

Migration as a Theme of Contemporary Cinema

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ABSTRACT / During the last decade and due to the massive migration phenomenon that has occurred globally, film productions have adopted various approaches to bring the stories of this new demographic group to the big screen. However, the perspective from which the information is presented has the power to change the perception of the viewers regarding the situation and those involved. It is for this reason that this study proposes to analyze four ways in which immigrants and refugees are being represented in today's cinema as well as reflecting on the new role of the seventh art as a tool for social denunciation, and at the same time opening the discussion on ethics and social commitment of the filmmakers when addressing issues related to the current national and international socio-political state.

KEYWORDS / Refugees, Immigrants, Representation.

RESUMEN / Durante la última década y debido al fenómeno migratorio masivo que ha ocurrido a nivel global, las producciones cinematográficas han adoptado diversos enfoques para traer las historias de este nuevo grupo demográfico a la pantalla grande. Sin embargo, la perspectiva desde la cual se presenta la información tiene el poder de cambiar la percepción de los espectadores respecto a la situación y a los involucrados. Es por esta razón que este estudio propone analizar cuatro formas en las cuales se están representando a los inmigrantes y refugiados en el cine actual además de reflexionar sobre el nuevo rol del séptimo arte como herramienta de denuncia social, y abrir a la vez la discusión sobre la ética y el compromiso social de los cineastas al momento de abordar temas relacionados con el actual estado sociopolítico nacional e internacional.

PALABRAS CLAVE / Refugiados, inmigrantes, representación.



The African Doctor

(Bienvenue à Marly-Gomont,
Julien Rambaldi, 2016).

“E very cinema is political” says French-Greek director Constantin Costa-Gavras and he is absolutely right, because cinema is a tool to protest and respond to reality by means of stories that open the door to new perspectives of the human condition. Rather than an escape, cinema becomes the form in which foreign contexts turn tangible for those who do not know of their existence and one of its goals is to bring to the table and place under public scrutiny, discussions and decisions that are made behind closed doors, among emperors whose reasoning is locked in bank vaults. Films are not mere entertainment because they carry messages that take the voices of those who are not heard and make them vibrate throughout the world.

That is why in order to achieve the objective of this paper: to analyze the forms in which immigrants and refugees are being represented in today’s cinema from different points of view, the Cartesian plane will be used. So following four items: 1) independent cinema, 2) big-budget cinema, 3) cinema from the refugees’ and immigrants’ perspectives, and 4) cinema from the perspectives of people who are not involved with the migratory crisis, it will be possible to carry out an analysis of each

item and also generate possible comparisons and contrasts among them. Finally, we will present a reflection about the role of the cinema as the witness of the realities all over the world and its role as a tool for social protest [FIGURE 1].

In the first part of this Cartesian plane we have the left, and of course the independent cinema. This type of cinema can be considered a rebel in the industry since it seeks new challenges, provides a view of the conflicts around the world and is willing to step out of the idealistic cinema tradition to explore other horizons with unpopular stories. Its financing comes from the pockets of entrepreneurs that take a risk with low-budget films whose job it is to tell uncomfortable stories that generate questions about the political, economic, educational, cultural and historical machineries that govern the world. The independent cinema is a strong contender not in terms of resources but in terms of structure because it accommodates and provides exposure for vulnerable populations, for pariah narratives, for social outcasts.

In general, independent films tell the stories of day-to-day human conflicts such as sexuality in *Moonlight*, (Barry Jenkins, 2016), war in *Silenced*, (James Spione, 2014), heartbreak in *Krishna* (Trey E. Shults, 2016), the crisis of values in *The Florida Project*, (Sean Baker, 2017), fear in *Whose Streets?*, (Sabaah Folayan, 2017) or religion in *Mustang* (Deniz Gamze Ergüven, 2015). All of these movies begin their reflection around specific themes from the characters' dissection and they continue with a study of what it means to be a human being in interconnected social fabrics, where the majority dominates the minorities and forces them to be part of the heterogeneity that threaten to wipe out individual virtues, simultaneously eliminating the opposition's right to protest and uprising.

However, and even though the independent cinema finds itself in a fertile ground regarding themes and perspectives, this is not a type of popular cinema in the West, where Hollywood controls a large share of the market. It is because of this particular situation that several countries in Europe,

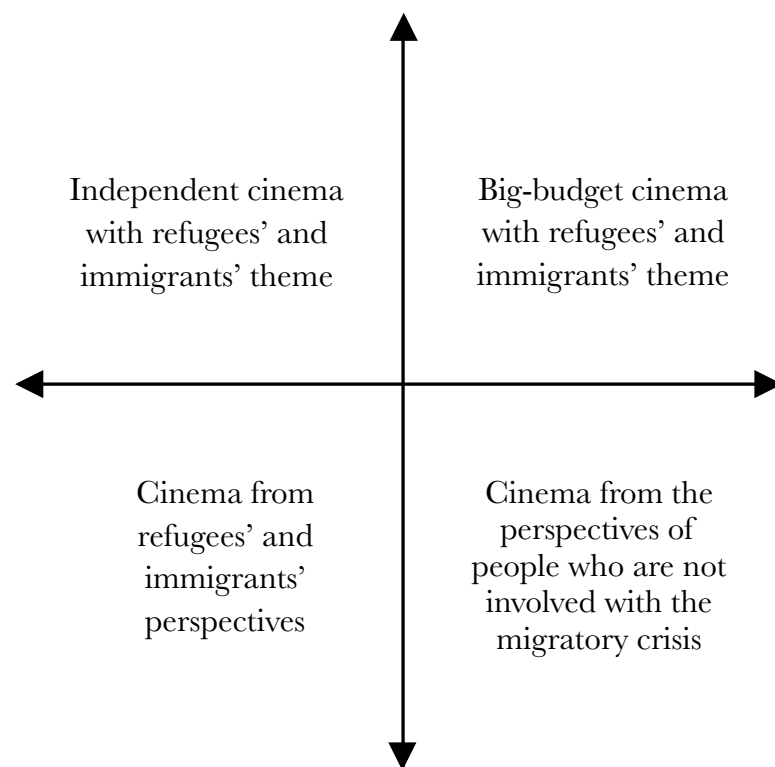


FIGURE 1. Cartesian Plane of the points of view from which the cinema dealing with migrants and refugees have been presented.

Latin America and other latitudes, have become constant producers of low-budget cinema and in addition, have been working for several years to promote spaces for this cinema to gain exposure and recognition. An example of this effort are the different festivals such as the Cannes, Berlin, Venice, San Sebastian, Zurich, the Immigration Film Festival, the London Migration Film Festival, the Festival of Migrant Film, Films Across Borders, the San Francisco Immigrant Films Festival, among others, which work as platforms to publicize at the local, national and international level, the films dealing with political and humanitarian themes that have become popular in the last two decades.

In these contexts, the cinema is used as a tool of social revolution to reveal the reasons why these great migrations are happening, the immigrants' and refugee's plight and their escape journeys, in addition to the abuse they are subjected to because of their illegal alien situation and the possible mid- and long-term solutions to relieve this situation.

It is due to global multiculturalism and the initiative to encourage the new directors to take a look at the social

problems afflicting the people, that the movies related with the topics of immigration, refugees, social changes, political unrest, economic instability, cultural and religious practices that go against human rights and children's rights, have had a platform to shed light into the problems that occur throughout the world.

The independent cinema is providing a voice for the victims of the migratory crisis, who are the result of international corruption and manipulation as the world looks on in silence and learns about hatred towards the other, since the forms in which immigrants and refugees are represented in their day-to-day through journalistic reports and the news are full of violence and terror, thus causing stigmas and xenophobia among the civilian population that find themselves in the dichotomy between the journalistic bombardment and lack of first-hand objective information. Enrique Martínez-Salanova, a pedagogue and member of International Amnesty, emphasizes that the information supplied to the public causes prejudicial opinions and misinformation:

In our society we have deeply internalized the opinion that the migratory phenomena are associated with the increase of social insecurity and crime rates. And the media are to blame for that to a large extent, sometimes by collecting information from some right-wing politicians, who constantly –as the news breaks– plant the seed that wherever there is crime there are immigrants, without stopping to consider that also, unfortunately wherever there is a labor accident there are always immigrants (2008, p. 3).

On the other hand, there are many medium-feature but few long-feature documentaries that manage to tell these stories mainly because they run into two obstacles: the first is financing and the other is distribution. The economic links, public awareness and questioning national and international policies make the investors take a step back and they prefer to look out for themselves and watch the backs of political leaders whose corruption has transgressed the cinema industry to include it in the media propaganda business. In addition,

when looking for cinema material on refugees and immigrants on the web or the streets, most of the titles are either hard or impossible to get because they are little known or come from independent productions, so their distribution is almost nil. The material produced throughout the globe exposing the subhuman conditions in which millions of people live resulting from the war between the powerful cannot find a way into the global transcultural market because it is not considered an important or strong contender to compete against the Hollywood monopoly at the world's box office.

An example of this situation is the International Amnesty webpage, where this article can be read: “7 free short documentary films on refugees, recommended by human rights educators,” written by Camille Roch in March, 2016, where there is a list of seven short films, and their links, which deal with the issue of human rights from the refugees' perspective: *People of Nowhere* (Lior Sperandeo, 2015), *Seeking Refugee: Ali's Journey From Afghanistan* (Andy Glynne, 2012), *Then I Came by Boat* (Marleena Forward, 2014), *Malak and the Boat* (André Holzmeister, 2016), *A Life on Hold* (Nick Francis and Marc Silver, 2012) and *When You Don't Exist* (John Denver, 2013), these are short films that show the conflict on foreign soil from the individual voices that reconstruct their past and the moment when they had to flee in order not to die. A single character who with his voice, old pictures and animation and caricatures, manages to connect with the viewer and leave a clear, simple message: a refugee is a human being with a past who is looking for a future. However, this information is lost for lack of exposure and a public to whom deliver the message.

Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that independent cinema dealing with the topic of immigration and refugees have made their way into the major leagues by means of a gap in the categories of Best Animated Picture and Best Picture in a non-English Language in the US Academy Awards. In the last 13 years, pictures such as *Howl's Moving Castle* (*Howl no Ugoku Shiro*, Hayao Miyazaki, 2005), *Persepolis* (Marjane

Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud, 2007), **Book of Kells** (Tomm Moore and Nora Twomey, 2010), **Chico and Rita** (Fernando Trueba, Javier Mariscal and Tono Errando, 2011), **The Wind Rises** (*Kaze Tachinu*, Hayao Miyazaki, 2013) and **The Breadwinner** (Nora Twomey, 2017), have been nominated in the category of Best Animated Feature. These movies resort to the children's artifact of illustration to show the dehumanization of war and the abuse inflicted on the victims of international conflicts. This fact has made it possible for these stories to be popularized so that they can gain a space in the global market because once they are nominated, pop culture accepts them and makes them popular thus contributing to their mass distribution and the subsequent awareness of the horror of war by people all over the world.

These films show refugees and immigrants as survivors and fighters that do not intend to take advantage of the resources that do not belong to them, all they want is a chance to earn a place in the new world. Unfortunately, this opportunity is restricted by factors such as nationality, race, beliefs and gender.

Regarding the category of Best Picture in a non-English Language, films that have been nominated and won such as **Nowhere in Africa** (*Nirgendwo in Afrika*, Caroline Link 2001), **Tsotsi** (Gavin Hood, 2005), **The Class** (*Entre les murs*, Laurent Cantet, 2008), **Waltz with Bashir** (*Vals Im Bashir*, Ari Folman, 2008), **The White Ribbon** (*Das weiße Band*, Michael Haneke, 2009), **In a Better World** (*Hævnen*, Susanne Bier, 2010), **Biutiful** (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2010), **A Separation** (*Yodá-e Nader az Simín*, Asghar Farhadi, 2011), **Monsieur Lazhar** (*Monsieur Lazhar*, Philippe Falardeau, 2011), **The Missing Picture** (*L'image manquante*, Rithy Panh, 2013), **Omar** (Hany Abu-Assad, 2013), **Timbuktu** (*Timbuktu*, Abderrahmane Sissako, 2014) and **Son of Saul** (*Saul fia*, László Nemes, 2015) among others, are narratives that reveal the complexity of this social phenomenon from the immigrants' and refugees' perspectives, without treating

them as the victims and exposing the consequences of war on the civilian population.

Galiano León (2008) refers to the migration cinema as a "medium that represents critically the difficulties entailed by adapting to this other new way of life since it always involves a series of profound social and human problems" (p. 177). This way, these forms of representation are accessible to the international public by means of an action as simple as buying a ticket and watching a movie.

Although in previous decades the majority of the films had shown almost exclusively the devastation caused by war and genocide in Africa at the hands of popular gangs, armed groups, illegal governments, corrupt blue helmets, etcetera, through images that brought about bitterness and mutated into the viewer's rejection, these horrors are moving westward and the cinema is now a tool to denounce the scourge of the crimes committed against those who flee, showing them as beings seeking equality, justice and also exposing the guilty parties, while it takes a stand against the media sale of the fake terrorism from the East.

It could be argued then from the previous analysis, that the independent cinema on a small and large scale continues its social work by providing a space for these subject matters and promoting them by means of festivals and word of mouth among the faithful to the cinema with a social and political content. Moreover, this type of cinema brings to the table discussions that in some cases manage to generate support initiatives that materialize in Non-Government Organizations, these entities seek to provide assistance for vulnerable people in need, in addition to promoting the creation of new jobs, donations and collection of necessary items. However, the most important task of independent cinema dealing with the topic of immigrants and refugees is to promote relations of empathy in the day-to-day [FIGURE 2].

To continue with the study of the items on the Cartesian plane, we will analyze now and in contrast with the previous item, how the issue of immigrants and refugees is dealt with

FIGURE 2. *Dheepan* (Jaques Audiard, 2015). The movie tells the story of an ex-guerrilla from Sri Lanka who arrives in France and faces the social problems within the country. The film won the Golden Palm in the 2015 Cannes Film Festival.



in big-budget cinema. This type of cinema is usually made in Hollywood, since the world's major cinema producers are based there, case in point: Warner Bros, Walt Disney Pictures, Universal Studios, 20th Century Fox, to mention but a few, and their content is consumed all over the planet.

In the last few years, the American industry has started a frantic race to revive superheroes and villains from comics, making biographical pictures and producing sequels and *spin-off* of classics. However, this currently reveals that the audiovisual contents giant has decided to turn its back to what is happening nowadays, refusing to mass produce and distribute films with a social content that directly denounce the situation in the new international panorama. Perhaps this current is a response to the overexploitation by the mass media regarding the international conflicts and the internal crises that overflow television, the printed media and the social networks –perhaps–. Nevertheless, Hollywood's refusal to look out the international window has left a void in representing the new world demographic group: immigrants and refugees from all the points of the compass.

Monica Castillo published in October, 2017 in *The New York Times* the article “Hollywood's Diversity Problem and Undocumented Immigrants” where she points out that though migration is part of the history of the foundation of Hollywood and it is a topic on which several movies were made in the early decades, this type of content seems to have been censored by the industry which in addition, has remained on the margin of telling stories whose subject matter is the object of current controversy, one that needs perspectives.

And that does not mean that in the last few decades Hollywood has not produced their fair share of movies that present the longed-for American dream, examples of this is *The Godfather: Part II* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974), *Moscow on the Hudson* (Paul Makurzy, 1984), *An American Tale* (Don Bluth, 1986), *Coming to America* (John Landis, 1988), *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), *Dancer in the Dark* (Lars von Trier, 2000), *Gangs of New York*, (Martin Scorsese, 2002), *In America* (Jim Sheridan, 2003), *The Terminal* (Steven Spielberg, 2004), *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006), *The Immigrant*

(James Grey, 2013), *Brooklyn* (John Crowley, 2015) to mention but a few of the most important box office hit films dealing with the topic of immigration and refugees before the new millennium.

These movies managed to spellbind the spectator with the promise of a better tomorrow in the land of opportunities but it is precisely this aspect which turns the whole theme into a paradox, since though these movies approach immigration and the pursuit of a haven in foreign lands, they do not actually portray realistically what immigrants live through on their pilgrimage and quest for asylum. There is too much stylization, an idealistic fantasy that promises a happy ending with a merely superficial struggle where love, forgiveness and hope conquer all, but reality is not like that, the opportunities for the immigrants and refugees to have a new life is not found on the streets or in favors, they are few and far between and they have to fight hard to get them against bureaucratic giants, corruption and xenophobia.

Blood Diamond (Edward Zwick, 2006), *The Last King of Scotland*, (Kevin Macdonald, 2006), *Beasts of No Nation* (Cary Fukunaga, 2015) or *He Named Me Malala* (Davis Guggenheim, 2015) are productions that have received worldwide recognition on account of the filmmakers and actors that appear in them. Acclaimed by the critic and nominated to international awards, these films present the internal conflict from countries whose governments are corrupt and are associated with national and international genocidal criminals. Moreover, they show the role of international bodies and the failures in the legal systems that, through trade treaties and illegal purchase of raw materials, promote the exploitation of foreign lands, the use of children in forced labor and the forced internal displacement of thousands of families that end up in refugee fields, thus adding to the orphan generations raised in the middle of the conflict and human rights violations, waiting for aid that is stolen or refused while they suffer the ever-present threat of left-wing and right-wing guerrillas.

Nevertheless, what crushes the possible impact of these movies as a form of denunciation and prevents debate to exert pressure on international bodies for them to help the civilian population, is the fact that war and its victims are isolated and overshadowed by the figure of the white man that becomes involved in a tragedy in which he seeks to be the hero or for which he either sacrifices himself or is sacrificed. Then, the victims are not the characters who suffer because of the war and have to flee to survive but they are turned into the savage monsters that come to the West to consume it with their barbaric ways [FIGURE 3].

Though an enemy is pointed at openly, nothing happens because the fiction in the story surpasses the denouncement of the situations of vulnerability in which a part of the world's population is living at present. Furthermore, spectators have already become jaded by these realities due to over-exposure to violence and war in the media, so the stories do not have the desired impact. It should be understood that the power that finances the armed conflict cannot be defeated with speeches during the awards ceremony, it is necessary for there to be a mass movement, it is necessary to go from the denunciation to the action, but how?

An example of the mass movement to denounce the politics that brings about injustice for the migrant and refugee population is that of the Latinos in Hollywood. Actors who are well known in Latin America and Ibero America such as Gael García Bernal, Salma Hayek, Diego Luna, Javier Bardem, Penélope Cruz, and directors who have been awarded the Oscar such as Alfonso Cuarón, Alejandro González Iñárritu and Guillermo del Toro, have advocated protesting and seeking the eradication of new xenophobic policies by President Donald Trump, who in his discourse has revealed a tendency towards the idea of white supremacy and exacerbated nationalism whose immediate targets are foreigners, immigrants and political refugees.

This group of personalities, using their international recognition as a platform to make interventions, cinema creation



FIGURE 3. *Blood Diamond* (Edward Zwick, 2006). The poster of the movie is divided in two: the left shows the white hero, and you can see the other two protagonists on the right. There is no emphasis on the conflict of the blood diamonds or their victims.



FIGURE 4. *The African Doctor* (*Bienvenue à Marly-Gomont*, Julien Rambaldi, 2016). The poster shows a Congolese family surrounded by French people who stare at them in surprise from a distance.

works, denunciations, among others, have reminded the American people and the world at large that the USA is a land that was founded in multiculturalism and the possibility to work to attain a dream.

Migration is a natural social phenomenon that has made it possible for ties to be interwoven among different nations throughout history and closing down borders creates situations that go against human dignity, generating unnecessary crises and segregations that are reminiscent of situations such as the legality of slavery until 1948, when the UNO abolished it by means of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the suffragette movement that was created to make the government recognize women's rights legally (such rights are still denied to women in Brunei, the United Arab Emirates and Vatican City); child marriage in Southern Asia, some areas of East and West Africa, the United States, among other countries; and considering homosexuality as a mental disease by the World Health Organization until 1990 and its subsequent decriminalization in 2003.

This comes to show that the big-budget film industry can contribute more than it has so far and that its commitment with the new international scenario goes from shifting paradigms in production and distribution, going through re-financing of projects from the east, west, north and south, to political activism. It is not possible to continue to give the people placebos with animation films that show other ideal worlds when ours is being bled to death by capitalism and genocide; the audiences need to wake up with stories and images that carry a message of emergency, one that urges common action.

In the article "Hollywood does not sell anymore: the cinema is facing its worst year in a century", published in *Vanity Fair* magazine in June, 2016, which talks about the drop in box office collection and the fall of Hollywood due to their constant recycling of stories, it is mentioned as well that the public goes to the movies to have an experience and they demand an awakening of the senses because they want

to be surprised by the characters and the fiction. This is an opportunity for filmmakers, without the need to resort to blood and the morbid –in Tarantino's style–, to present feature films with which the moviegoer can connect, one that provides upsetting experiences so as to promote actions offering real possibilities of support: pages to donate money and resources, names of NGO's to welcome immigrants, support and relocation programs for the population in a condition of vulnerability and any other kind of mass movement that is deemed useful to relief the crisis and help the victims.

Big budget movies from Hollywood have so far managed to avoid participating directly in advocating the victims of worldwide conflict, hiding behind utopian dream worlds, refusing to take a definitive stand and work for the betterment of the immigrants' and refugees' situation which has catalyzed in the last two decades due to lack of commitment and tangible solutions by the world powers regarding migration and international conflicts. It is high time for renowned film makers and actors and everyone else who has either the budget or the recognition, to join together as one and admit that there is a very migratory crisis that has taken place this last decade, providing a voice for those who are censored by the media, calling the necessary attention to relief helplessness and rethinking actions that have the potential to generate an impact both in the mid and long run.

So far two opposing items have been analyzed on the Cartesian plane regarding the forms in which the topic of immigrants and refugees is approached in the cinema. Though it is understood that both the independent cinema and the big budget cinema have different formats, consumers and purposes, here we have two branches that contribute to either clarifying the immigrants' and refugees' situation in new territories, or the generation and reaffirmation of more myths and stereotypes that permanently harm not only the image but also the possibilities of receiving help and support that this rapidly growing group may get at the local and international levels. Therefore, the discussion about the ethics of

the cinema exercise is brought to the table no matter what its origin is, when it has among its objects of study realities resulting from global political comparisons and this population in particular due to the fact that cinema and the movies are, as Sorlin mentions:

The instruments society has to put itself on the stage, to show itself. They are never carried out in a naïve or neutral manner because they intend to intervene in society promoting different interests. In fact, it is well known that the cinema has played a crucial role in the makeup of popular imaginaries since the last century (1996, p. 45).

Therefore, there is a responsibility on the part of the filmmaker and the entertainment industry not only when it comes to presenting contents referring to the topic of immigration and refugees but also when it comes to considering the perspective from which such content is presented. That is why the following part of this paper focuses on the perspectives from which the migratory and refugee crisis is told in contemporary cinema.

The third part of the Cartesian plane contains the perspective taken by the stories in the movies when they show the realities through the immigrants' and refugees' eyes and experiences, those who are forced to seek asylum in foreign lands due to the inner crisis in their countries. The purpose of showing the vulnerable side of the conflict situation is not to encourage the viewers' pity, who generally do not go beyond making comments on the social networks, but also to generate in them an activation of critical thinking; going beyond the comment of *poor people* to enable a reflection about the events, looking for reasons and explanations, connecting the different social realities to clear up the events and find the people responsible. As Basili mentions, "there is an inherent need to tell the victims' stories that is focused on the ethical responsibility before political crimes: the link between the story and the power" (2017, p. 44). Thus, the stories told by immigrants and refugees, where their experience is presented as the point

of departure, have the scope of pointing at the guilty parties without serving an international political agenda.

And once again it is independent cinema the one that takes the lead and provides the tool and medium to tell the events from the point of view of those who have lived the conflict and instead of taking part in a war cycle, they have decided to flee. This can be considered an objective outlook because those who talk and recreate a succession of events are people who have lived the violence and devastation of war in the flesh. Here there is no television in between to edit the news story and censor authoritatively, disguising figures and protecting private interests, here there is a voice with the power to change the elusive, unpleasant looks that are above giving an opinion, since it forces the viewers to take a stand regarding the situation because after all, cinema is not for people to escape reality but for them to reflect upon it and take a stand in favor or against.

The cinema that tells the story of migration and their quest for asylum from the perspective of those who have lived through it helps to generate an understanding of the migratory phenomenon by the civilian population that has become used to seeing conflict victims as figures and threats. By giving this opportunity to the observers so that they see this crisis from a position where the consequences of war and immigration are presented as the only choice to not die, a sort of dialog is established, an understanding of the other and towards the other. This way, the observer reflects about the idea that the alien, the immigrant, the refugee is not someone who has come to invade or conquer their land but an individual who is looking for a way out of genocide, crisis and the violation of human rights.

By means of the audiovisual discourse, the common person can put themselves in the immigrant's or refugee's shoes and reach a minimal level of empathy that is expected for them to change the way they think and act towards these people. Patti Absher, who headed the executive team of the Immigration Film Festival in Washington D.C., in an interview for

the newspaper *El Tiempo Latino* in 2016, claimed: “The people who come to see these films cannot remain indifferent to the situation of millions of people in the USA and the hundreds of millions all over the world who flee from wars, poverty, natural disasters and violent political repression to seek a better future and a better life” (quoted in Avendaño, 2016).

Sharing universal values is the first step to acknowledge the other and their situation, after all, we are all migrants and just like those who are internally displaced and the aliens find a home in our lands, we do the same thing when we seek better luck beyond our hemisphere.

Whether they are legal or illegal, mass migrations bring about the redefinition of borders, reconsidering the social representations of certain kinds of populations that have been stereotyped throughout history and negotiating national identity.

Although they are hard to find, these movies have made their way into the foreign market thanks to streaming platforms, more specifically, Netflix. This platform has managed to establish itself among the powerful in the industry in the intercontinental arena while it maintains its foundational ideals such as financing high quality projects with low budget and a social message. When you search the words *refugee* or *immigrant* on this server, a great variety of materials are offered: from series to documentaries and feature films, the majority of them in French, Spanish and English.

This tool provides a more significant scope for the refugees’ and immigrants’ voice, and with materials of an independent origin such as *The African Doctor* (*Bienvenue à Marly-Gomont*, Julien Rambaldi, 2016), *Refugee* (Clementine Malpas and Leslie Knott, 2016) and *Living On One Dollar* (Chris Temple, Zach Ingrasci, Sean Leonard, 2013), the viewer finds clear-cut stands about the conflict and the forms in which this social situation bleeds out the civilian population, about how difficult it is to be a refugee or an immigrant on foreign lands where there is an abundance of discrimination, and about the outrage and abuse to which these people are subjected on a

daily basis with the people they have to interact with: from their neighbors to the high executives and other workers that serve them in the government bureaucracy.

It is by means of these little-known films that the spectator learns about the situation from the other side, from the perspective of those that have to endure discrimination [FIGURE 4].

A good example of popular films that have been box office hits worldwide in the last decade dealing with the theme of immigration, movies that tell stories told about the perspective of the immigrant and the refugee is *District 9* (Neill Blomkamp, 2009). This film is presented as a unique opportunity to explain how big-budget cinema can become involved with social issues, even if it is in an indirect or metaphorical manner and also show the perspective of the pariah. The science fiction story, inspired in the case of District 6 in Cape Town, South Africa during the apartheid, shows a community of extraterrestrial aliens separated from the civilian population and their subsequent elimination. What calls the attention about this story is that the word *alien* could be replaced by *Negro*, *Asian*, *Latino*, *woman*, *gay*, *immigrant*, *refugee*, *Muslim*, or any other minority, and still the spectator would be able to understand the problems hidden in the application of xenophobic, racist measures under private bureaucratic and political concepts.

In the words of French philosopher Simone Weil, “approaching the innocent, helpless population’s suffering opposes every attempt at rationalization to the nihilistic character of massacres” (2007, p. 525). Hence, by showing the other as an equal and understanding their motivations, their struggles and hopes, it is possible to establish a link with the spectator who is expected to change his way of thinking about those who are different so that it translates into his interactions in daily life.

Although there is fear of the nature of those who come to occupy the territories, there should also be a concern about our racist, sexist and xenophobic nature because it is the

nationals (in the majority of the cases) who close the spaces and create incorruptible imaginary lines that are to the detriment of other human beings compounding their situation even further. As Rose (1995) concludes, there is generalized fear among the population of the idea and the reality of migration because the limits are erased, there is no more inside and outside, everything is open and can be trespassed, so this new reality should not be understood as negative but as positive because it allows erasing barriers and keeping the people's history and multiculturalism alive, as a result of demographic movements from the past.

In addition, there is a general phenomenon in the narrations presented from the refugees' and immigrants' perspective that should be pointed out and it is the absence of hatred, the absence of a search for revenge against their oppressors. There is no label of villain or murderer or the intention of creating antagonism. These people simply tell their stories to seek understanding and empathy from the listeners while they provide their knowledge of the atrocities that are committed in some of the corners of the third world, sponsored by international policies and with the financing of illegal armed groups.

Lastly, the final part to be analyzed is dedicated to films that show the conflict from the perspective of people who are not involved in it. That is, those who are affected indirectly or those who when trying to know more about the situation, find themselves involved in these forms of violence and through their story, they intend to call the attention of international audiences.

There are several examples of this perspective, case in point, the film *The Bang Bang Club* (Steven Silver, 2011), which tells the story of the life of war photojournalist Kevin Carter during the final days of apartheid in the South Africa and starvation in Sudan. This young photographer won the Pulitzer Prize in April, 1994 with the photograph of a hungry child being stalked by a vulture. Later that year, he committed suicide. However, the relevant aspect of this movie

is analyzing how it takes the attention focus that should be given to war, famine and the civilians that suffer from these conditions and it is refocused on the life of a single individual. And it does not mean that this perspective should not be told, because after all the story is told from the voice of a witness of the events, but once again the external agent is taken and turned into a martyr, it is given a relevance that should be directed towards the war victims, who in the process lose the summons to social action [FIGURE 5].

Other examples of stories told from the perspective of people uninvolved with the conflict and the migratory crises are the Spanish production *Sarah's Notebook* (*El cuaderno de Sara*, Norberto López Amado, 2018), the documentary *A Place in Time* (Angelina Jolie, 2007), the fictions *Beyond Borders* (Martin Campbell, 2003), *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979), *The Good Lie* (Philippe Falardeau, 2014) or *The Intouchables* (*Intouchables*, Olivier Nakache and Eric Toledano, 2012) among others.

These productions that intend to show war victims and the precarious situations in which they live are crushed in their attempt because they give more importance to the look of that person who knows the situation superficially and how they feel about it overlooking the immigrants' and refugees' perspective. However, it should be pointed out that they do not set out to minimize the importance of the pain felt by those who have lost their families in the hands of violence or those who seek answers in foreign realities, but in their quest the voice of the direct victims is lost and once again the call to action, to denounce, to social work to solve the conflicts takes a back seat because the main characters are those living a deed of personal and family discovery using the victims of the international conflict as point of reference.

The exposure of the foreign situations is overlooked because the films choose an emotional vehicle that is alien to these realities for their presentation and analysis, alienating the observer and leaving little if any room for the profound understanding of war situations and the abuse they bring

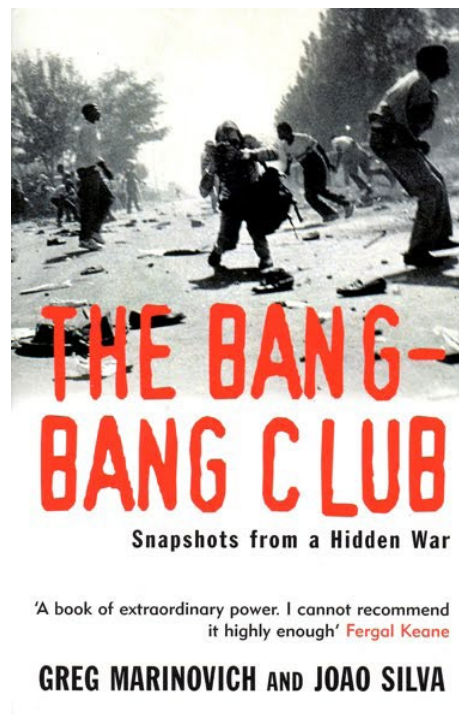
about, in this particular case, mass territorial displacements. At the end of the movie, the viewer relates more with the external agent's trauma than with that of the refugee or immigrant and at times it is even indicated that it is their responsibility that someone else is involved in these conflagration situations because of the simple fact that the importance of their suffering is minimized. This way, the white man appropriates the entire external reality to become the center of attention.

In a study carried out by professor Charlton Mcllwain (quoted in "Cleveland: do white victims receive more attention?", 2013), it was revealed that white women occupy a privileged position as the victim of violent crimes in news reports. That is, the events involving a white victim have more media coverage than any other story originated in a different ethnic group.

As it can be observed from the information presented and analyzed previously, this phenomenon goes beyond the mass media and has permeated the film industry and there is evidence to that not only in the way the stories of the majority of ethnic groups around the world have turned toward the white man's egocentrism and his need to make it all about himself, in addition to the shortage of world famous productions that deal with the minorities, whether they are ethnic, gender or religious minorities. The tendency to make the white man the protagonist of the story surpasses the attempts by filmmakers to show other realities and it frustrates their attempts to help others who really need it. Consequently, it is necessary to reflect on the forms in which stories are told: what is the purpose of the narration and what perspective is it told from?

This way, the points of view from which the migratory phenomenon is told in the cinema field, –which has intensified

FIGURE 5. Cover of the book *The Bang Bang Club*, written by Greg Marinovich and João Silva and the poster of the film of the same name *The Bang Bang Club* (Steven Silver, 2011). Photos published by the website *Delhi Photography Club* to commemorate Photography World Day in 2016. You can see how in both photos attention falls on the photographers, not the victims.



in the last decade—, are relevant at the moment in which this demographic group is presented and characterized, because these representations bring about myths, stereotypes or changes in appreciation that can affect negatively or positively the public's perception regarding immigrants and refugees, the causes for their displacement, their role in the construction of transcultural societies, the challenges they face to have a better future and the commitment of the societies that receive said immigrants. Consequently, filmmakers should understand the responsibility entailed by presenting the spectators with a biased idea because it shapes the way in which the world and conflict victims are understood. In the words of director David Riker, the director of *The Girl* (2012): “Films can be extremely destructive and harmful. They shape much of how people look at the world and at others. taking up a camera entails a huge responsibility” (quoted in Johnson, March 23, 2013).

From the arguments presented above, it can be concluded that cinema is a social tool whose task it is to convey messages to society at large, from and towards all the corners of the planet, whether the observers are involved or not directly in the global conflicts in the current moment.

That just like in the news shows and the newspapers, it is their duty to tell stories but as opposed to the news shows and newspapers, films allow the observers to expand their outlook and subsequent understanding of the different realities, beyond figures or labels, resulting from the stigmas and prejudices that have been created in the people's imaginary, which are promoted by wrongful representations of social groups that are marginalized or in a condition of vulnerability, representations where misinformation originates about the current state of war and crisis.

Therefore, cinema is presented as a tool and a means to provide a voice for those who have fallen victims of global war conflicts and live the consequences of said conflicts due to the indulgence characterizing the international community represented by international courts and treaties. Moreover, the cinema is responsible for the ideas it presents and the forms in which it presents the individuals who find themselves involved in international crises, that is why its content should be studied and analyzed thoroughly, not only from the perspective of those who decide to create and tell stories dealing with the topic of immigration and its purposes with said material, but also from the protagonist's perspectives (whether an immigrant, refugee, or an external agent), at the same time considering the possible paradigm changes by the spectator from the reception of the information presented.

These are the reasons why the cinema dealing with immigration should have among its principles to promote debate and represent as many demographic groups around the world as possible, since an excluding cinema shows social bankruptcy when it excludes certain individuals, leaving room for stigmas, prejudices and the promotion of wrong representations that make it difficult to accept and open up culturally to others. López Aguilera (2010) refers to director Jennifer Kent when he reflects on how the cinema is a mirror of the world and its realities therefore, if the cinema represents only a part of the population (generally the privileged part) it is not fulfilling its job and in this void of information you are not allowed to eliminate the blame laid on victims due to situations created by inconsistent policies that perpetuate the power management model. 🎬

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