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Abstract

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Foreign Fear in *Lamerica*: Exile, Liminality, and Hybridity in the Refugee as Monster

by Katerina Leung

The emergence of an increasingly mobile human population due to globalization has made displacement and relocation commonplace punctuations in the narratives of modern humanity. These punctuations have emerged in film as Migration Cinema which examines the importance of an individual's political, social, economical, and/or national situations on ontological definitions.

This essay will investigate and attempt to define a framework for understanding the Refugee in Migration Cinema. Beginning with the introduction of Hamid Naficy's *Accented Cinema* and delving into the concept of Exile as a process and a being, this essay will link these concepts with those of Hybridity and Liminality in the composition of the Refugee. The Refugee as a being is intrinsically linked to the concept of Exile, which can be both a being/state and a process. The duality within Exile is vital in understanding Refugee and in creating the necessary framework to situate the Refugee in such topics as national identity, migration, and xenophobia on a national level. Specifically the understanding of Refugee as Monster will be presented using the anthropological theory of Liminality, Exile as a process, and the theory of Hybridization manifested and realized in the Refugee/Exile. The Refugee as Monster will provide the basis for theorizing the ambiguous ontology of nation and national identity and its modern by-product, xenophobia. Finally, this framework will be applied to the acclaimed *Lamerica* (Gianni Amelio, 1994).

In the postmodern world, global migration is an inextricable part of the global collective and inherent to the creation of Migration Cinema, now a burgeoning area of film study and theory. Middle Eastern film authority, Hamid Naficy forefronts the study of Migration Cinema with his theory of *Accented Cinema*. It posits that migration has a deeply affective influence on ethnic filmmakers and 'accents' their filmmaking, affecting how reality and migration is understood and transmitted in these films. Naficy focuses on the filmmaker and the exilic relationship a filmmaker has with his(/her) homeland in the literal and creative production of a film. In terms of film analysis, Naficy defines *Accented Cinema* using Russian literary philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin's, chronotopes as organizing centers for accented films (Naficy 2001, 153). Chronotopes, translated as "time-space" (152), exist in three forms: open, close, and third-space (transitional) [153-154]. From there, three categories of accented cinema exist: exilic (internal, external), diasporic, and ethnic and postcolonialist. Aesthetically, an ambiguous reality, transitional time and spaces, and alienated hybrid characters pertain to Migration Cinema since many of these films feature journeys and change. Within *Accented Cinema*, Naficy defines three journeys: home-seeking, homelessness, and homecoming. Transition manifests as liminality, hybridity, and simultaneity. Characters and places are often in a state of flux existing between states and yet combining both the temporal and/or spatial states (290-291). Similar to Third Cinema and Italian Neorealism, accented cinema's ambiguity extends right up to the last frame with an incomplete closure paradoxically leaving the spectator to assume a liminal position.

Liminality began as an anthropological conceptualization of transition which was introduced by Arnold Van Gennep in 1909 and developed by Victor Turner. Originally a theory on social rites of passage, it has been investigated, theorized, and applied to other fields of study (La Shure 2005). The concept of Liminality is one that permeates all aspects of dynamic life. Life itself is a liminal state; between birth and death, life takes place. All change requires a liminal period. This is defined as an indeterminate state simultaneously existing within two states but belonging to neither. Despite liminality's unquestionable place in Nature, this state/period of displacement and uncertainty elicits fear. This is best illustrated by the polar pair of Purity/Pollution within the social order as suggested by

scholar Mary Douglas. According to Douglas, Pollution is a dangerous threat: socially, physically, and morally (Douglas 1966). It connotes an objective morality which is predicated on righteousness and unrighteousness (Douglas 1966, 165). Pollution, the “Evil”, is perpetually in contrast to its antithesis, the “Good” of Purity. Thus, Purity is the super-ego of the social order and the standard to which individuals and actions are often judged with Pollution inscribed to those which fall outside of Purity. It is the motivation to a communal and individual Purity which drives the social and culturally rituals, norms, and beliefs of a community or nation.

Exile is a liminal state. Whether it is voluntary/involuntary or internal/external, the process of exile is one where an individual is removed from a place of origin (a homeland). Once removed, the individual enters a period of liminality definitively between leaving one’s origin and resituating oneself in a new place. Regardless of the length of the liminal period, it becomes an intrinsic characteristic of exile such that the exiled individual is unable to align him-/herself with a definitive state of belonging. In this way, the exilic status is in itself a location: neither here nor there (Marciniak 2006, 33). This positioning of the self thus correlates to a vagueness in personal identity. Irrespective of a individual’s alignment and pre-formed identity in the pre-exilic location, once he (/she) has been removed from that location such removal is irreversible.

The simultaneity of being two states is epitomized in the Exile as a being. The trope of Exile is that it is composed of both placement and displacement. The exile is expelled from one place (a homeland, a place of origin, a nation with its own identity) and undergoes a process of realignment into a new nation (the host land with its own separate identity). The process begins when the Exile is denied his/her entitlement of belonging (Marciniak 2006, 44). An Exile’s ontological alignment is itself. The very process an Exile undertakes is its definitive characteristic. Therefore, the identity of one within the process is the very process itself.

An Exile is ontologically a hybrid whose naming and identification is a hyphenated one (Naficy 2001, 15-16). An Exile belongs to neither state; his (/her) placement is defined by displacement from a place of origin or homeland. His (/her) existence is defined by various hybrids: freedom/imprisonment, origin/destination, utopia/dystopia. The first refers to an Exile’s mobility and release from the oppressive ties which have usually resulted in his/her deterritorialization as well as the constraints placated by external forces such as the social, economical, and/or political institutions of the exilic locations. This hybridity of states accounts for the liminality of exilic being.

An inherent aspect of the discourses of hybridity, liminality, monsters, and exile as well as Third Cinema and postcolonial theory (Shohat 2006, 47) is the aforementioned relationship between purity and pollution. Robert Stam, Mary Douglas, and Katarzyna Marciniak, among others, has explicitly dealt with this relationship. The dichotomy of purity/filth is inherent in distinguishing the difference between two states. Purity can be defined as authenticity, literal cleanliness, or clarity and ultimately represent goodness. Filth can be defined as contamination (Stam), pollution (Douglas), literal filth, or ambiguity/hybridity and can ultimately represent evil. The natural reactions to this polar pair are to protect and strive towards the good of purity and defend against evil of pollution (Douglas 1966, 2). Thus, the Refugee as Monster is a resultant belief of this instinctive response. When upheld by a nation’s population, it manifests in the tangible aspects of human life as xenophobia and prejudice.

As a mode of individual and/or collective expression with the ability to present, transform, and transmit social codes, film is a potent medium for the formation of nationally specific definition of Purity/Pollution in a population. Film is both formative and counter-formative. While creating a

homogenized standard identity, it can also be used to complicate pre-formed notions and conceptions accorded to identity, race, gender, and class. Migration Cinema and Accented Cinema is one such form of counter-formation. These films present the interactions and clashes between two national identities present within the sphere (social, cultural, political, and historical) of the exiled individual or community.

Gianni Amelio's celebrated *Lamerica*, posits itself comfortably in the realm of migration cinema. Inspired by the Italian government's detainment and deportation of fifteen thousand Albanian refugees from the south of Italy in the summer of 1991, the film documents the Albanian diaspora to Italy following the fall of dictator, Enver Hoxha (Rivi 2007, 115). Shot entirely in post-Communist Albania and featuring real Albanian locations and non-actors, the film is reminiscent of Italian Neorealism. Barren landscapes, broken buildings, and dusty roads containing disenfranchised men, women, and children dominate the film. Despite a few physical markers (the bunkers, "Enver Hoxha" on the mountain side, and painted signs), the majority of the diegetic spaces are Any-Space-Whatevers. Defined as nondescript spaces which signify pure potential (Deleuze 1986, 111), Any-Space-Whatever utilizes situational ambiguity to create a universality of space and time. The Albanian landscape, roads, and rural buildings are all Whatever-Spaces which could exist in any nation at any time. This universality emphasizes the disjunction between emplacement and displacement in its lack of idiosyncrasy. These spaces, like the Exile, are neither "here nor there"; they resist an initial establishment or prescriptive definition (as genre does by connoting a specific set of expectations (Higson 1989, 53)) and translate this internal experience of liminality and ambiguity into an external experience for the spectator.

Lamerica also positions itself within Hamid Naficy's Accented Cinema. While the film is not directed by an exilic filmmaker nor is it a low budget film, the film contains many aesthetic, narrative, and thematic aspects of Accented Cinema: homecoming journey, twoness in Spiro's character, and transitional time and spaces. Gino and Spiro's movements are motivated by a desire to return to Italy, their home. Hybridity of Spiro-Michele is a literal manifestation of the Albanian-Italian identity. Time and space in the film is blurred as their desperate journey to Tirana is constantly complicated and a return to Italy becomes increasingly distant and unattainable.

Lamerica's ability to invoke a sense of fear through deterritorialization relies on the accessibility of the exilic experience through Naficy's "Structures of Feeling". Oscillation between the polarities of utopia/dystopia is represented by the idealization of Italy through dialogue and the recurrence of Italian television and the barren and dilapidated Albanian landscape. Specific to *Lamerica*, longing, loss, and nostalgia prevail. These sensibilities are enforced by oscillation between the polarities of utopia/dystopia. Like purity/pollution, the "good" and the "bad" are established by their juxtapositions as the idyllic Italy and the barren Albania.

Spiro is the Refugee, an Exile whose liminality exists both physically, temporally, and ontologically. His hybridity manifests itself as his dual identities as Spiro Tozai, the mute Albanian prisoner, and as Talarico Michele, the Sicilian deserter and young father-to-be. His aged body stands in contrast to his unchanged young mentality. Due to the fact that he has resided in Albania for the majority of his life, it is difficult to excise his Albanian identity from his 'true' Italian identity. Thus, temporality complicates Spiro's ontological classification because his mental state remains in the Italy of the past while his physical presence and his legality exist in the Albania of the present. The simultaneous juxtapositions of young/old, past/present, and Italian/Albanian in Spiro's character ensure his definition as a Refugee in multiple categories of identification.

Gino's confident and stable initial identification stands in contrast with Spiro's. Gino, like the Western spectator, is a tourist who has come into the diegesis with a pre-formed and relatively stable situated identity. Gino is the dubious Italian businessman who has come to Albania in order to exploit the ruined national infrastructure. His superiority is conveyed by his material possessions. His Jeep, his fashionable clean clothes, and expensive accessories complement his arrogant nationalism and superior demeanour. These physical markers of wealth separate him from the poverty of his surroundings.

The polarity of Spiro and Gino is established in their first sequence together. Spiro's anxious demeanour contrasts Gino's confident one. Spiro's silence and stasis bothers an impatient Gino who exercises agency to extract Spiro's name. At this, Gino's business partner, Fiore, asks the work camp directors to confirm that Spiro has no family. Mirroring the incredulity of the Western spectator, Gino responds on Spiro's behalf: "He has no one. They wouldn't have left him here". His confidence in the reciprocal association between him and his homeland Italy mirrors that of the Western spectator to his/her own personal relationship with the Western alignment. For the Western spectator, Gino's character provides a vehicle for diegetic identification while Spiro provides the antithesis for comparison. Initially, Spiro's self-contained and silent character reaffirms the dichotomy of authorial Western and subaltern Non-Western. However his reawakening as Talarico Michele after his brush with death coinciding with Gino's progressive loss of identity moves towards an equilibration of Western and Non-Western.

An attempted equilibration or move from parity to equality of Western and Non-Western disrupts their very definitions. This disruption forces the Western spectator to confront the possibility of displacement. In this way, it is Deleuze's "Monster": a thought, "something or someone whose extremely determinate nature allows the indeterminate to stand" (Bompiani 2001, 265). The function of the 'Monster' in accented cinema is to enlighten the spectator and foreground the multiplicity of the modern human condition in relation to placement and displacement. Hamid Naficy articulates this aptly: "Most of us take for granted our place in the world and come face-to-face with it only when we are threatened with displacement. Thus, placement is tied to its opposite, displacement" (Naficy 2001, 152). Thus, the dissolution of the boundaries between Western and Non-Western and the process of placement to displacement evokes unpleasant sensations for the Western spectator.

While migrational cinema foregrounds this polarity, *Lamerica* derives its profound affectation by portraying the ease at which sudden irreversible displacement (exile) is possible. For Spiro, his exilic journey was premeditated and to some extent self-inflicted. He had planned to run away from the war and return home. However, for reasons unstated but implied by the onset of his current mental state, his desertion had the opposite effect and he remained imprisoned in Albania for 50 years. For Gino, his transformation is diegetic. He is transformed by escalating alienation from his homeland Italy, and his increased intermingling and unification with the disenfranchised Albanians around him. His loss of identity is expressed by his loss of material possessions: money, Jeep, sunglasses, clothes, and finally his passport. With that final loss, according to the film's narrative equilibration of physical papers for national affiliation, Gino loses his claim to (and power of) his Italian birthright. Perhaps more disconcerting is that he then assumes an Albanian identity:

GINO. ... where are my bags? I gave my clothes away.

OFFICIAL. This Albanian prison is a nasty place. Your bags have been sequestered.

GINO. What do you want from me?

OFFICIAL. Name, Surname, and birthplace.

...

GINO. Where do I go without a passport?
OFFICIAL. But in Albania, no one has documents.

In this critical exchange, Gino has lost all of his original possessions, is asked to surrender his identity (in the form of his name and birthplace), and finally his passport. With the loss of that small bound book, Gino loses his Western (Italian) identity and enters the exilic state becoming homeless, powerless, and most importantly, one with the chaotic Albanian populace around him.

The ease with which ontological and social stability is lost elicits discomfort and fear in the Western spectator. In its portrayal of transition and exile through Spiro and Gino, *Lamerica* effectively articulates liminality and hybridity and establishes itself as a kind of "Monster". A Refugee, as an Exile, embodies transition, liminality, and hybridity. Its identification is intrinsically hyphenated. A hyphenated being simultaneously incorporates both states while belonging to neither (Naficy 2001, 15-16) By defining itself as indefinable, the Refugee is thus a "Monster" (Bompiani 2001, 272). By taking refuge in a new country, a refugee seeks emplacement in a pre-established social, economic, and political infrastructure. Not a blank slate, the Refugee is also pre-formed by the infrastructure of its place of origin. Thus its presence and resultant hyphenated identity exists to disrupt the homogeneity of the host nation.

Disruption of national and cultural homogeneity by the Refugee's hyphenated identity can be understood in the conceptual polar pair of Purity/Pollution. It is here that the Refugee can be understood as more than Deleuze's Monster. Like some beast, the Refugee as an expatriate, displaced person "is not recognized as belonging to the human genus and is outside humanity" (Bompiani 2001, 266). A refugee's ethnic, cultural, and/or religious pre-exilic associations often stand in contrast with those of the post-exilic nation. By incorporating themselves into the social system of the host country, they introduce heterogeneity into that nation's homogeneity. Or more succinctly, their incorporation pollutes the purity of the authentic national culture (Douglas 1966, 2). If authenticity is assigned to be good for a nation, naturally its antithesis of pollution must be the loss of this authenticity.

As an external being with previous formations by another cultural authenticity, the Refugee is identified as an "Outsider" (Bompiani 2001, 266) who should be monitored and guarded against. In the modern context, the exilic transition is an East-to-West transition. Refugees and exiles from Non-Western nations often differ in many external ways: race, religion, and moral conduct. Exacerbated by the fact that refugees are expelled from their homelands, refugees are further segregated by the host country's societal, economic, and/or political infrastructures in an attempt to safeguard a host nation's cultural authenticity.

"Monster" is thus experienced as danger and translated to fear (Douglas 1966, 2). In the context of postcolonial theory, alignment of Western society with the Occident and Non-Western society with the Orient provides a platform for which xenophobia is able to stand. Stuart Hall comments that postcolonialism is "a sign of desire for some, and equally for others, a signifier of danger" (Hall 1996, 242). In the globalized modern world, the transnational identity is gaining prominence as national and cultural borders blur with the influx of accessible modes of migration. The fear manifested as xenophobia stems from the understanding that in order to amalgamate two identities, there must be an intrinsic loss of the authentic identity.

Lamerica's final poignant sequence invites more questions than it answers. It opens with an enigmatic Albanian girl's smile fading into a bright blue ocean. From this ocean, the Partizani appears to

materialize with every single inch of its surface occupied. It is on this overcrowded deck that Gino and Spiro are reunited. Their transformations are solidified: Gino's loss of identity is juxtaposed with Spiro's reappropriation of his 22-year-old persona of Talarico Michele. In a reversal of their initial encounter, Gino is mute and apprehensive and Spiro is the agent. The once arrogant Italian businessman now seeks comfort from the very same man he tried to exploit, highlighting the superficiality of a static identity. The jarring final close-up shots are the Refugees' final testimonies. The static shot, "stasis shot", is an impression of both the presence of the person in the film but also of the spectator's experience watching the film (Chaudhuri 2007, 391). Their honest yet enigmatic faces call to question film's reality and the Western spectator's current stability (O'Healy 2004, 249). Specifically, they confront the Western xenophobia and racism towards the 'polluting' Albanian refugees with the verification of their humanity. To further antagonize the Western spectator, *Lamerica* does not satisfy their curiosity about the fate of these refugees. The film ends with the Partizani floating on the ocean, destination unknown. In a final twist, the Western spectator assumes a liminal position. Suddenly, the Western spectator is also transformed and in transition. *Lamerica's* greatest affectation is embodied by the spectator's self-inquiry: Am I also in transition?

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