasy that might be.

is essential, between women – in the very centre of the narration, among others in *The Lure* (*Córki dancingu*, Agnieszka Smoczyńska, 2015), *United States of Love* (*Zjednoczone stany miłości*, Tomasz Wasilewski, 2016) or *Nude Area* (*Strefa nagości*, Urszula Antoniak, 2014). To the young Polish filmmakers – Agnieszka Smoczyńska, Tomasz Wasilewski, Kuba Czekaj or Małgorzata Szumowska – it is obvious that the diversity of gays and lesbians, the style of our culture can have a positive and refreshing effect on the development of the cinema and the entire culture. Thus, the diversity and distinctiveness of the LGBTQ community is not something that should be overcome but a strength that should be exploited.

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## 10. To be or not to be yourself: Turkish diaspora and the foreign land – stereotypes, nation and (hetero)norms

**Abstract:** The author analyses a few films of the German-Turkish and Austrian-Turkish cinema directed by Fatih Akın, Kutluğ Ataman and Umut Dag. He's interested in the functioning of the Turkish diaspora in the German-language societies of the West, and in topics of cultural differences, gender, sexual identity and changes of the forms of traditional Turkish family.

Discussing such problems as honour killings, patriarchalism and homophobia of Muslim diasporas, he tries to answer the question if diasporic cinema is able to change stereotypical perception of the ethnic minorities. Can it play with the meaning of such concepts as “family” and “nation”?

**Keywords:** German-Turkish, Austrian-Turkish cinema, gender, sexual orientation, stereotypes, identity

In this short chapter, I will analyse a few films directed by Fatih Akın, Kutluğ Ataman and Umut Dag dealing with the functioning of the Turkish diaspora in the German-language societies of the West. I'll try to answer the question if diasporic cinema can change stereotypical perception of the ethnic minorities and redefine categories of “family” and “nation.”

Films such as Akın's *The Edge of Heaven* (*Auf der anderen Seite*, 2007), Ataman's *Lola + Bilidikid* (*Lola and Billy the Kid*, 1999) and Dag's *Kuma* (2012) show that “clash of civilisations” should not be perceived in the categories derived from the classical theoretical work of Samuel P. Huntington who treated these words quite literally, foreseeing real face-offs of cultures built on different foundations, beliefs and meanings, but the ones closer to the current cross-cultural dialogue that takes place in a more private space. I'll try to check if heteronormativity and gender norms of the Turkish diaspora play the significant role in the life of the films' protagonists or if the Western context changes significantly the way in which they perceive themselves.

Let me begin with *Kuma*. The main protagonist of this film, Ayse (Begüm Akkaya), is a young woman who in the first scenes of the film (which take place in Turkey) is wed to the young and handsome Hasan (Murathan Muslu) with

whom she later moves to Vienna. Though the title of the film (which literally means “concubine” or “second wife”) doesn’t hide the true role of Ayse in the Hasan’s family, the first scenes of the film do not explain if Ayse is aware of this role and whether she knows that her marriage to Hasan is just a guise to bring her to Austria as the concubine of Hasan’s father whose first wife, Fatma (Nihal G. Koldas), supposedly terminally ill, wants to be sure that her children won’t be motherless after her death.

For quite some time, Dag doesn’t reveal Hasan’s motives to agree to such a marriage. The viewers are confronted with the truth when Ayse, who falls in love with Hasan, is informed by him that he is not interested in women. However, it is unclear till the end of the film if his parents were aware of his homosexuality when they decided to arrange his marriage and if this marriage was planned to hide his true sexual leanings from the local Turkish community.

When, quite unexpectedly, Hasan’s father passes away, Ayse’s position in the family changes and she has to start working in the local store. There she starts an affair with a young Turkish man. She spends her time off with Hasan’s mother, Fatma, looking after her, even sleeping with her in the same bed. Their relation is full of kindness, mutual respect, even intimacy. It changes when Ayse is caught in the store in flagrante with her young lover. The feeling of betrayal overwhelms Fatma, who turns against Ayse, beats her with fury and wants to chase her away from their apartment. One of the reasons of her anger is the fact that her daughter-in-law’s adultery was witnessed by the store’s owner so there’s a whiff of scandal in the story which may dishonour her son. Honour of the family is very important for the Muslim diasporas all over the world, the topic I will come back to later.

Ultimately, it is Hasan who helps his wife to stay in the family and probably – it is uncertain due to the open ending in the final scene – alleviates the crisis. This stabilisation is connected, though, with the need to continually lie about Hasan’s and Ayse’s marriage. This lie is from the beginning present in her relationship with her lover: she may consider herself a widow (after Hasan’s father’s death) but for her diaspora she’s a woman betraying her husband.

Films about young Turkish women and their situation in the patriarchal surroundings of their families have been made by the German-language cinema for years. Ewa Fiuk in her Polish text about German-Turkish cinema cites *Forty Square Meters of Germany (40 Quadratmeter Deutschland, 1985)*, directed by Tevfik Baser, about a wife kept by her husband in their apartment to – as he claims – guard her from the allegedly demoralising influence of the German reality. The same topic is present in *Head-On (Gegen die Wand, 2004)*, directed by Fatih Akin, which probably is still the most widely known film of the German-Turkish

cinema. The main female protagonist of the film, Sibel (Sibel Kekilli) meets Cahit (Birol Ünel) and marries him to escape the patriarchalism of her family. After some time, it becomes clear that Cahit, allegedly as rebellious as his wife against their diaspora's norms, is as patriarchal as (we may assume) Sibel's father. His patriarchal jealousy is one of the reasons why he kills one of his wife's lovers.

In *Kuma*, this topic is treated differently, mainly because of Hasan's homosexuality, which interferes with the codified family's relations and at the same time (especially in the final scenes of the film) is the guarantor that lets the family keep its status quo. Hasan does not want to reveal his sexual orientation (to "come out of the closet") so he does not strive to defend the family's honour by banishing Ayse from his family. The wives' adulteries in the Muslim communities of the West are very often punished by the so-called "honour killings." They are notorious among the members of the Turkish diaspora in the German-language countries. Between 1996 and 2005, there were as many as fifty-five honour killings in Austria and their number does not change from year to year. They take place as often in Turkey as in the Turkish communities all over the world. Monika Lisiewicz (2012) in Polish text *Społeczności LGBT w Turcji: między kemalizmem a westernizacją* (*LGBT communities in Turkey: between Kemalism and westernisation*) claims:

The last research commissioned by the Turkish government showed that there are on average one thousand victims of the honour killings every year – compare it with sixty-six people murdered in 2002 [data from 2011]. Usually the victims are young women murdered by their male relatives for having extramarital relations, talking with strangers or being rape victims<sup>1</sup>.

Homosexuality is another important reason for "honour killings"; therefore, it might be said that Hasan's situation in the community of Austrian Turkish diaspora is very similar to Ayse's situation. This might explain why Hasan defended Ayse when Fatma became aware of her extramarital affair.

The "honour killing" of the homosexual young man is one of the subjects of the film *Lola + Bilidikid*. This film about homosexual and transgender Turkish Germans tells a story of three brothers and their attitude to their sexual orientation. When writing about the sexuality of the Turks, Lisiewicz writes: "As the results of research of the Turkish society's sexuality suggest, 25% of the people under the age of 30 felt or still feel sexual attraction to the person of the same sex"<sup>2</sup> and

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1 Monika Lisiewicz, "Społeczności LGBT w Turcji: między kemalizmem a westernizacją," in: *Queer a islam. Alternatywna seksualność w kulturach muzułmańskich*, ed. Katarzyna Górac-Sosnowska (Sopot: Smak Słowa, 2012), p. 189.

2 Lisiewicz, "Społeczności LGBT," p. 195.

there is no reason, I suppose, to think that this percent is lower for members of the Turkish diaspora living outside Turkey. Additionally, it is worth remembering that honour killings of the homosexual men are very often committed by men who – as Lisiewicz writes – “had sexual intercourse with their victims”<sup>3</sup>. Attitude to homosexuality is quite different in Turkey than in the West and these differences might explain why we’ve read here about percentage as high as 25% (when most of the research in the West claim that only around 5% of people are gay). I’ll come back to this topic once again later.

The youngest of three brothers portrayed in *Lola + Bilidikid*, Murat (Baki Davrak), has just started his adolescence and seeks his first erotic experiences. The oldest one, Osman (Hasan Ali Mete), gives the impression of the heterosexual macho and the homophobe. Suspecting that Murat is gay, Osman tries to force him to have sex with a prostitute. However, it is later revealed that Osman, when informed about homosexuality of his second brother, Lola (Gandi Mukli), raped him. Later in the film, when Lola, previously banished from the family, meets and befriends Murat, Osman murders her, presumably to hide his own homosexual tendencies, which might have been revealed if Lola told his family about being raped by her brother. As I’ve written before (citing Lisiewicz), such murders are very often committed as attempts to hide the murderer’s sexual experiences.

When Murat meets Lola, she performs as a drag queen in gay clubs and lives with Bilidikid (Erdal Yildiz) who sells himself to other men for Deutschmarks. “Selling himself” means here that he lets other men perform fellatio on his penis but does not do anything else. His treatment of his own sexuality is another subject. He clearly loves Lola but at the same time is ashamed of living with a man. He tries to convince Lola to move to Turkey and pursue sex reassignment surgery (and marry him later). This clearly contradicts with her wishes: despite being transgender, Lola does not want to change her sex surgically. She even foresees that if she decided for such a step, Bilidikid would leave her for not being built like a man anymore.

An attitude to homosexuality in Turkey (and therefore in Turkish diaspora) was formed not only by Islam but also by Atatürk’s cultural revolution and the influence of the modern Western discourse about gender and sexual identity. Obviously, the Western context and Western customs cannot be forgotten when someone tries to talk about the subject of life and identity of German-Turkish men having sex with other men. Lisiewicz writes:

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3 Lisiewicz, “Społeczności LGBT,” p. 190.

In the Muslim world ... there was ... a wide margin of freedom for crossing borders of heteronormativity. It had its roots in the legacy of the classical Islam which sanctioned roles for transgender persons and also in the influence of the local customs and cults present on these lands before Islam<sup>4</sup>.

It might be suggested<sup>5</sup> that changes introduced in Turkey after Atatürk's cultural revolution, which tried to incorporate Western customs into Turkish society, were among the reasons behind the change in the attitude of Turks toward gender, masculinity and femininity. All departures from gender or sexual norms (and by "norms" I mean, among others, borders between masculinity and femininity that allegedly should not be transgressed) were seen as "part of the past"<sup>6</sup>. Non-heteronormative sexuality is defined in Turkish language in various terms but for us the most interesting information should be this: long are traditions of different perceptions of passive and active partners in sex. Only passive ones were perceived as "unmanly"<sup>7</sup>, and this asymmetrical perception results from the cultural belief that man is the one who, during sexual intercourse, penetrates the body of his lover and woman is the one who is penetrated (so the act of being penetrated is always feminine and therefore unmanly).

This belief might explain why Bilidikid does not perceive himself as homosexual. We cannot be sure but his "macho" style and the fact that he wants to convince Lola to sex reassignment surgery suggest that he might be an active partner in sex and therefore in his own eyes (and as a result of the aforementioned perception of male homosexuality in Turkey and Turkish diaspora) he isn't "unmanly." Heteronorms of the Turkish diaspora, not necessarily identical as hetero-norms of the Western world, connect with his identity and let him perceive himself as the "real man," even if he's in love with another man.

Homosexuality (but this time lesbian) and the situation of women in the Muslim communities are two of many subjects of *The Edge of Heaven*. The female protagonist from Turkey, Ayten (Nurgül Yeşilçay), is Kurdish. When she escapes from Turkey and seeks asylum in Germany, she meets Lotte (Patrycja Ziółkowska). The women fall in love with each other. When Ayten is expelled from Germany, Lotte travels after her to Turkey. This is one of many subplots of Akin's film but the one representative for its themes of cultural identity and Eastern/Western dichotomy. When writing about the film, Ewa Fiuk draws our attention to the fact that Akin shows both sociological and political problems of Turkey and does

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4 Lisiewicz, "Społeczności LGBT," p. 184.

5 Lisiewicz, "Społeczności LGBT," p. 185.

6 Lisiewicz, "Społeczności LGBT," p. 185.

7 Lisiewicz, "Społeczności LGBT," p. 186.

not forget about exclusions still existing in the Western societies. Despite the fact that Ayten is in love with a German female citizen, she can't receive German citizenship through marriage with her beloved because gay marriages aren't legally established yet<sup>8</sup>. Paradoxically, the victim of this social injustice is German: Lotte travels to Istanbul after Ayten and she is killed there mainly because Ayten could not stay in Lotte's homeland.

There's also another story told in *The Edge of Heaven*: the one of Yeter (Nursel Köse), Ayten's mother, a prostitute who abandons her profession to live with Ali Aksu (Tuncel Kurtiz), an older man who is aware of her past and seems to accept it but later is jealous of her alleged (but non-existing) relationship with his son, Nejat (Baki Davrak). Yeter dies in an accident, which happens during a quarrel with Ali. His rage is unsubstantiated and irrational but is undoubtedly connected with his patriarchal upbringing. Her profession of sex worker was good enough for him as long as her sexual experience could be tamed and used only for his own pleasure. When his "ownership" of woman's body is called into question, rules of patriarchy prevail. The situation of women in Turkish family is treated here in a similar way to the one in *Kuma* and many other films dealing with the identity of Muslim diasporas all over the world: Akın shows that traditional ways of living of the Muslim communities might change in the Western context but the Turkish identity is still the result of a dialogue between two cultures and two types of thinking about gender, sex, family etc. It is almost impossible (or at least very difficult) to forget about one's upbringing, religion, and a way of thinking, and assimilate with the Western society in a way that would eliminate all differences. People belonging to Muslim diasporas create their identity as a bridge between two river banks of two different cultural worlds.

The "marginalisation" of the films' protagonists mentioned in this chapter is the result of their ethnic roots, their gender or their sexual orientation. An American female theoretician, bell hooks, claims that marginality is not "a site of deprivation"<sup>9</sup> but it can be "the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance"<sup>10</sup> and from this "site" people of margins can talk about their life, their world and their experiences: marginality may be "a central location for the production of

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8 Ewa Fiuk, "Kobieta – Inna, Obca. Bohaterki i autorki współczesnego niemieckiego kina migracyjnego," in: *Między filmem a teatrem II. Napięcie i poznanie. O inter-, multi- i transkulturowej komunikacji w sztukach audiowizualnych*, eds. Sławomir Bobowski and Piotr Rudzki (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2014), pp. 159–160.

9 bell hooks, "Marginality as site of resistance," in: *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, eds. Russell Ferguson and others (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), p. 341.

10 hooks, "Marginality," p. 341.

a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives"<sup>11</sup>. We should ask if the aforementioned films try to be "the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance", if they let margins to find their own voice, to show how they see and understand the world.

Homi K. Bhabha adds to these hooks' observations that the space of nation, though it is seemingly formed in opposition to other nations and in a way, tries to overlook marginal groups that live in this space, cannot (even if it wants) ignore those that step in its borders: The Others. The cultural otherness has to be an issue when the subject of nation is analysed and nation itself is defined<sup>12</sup>. Films about national "otherness" very often (as we've seen already in this chapter) have protagonists that are "other" in many ways: their gender or sexual identity is usually an issue that can put their cultural, ethnic and national identity into question, that can show cultural inadequacies and the enslaving nature of cultural norms.

The narrative of the nation is very often one-sided – and it does not matter if this sentence is used for the nation of diaspora or for the one of the country in which it settles. It's true in both cases. Diasporic films show "scratches" existing on the surfaces of these narratives and show that national discourse (very often connected with the gender discourse), enforcing its authority, its power, is at the same time condemned to failure in its pursuance to create one image of nation. In *Kuma*, the rules of "typical" Muslim family are supposedly followed or at least it should look like this to the accidental people. Dag lets us peep into Fatma's and Aysel's family, to stalk their privacy and because of this the viewer is informed that behind the veil of norms that they supposedly follow is another reality of lies and suppressed desires. The same accumulation of lies and conflicts is shown in *Lola + Bilidikid* and a result of the ferocious fight between personal needs and the cultural norms is there even more dreadful than in *Kuma*: Lola is murdered by her brother. We've also analysed the relation between Yeter and Ali Aksu in *The Edge of Heaven* and I've mentioned a few other examples (such as *Head-On* or *Forty Square Meters of Germany*) that show the same fight between traditional patriarchy and the authenticity of the gender and sexual needs.

Another topic very often touched upon by the diasporic cinema are generational differences. The older generation is (or at least should be) the bulwark of tradition. Mother of three brothers, main protagonists of *Lola + Bilidikid*, and Fatma in *Kuma* are such bulwarks. The younger generations are very often more

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11 hooks, "Marginality," p. 341.

12 Homi K. Bhabha, *Miejsca kultury*, trans. Tomasz Dobrogoszcz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2010), p. 158.

willing to find compromise between their needs, the realities of living in the West and the traditions of their diaspora. Lola from Ataman's film cuts herself off (or rather is cut off) from her family and her diaspora's traditional way of life. In *Kuma*, this discussion between the Western realities and the Eastern traditions is constantly ongoing (and – mainly because of the fact that Eastern norms are still respected and celebrated by the people of diaspora – needed to survive in the context in which the chains of norms are part of everyday life). This “discussion” takes place on someone's body, in the realm of gender and sexuality. Judith Butler (2010) in her well-known book *Gender Trouble* claimed that gender is “performed.” I think that this statement should be enough for us here and I don't want to go any further into summarising her theory. Let me just say that functioning of gender and sexuality in the aforementioned films very often shows validity of Butler's views. *Kuma*'s protagonists deceive people who do not belong to their family by *performing* (sic!) their gender roles for the outside world. It is also clear from the stories told in those films that gender roles are created (and written on someone's body) as heterosexual. Therefore, homosexuality of Hasan is hidden behind the costume of heterosexual role of Aysel's husband: his true nature is non-normative and therefore Hasan has to play someone else to be able to find himself in the “right” position in his diaspora. Lola, one of the title characters of *Lola + Bilidikid*, works on stage as a *drag queen*, literally *performing* in the costume of the female gender and at the same time showing that gender is only a costume. Films mentioned here show that playing parts is the everyday reality of the people belonging to different generations of the German Turks. Women have to play roles of wives, daughters and mothers, men of husbands, sons and fathers, but first and foremost all of them have to play their gender – even when their real selves remonstrate. Younger generation may treat norms that define gender and sexuality more liberally than the older one but even they cannot escape from them – they need to debate with them and create themselves in the realm of their power. When they rebel – they are victims of their culture, which leaves its marks on them. Fight between culture and identity is part of life of every human being who does not subordinate to the norms that captivate his true self – so this sentence may be used to describe the situation of people in Poland as well as in Germany, Austria or everywhere else – but the more conservative the culture, the greater is the need to pursue one's identity in a way that would let keep up oppressive appearances of the traditional gender and family roles.

All films mentioned in this chapter try to crack down stereotypes. But do they succeed? They show small, private “clashes of civilisations” happening in the everyday life of their protagonists and at the same time teach that one-sided perception

of people belonging to “civilisation” is false, even impossible, and therefore that stereotypes are false, distorted visions of far more complicated human beings. The need to redefine themselves, their identity, is part of everyday life of main and supporting characters of *Kuma*, *Lola + Bilidikid* and *The Edge of Heaven*. Their identity is created at the point of contact of two different cultures. This need, even necessity is the site of such clashes that happen in the private space which at the same time coexists with the space of nation.

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