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Filmscapes of Antagonism:
from Hausa Videos to Amir Naderi's Visions.

> When visual culture tells stories, they are about ghosts.
> They are not about the "spirit" but about spectres; they
> refuse ontology in order to evoke *hauntology*.
> (Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Ghost Writing:
> Working Out Visual Culture")

This article explores the relation between the filmic representations of alternative subjectivities and the experience of migration concerning both movies and filmmakers. I will first analyse the videos produced in Hausa society, in Northern Nigeria, as a hybrid cultural product emerging from the "migration" of Indian movies to Nigeria; then I will examine the transformations of the migrant self in the films of the Iranian filmmaker Amir Naderi based on his personal experience of migration to New York city. I would suggest that, although ontologically and geographically distant, the two examples of filmic production are *hauntologically* close. As hybrid, marginal products, they haunt and unsettle both the hegemonic landscape of Hollywood and the Western ontological paradigms about cultural identity and national belonging.

When representations of cultural identity are related to diasporas, they problematize and even disrupt the presumed indissolubility between identity and nation, because, as Stuart Hall argues: "identity is rather produced within not outside representation."[1] Diasporas eradicate any easy continuity between cultural identity and belonging, which is now "partly, in the imaginary and therefore always partly constructed in fantasy, or at least within a phantasmatic field."[2] The diasporic identity "belongs" to the field of representation, to a volatile space beyond the culturally homogeneous nation(alist) boundaries, in accordance with its multiple, hybrid, splitting nature. It is in the transnational landscape of images that cultural identities are now situated.

If the relation between diasporas and visuality can be considered a significant example in the questioning of assumed notions of cultural identity and national belonging, it is important to underline the fundamental role that the diaspora of images, or the global circuits of distribution and consumption, play in the process. The concept of mediascapes coined by Arjun Appadurai is very illuminating. According to the Indian anthropologist, a mediascape is made up by the heterogeneous and uncontrollable global fluxes of images created by media (newspapers, magazines, television, Internet, films) which provide alternative narratives of life to viewers throughout the world:

> What [*mediascapes*] offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places. These scripts can and do get disaggregated into complex sets of metaphors by which people live as they help to constitute … fantasies that could become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement.[3]

Mediascapes provide, therefore, the transnational ground upon which people construct their lives, produce their desires of migration, and eventually create new works of art that can be considered counter-narratives of the nation and national identity. A new, multicultural space of living and working unfolds between the fissures of national order. In the light of the tensions between homogenization and heterogenization caused by these fluxes, Appadurai describes the configuration of cultural forms as substantially fractal, suggesting, through the use of this particular term, that the polymorphism of postmodernity is adequately rendered through metaphors of a kind that relies on images of mutability, mobility, and flexibility: "flow and uncertainty, hence *chaos*, rather than… the older images of order, stability, and systematicness."[4]

Fractal geometry offers a way to describe irregular shapes that are self-similar, that is, shaped identically at their macro and micro levels. In this sense, I consider Hausa videos and Naderi's films as fractal metaphors of the postmodern condition because they share a migrant biography and present, at the macro and micro level, all the antagonistic aspects inscribed in the process of cultural hybridization. They show how cinema is both the product and the producing agent of otherness or of identities "altered" by the cultural contaminations, intrusions and intermissions stemming from the tensions between homogenization and heterogenization inscribed in modern diasporas.

Reflecting upon the relation between cultural identity and diaspora, Rey Chow suggests that film is a means through which culture can be explored as crisis, "especially in cultures whose experience of modernity is marked by conflicts between an indigenous tradition and foreign influences."[5] She argues that film is an ideal medium for rethinking culture by virtue of its technology that reproduces the past in the present, thus rendering "the dilemmas and contradictions, nostalgia and hopes, that characterize struggles toward modernity."[6] The filmic representations I refer to not only register, as Chow suggests, the crises of a changing culture, but they also reproduce new "critical" identities in the presumably homogeneous quality of national tissue and in the visual hegemony of Western media, as well.

Such visuality exceeds any power to control, eludes all rapacious expectations of totalizing and hegemonic perception, and opens itself to what Mirzoeff has described as 'phantasmagoria'.[7] The authors and even

[3] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimension of Globalization* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003 [1996]), 35.

[4] Appadurai, *Modernity*, 47.

[5] Rey Chow, "Filmic Visuality, Cultural Identity", in John Hill and Pamela Gibson, eds., *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 173.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Ghost Writing: Working out Visual Culture", in Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey, eds., *Art History, Aesthetics, Visual Studies* (Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, 2002), 189.

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the viewers of the films produced in diasporic contexts and interstitial conditions themselves become interstitial and elusive, 'haunting' the Western hegemonic visibility with their alternative realities:

> The ghost … is not everywhere. It is in-between – between the visible and the invisible, the material and the immaterial, the palpable and the impalpable, the voice and the phenomenon. The ghost is the place from which we should invoke the structures of visibility that have constructed, destroyed, and deconstructed the modern visual subject.[8]

[8] Ibid.

The spectres of visual culture are 'in-between' cultures, languages and identities; their permanent impermanence forces us to question the solidity and unity of our geographical and mental confines. Being transnational and transcultural, they are continually repositioning themselves, becoming open and subjected to the play of *différance*. In this sense, I consider "phantasmatic" the identities which the films and the filmmaker I refer to produce both outside and inside themselves. These "filmic" phantoms are lives deferred or, as Roland Barthes would say, " the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance", something that presents itself in the absence of a proper constitution, a proper land, a proper home; something that shows its identity without a proper name, and irreverently covers the authoritative clarity of well-established perspectives on cultural identity with a thick shadow of uncertainty.[9]

[9] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

I consider Hausa videos and Naderi's films as phantasmatic precisely by virtue of their multiform and powerfully elusive nature, and as antagonistic because their hauntology brings them into conflict with "tradition" and "origin". As regards Hausa videos, the phantasmatic otherness appears outside, in the alterations of the geographic and cultural identity of a community caused by the migration of Indian movies. Naderi's films show, instead, the phantasmatic otherness appearing inside the subject, in the transformations of the (auto)biographical identity as the effect of the author's personal experience of migration.

"Filmic" Communities and Love

> Do cultures actually exist as separate, pure, defensible entities? Is not mélange, adulteration, impurity, pick'n'mix at the heart of the idea of the modern, and hasn't it been that way for most of this all-shook-up century?
> (Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line*)

[10] See Brian Larkin, "Itineraries of Indian Cinema: African Videos, Bollywood, and Global Media", in Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, eds., *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media,* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003)

We can see how, through the unpredictable transnational migration of movies, the Indian presence surprisingly creeps into many aspects of everyday Hausa life.[10] In Kano, the major city of Northern Nigeria, stickers of Indian films and stars decorate buses and taxis; posters of Indian films

adorn the walls of tailors' shops and garages, and religious singers sing praises to the Prophet Mohammed by borrowing and modifying love songs from Indian films. Disrupting the dominance of Hollywood films, Indian romance, shown five nights a week, is incorporated in the local Hausa reality, thereby offering alternative worlds out of which women and men can imagine different forms of life.

What Hausa viewers recognize in Indian movies, despite the linguistic and religious differences, are the strong visual and social similarities to their own culture, especially when compared with American and English movies. The global trajectory of Bollywood conflates with the local reality, thus producing new hybrid formations in which we can hardly distinguish the Nigerian from the Indian traits.

Hybridity also concerns Hausa film production. This has become part of a wider and older national cinematic tradition, which some critics call *Nollywood* for it is the world's third biggest film industry. It develops in Southern Nigeria and is strongly influenced by Western movies. Yet we should speak of *Kannywood* as regards Hausa production since its growth follows a distinct trajectory developing around the city of Kano and carving its own identity by drawing from Bollywood. Hausa videos revolve around the theme of love and sequences based on singing and dancing which draw their motives and features both from the Hausa literary tradition of *littatafan soyayya* (love stories) and from the style of Indian romance.[11] Significantly, the strategies of cultural appropriation do not supplant cultural differences.

In the Hausa video *The Soul of my Heart* (*In da So Da K'auna*), written, produced and directed by Ado Ahmad, the protagonist, Sumayya, sits in her bedroom as a boy brings her a tape from her lover. She turns on the tape recorder and hears her lover announce he will sing her *Lambun Soyayya* (the garden of love). Acceptance of love occurs in the intimacy of a bedroom; lovers share the same space but only by virtue of song – so central to Indian films.[12] The Indian element, then, allows unusual proximity between lovers, while preserving the sexual segregation necessary to Hausa Islamic values. There is a "virtual" intimacy in this new way of loving which consists of something that mingles Bollywood with Hausa tradition but is irreducible to either. The anthropologist Brian Larkin maintains in fact that Indian films work for Hausa society "because they rest on a dialectic presence and absence culturally similar to Hausa society but at the same time reassuringly distant."[13] These films function for Hausa spectators as a "third space" which, as Homi Bhabha argues, "puts together the traces of other meanings or discourses, … [and] gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation", a new hybrid space between the poles of Islamic Hausa traditions and modern cultural production.[14] They also

[11] For the differences between *Nollywood* and *Kannywood* see Abdalla Uba Adamu et al, eds, *Hausa Home vodeos: Technology, Economy, and Society* (Kano: Center for Hausa Cultural Studies, 2004). With regards to the development of Nigerian film production, see the documentary film *This is Nollywood* by Franco Sacchi and Robert Caputo.

[12] For the importance of song in Bollywood love stories, see S. Prakash, "Music, Dance, and Popular Films: Indian Fantasies, Indian Repressions", in Aruna Vasudev and Philippe Lenglet, *Indian Cinema Superbazaar* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1983).

[13] Brian Larkin, "Itineraries of Indian Cinema: African Videos, Bollywood, and Global Media", in Shohat and Stam, 181.

[14] Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space", in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference,* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 210.

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[15] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 194.

constitute a means through which Hausa society affirms its identity in opposition to the neighbouring Westernized ethnicities. All this makes clear that, as Rey Chow suggests, we don't simply have to deconstruct the West as origin but, rather, to "dismantle both the notion of origin and the notion of alterity as we know them today".[15]

The migration of Bollywood movies to the Hausa community shows what happens when national films (produced in one nation and characterized by national traditional traits) become transnational mediascapes. They produce "translated" forms of cultures: something that is beyond the nation *and* beyond the idea of the nation as a space of original pureness. Culture – and love in this case - is thus constructed through a process of material and ideological transition. Through the consumption and creation of transnational films, Hausa society is itself deterritorialized, and acquires an intertextual, phantasmatic visuality. *Kannywood* is present but almost invisible in the hegemonic landscape of filmic industry; it creeps into the interstices of both national and Hollywood film production and represents alternative ways of being and loving. These new forms of re-presentation emerge in what Gianni Vattimo calls "the phantasmagorical world of mass media" with its liberating and emancipatory significance.[16] This world is then the place where identity leaves room for multiple identifications, where, in the tensions between homogenization and heterogenization, tradition fades into translation, the constant negotiation between the local and the global produces unpredictable effects, the 'origin' is substituted by 'construction' in representation.

[16] Quoted by Rey Chow in "Film as Ethnography, or Translation between Cultures in the Postcolonial World", in *Primitive Passions*, 175-202, 238-243. See Gianni Vattimo Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, trans. David Webb, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

This analysis focuses on collective and social phenomena; what then is at stake when migration involves not films but a filmmaker? What happens when transnational visuality concerns a single person? What are its effects on subjectivity? In the light of what Hausa videos exemplify, I will try to answer these questions by concentrating on the works of the Iranian-born, New York-based filmmaker Amir Naderi, where phantasmagoria is inscribed at a deeper personal level.

(Auto)biographic Exiles

> What is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both. Regard experiences as if they were to disappear. What is it that anchors them in reality? What would you save of them? What would you give up?
>
> (Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile*).

Interstitial existence characterizes Naderi's deterritorialized ethnoscape. As Hamid Naficy remarks, artists like Naderi exist in the field of what Derrida calls undecidability: like the hymen, the supplement, the mark,

the *pharmakon* they indicate one thing and its opposite at the same time.[17] Phantasmatic presences, "at once partial and plural" which, although at the margins of cultures, produce ambiguity about essentialist values concerning both their homelands and their host societies.[18] As part of a mediascape, their films poetically codify the tensions deriving from their own liminal position, exile, transculturation and integration. That is why Naficy considers them as transnational 'biographies':

> As authors of their texts (and to some extent of their lives) their biography is not just implicitly closed in their films. Often autobiography and self-reflexivity are the forces that drive the narratives and the tropes through which the films are conceived and structured. Any cultural space such as the translational liminality is capable of generating films that inscribe at a fundamental level their makers' station in life and their location in culture, marking their films with narrative and iconographic hybridities, doublings, and splittings.[19]

The Runner and *Manhattan by Numbers*, written and directed by Amir Naderi, can be intended as a single frame representing his transnational autobiography.[20] *The Runner* (1985) shows the approximate life of Amiro, one of the many (ghostly) children who inhabit the geography of exclusion. Amiro, orphaned in the war, lives in a rusty ship on the shore. He makes a living by selling bottles found by the sea, humble objects picked up from the scrap, and by working as a shoeshine boy for the sailors sitting at the café in the harbour. Amiro's reality is made of deprivation, precariousness and misery; his places are non-places, their vastness and desolation emphasized by the interminable shots over vast and deserted landscapes. Naderi's tendency to indulge in drawing scenes of solitude returns significantly in two sequences: in the first, an old lady, bent by pain, tries to proceed with much difficulty; in the second, an invalid walks on his encumbering crutches. The two characters 'emblematically' represent what Amiro is escaping from: the impossibility of escape. While the camera insists on the old lady and the invalid's slow and precarious movements, we have time enough to feel their pain and to be growingly invaded by a sense of frustration, immediately followed by an urgent desire for rebellion. It is for this reason that Amiro's main activity is racing: he races to learn the alphabet, he races against friends, trains, and classmates. By marking Naderi's narration with an original spatio-temporal rhythm, his proudly tenacious and strenuous run exorcizes the risk of remaining trapped in the stifling desolation of his homeland. It also expresses a strong lust for escape: Amiro dreams of sailing from Abadar on one of the many tankers crossing the gulf. Every day he shouts his despair at them, or else he dreams of flying away on one of the many military airplanes he contemplates from the fence that delimits the base. The film ends by leaving Amiro's desire suspended, but by following the autobiographical

[17] Hamid Naficy, "Phobic Spaces and Luminal Panics: Independent Transnational Film Genre", in Shoat and Stam, eds., *Multiculturalism*, 203-226.

[18] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), 15.

[19] Naficy, "Phobic Spaces", 213.

[20] For a general overview on Iranian cinema and Naderi's production see, among others, Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future* (New York: Verso, 2001); as regards the characteristics of Naderi's films see Massimo Causo e Grazia Paganelli, *Il vento e la città. Il cinema di Amir Naderi* (Milano: Il Castoro, 2006).

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traces of Naderi's works from *The Runner* to *Manhattan by Numbers*, we may nevertheless imagine that his run will finally lead him beyond the barriers of his nation to New York, with unpredictable results.

Manhattan by Numbers depicts the growing uncertainty and intense sensations of homelessness experienced by George Murphy, an unemployed journalist who lives in New York. Fired from his job, abandoned by his wife and son, who never appear in the film, he is deterritorialized in his own town. He starts desperately searching for his friend Tom Ryan, who could give him a job. His search turns into a hallucinatory, frantic voyage that brings him to a ghostly building where none of the flats has a name or number, then through Manhattan, among the stifling crowds, down into the underground and from the decrepitude of Harlem to the cold brightness of Wall Street. This endless itinerary makes Tom Ryan, and George himself, distant; they end up as two impersonal entities, in what seems to be a dehumanizing alienation. The scenes transform large urban spaces into compressed visualities, showing a distorted reality that mirrors the protagonist's feeling of displacement.

The Runner and *Manhattan by Numbers* may be defined as transnational autobiographies in that they refer to periods of Naderi's own life, respectively his childhood in Iran, at Abadan, and his experience of migration to New York. In the confrontation between the two films, an evident difference, or rather an opposition, can be noted in their representation of exile. In *The Runner* exile is described in utopian and euphoric terms and is present only in the form of desire; we can argue that this film does not properly deal with exile as it is entirely based on the lust for escape. Actually, Amiro runs to escape but he never crosses the frontier of his nation; he runs inflexibly but never achieves his goal; exile exists only in his dreams. In *Manhattan by Numbers*, Naderi allegorizes his actual experience of migration almost entirely in dystopic and dysphoric terms. George Murphy's feeling of displacement symbolizes the trauma which marks the passage of Naderi from his place, home, culture and tongue to a foreign one, and to a confrontation with newness. A sense of restlessness stemming from the questioning of his previous certainties about his origin and belonging marks the transition from old to new. Murphy's abandonment by his wife and child, his dismissal, the imminent eviction from his flat, the awareness that his elusive friend, Tom Ryan, has fallen on hard times and will be in no position to help him: what if not Naderi's fear of solitude and homelessness does all this reproduce? The fear of being "estranged" from his certainties? What I suggest is that Murphy's despair and his frantic search for his friend stand for the danger we run of being dramatically dependent on our certainties in order to survive.

In this sense, Said's observation that "borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons" can be

applied to both Amiro and Murphy.[21] Even though Murphy may represent in some way the accomplishment of Amiro's desire to escape from his homeland, he paradoxically ends up sharing Amiro's claustrophobic feeling of being trapped in a dead end. Their condition represents what happens when existence is too firmly fixed on stable points. The safety of familiar territory becomes a prison that gives rise to a burning *wanderlust* (as in the case of Amiro), but it can also turn to haunt our life when our desire of migration comes true (as in the case of Murphy).

Actually, Naderi's imaginary experience of migration, represented by Amiro's wanderlust, seems unexpectedly to be even more problematic when it comes true. Amiro's tenacious run in the wide Iranian landscape is in fact supplanted by George's hallucinatory wandering in the urban scenarios of New York and no "Iranian" trace of Naderi's identity is preserved in *Manhattan by Numbers*, as is made clear by the distance between the two main characters. While Amiro refers back directly to the author, the white American George Murphy makes the association more problematic. Yet, it seems that the complete absence of "Iranian-ness" has precisely the function of exasperating the effect of cultural erasure that exile brings with it: the invisibility of the "origin". The tension between the relation with something old and recognisable and the relation with something new and unrecognisable, or between tradition and translation, which marks every experience of exile, is resolved here in a radical turning away from the origin. A turning away that dramatizes the traumatic consequences of charging "the origin" with inalienable significance. It is significant to note that *The Runner* was one of the last films Naderi produced in Iran before his voluntary migration to the United States in the mid-1980s. In one of his interviews, he declares: "I want to make a complete break, destroy all the bridges. I want to have nothing to do with Iran, my family, Iranian cinema, or being an Iranian exile filmmaker. I want to be a great filmmaker".[22] Unlike many diasporic groups, Naderi expresses a decisive desire for a total break with his homeland, and a destruction of "all the bridges", thus dismantling the myth of a sacred origin to return to. Although, as Stuart Hall observes, the identity of many diasporic groups or persons is nurtured solely by the persistent desire to go home, the experience of diaspora is not defined by essence and pureness but, rather, by a necessary heterogeneity and diversity. Identity lives in and through difference, and is defined by hybridity.[23] Thus, we could say that Naderi exorcises, through disavowal, the risk of considering original belonging and identity as something pure, stable and unitary, irremediably lost in the process of migration. For this reason he seems to polarize, in his works, self and other, here and there, before and after. Clearly, there is something more lurking beneath these easy polarizations.

[21] Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile* (London: Granta Books, 2001), 185.

[22] Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema. Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), 245.

[23] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference,* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990).

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Shadows and Graffiti on the screen: the disappearance of origins

> In poetical language, there is no "I" that just stands for *myself*. The "I" is there; it has to be there, but it is there as the site of all other "I's" can enter and cut across one another.
>
> (Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *FramerFramed*)

> "Entering into the only reality of signs where I myself am a sign … am looking through a circle in a circle of looks"
>
> (Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Reassemblage*)

Naderi recognises migration as that which exposes identity to multiple identifications, and accepts that otherness is, in this process, a constitutive presence in the construction of the self. The director does not simply celebrate the resourceful, phantasmatic status of being in between different cultures because he wants first of all to underline that the experience of migration and the process of translation can be difficult. *Manhattan by Numbers* is a story of displacement (and of the search for money) that clearly allegorizes both the general condition of exile and Naderi's own experience as a transnational filmmaker with the fund-raising problems inherent in his independent mode of production. Emblematically, only at the end do we have a surprising turn from a dysphoric register to a euphoric one. The last scene shows the homeless Murphy dancing in the street and breaking into foolish laughter, no longer anxious about his precarious condition.

Actually, if we look beyond the oppositions evident on the surface of the films, we can see subtle and significant similarities stemming from the characters. Two sequences in particular trace an ontological continuity. The final sequence of *The Runner* shows Amiro in his last race, in what seems to be the decisive and more difficult challenge against his friends, the race that will finally see an absolute winner. The boys compete to see who will arrive at a distant oil well before an ice-block in front of the fire coming from the well melts down. This time Amiro has to compete not so much against his friends as against the fire. This is his most important competition because the fire symbolizes the origin of his condition of misery: oil and the war for its possession. The symbolical and physical gravity of this decisive race is emphasized through the slow motion of the images contrasted to the amplification of the noise produced by the well. But the most suggestive and significant effect is that produced by the scenes where the fire occupies the entire screen overshadowing the images of Amiro and his friends. We can hardly see them as they advance slowly beyond the fire as the distorting effect of the heat makes them undistinguishable, abstract figures, shadows without identity, like phantoms.

In *Manhattan by Numbers* Murphy faces a similar elusiveness about his "status" (in the double sense of identity and location). This is evident in the sequences where he walks through the streets enquiring about his friend

Ryan, speaking with mutual friends, or with people who had some contact with him, in order to have some clue as to Ryan's whereabouts. The film shows a long fast series of scenes where Murphy's image and voice never appear and the different people interviewed speak directly to the camera. In this way, the scenes produce a conflation between Murphy and those who are thought to be behind the camera: Naderi filming his work, and the spectator watching the film. Moreover, the ambiguity of Murphy's identity and the instability of his positioning increase as he gradually realizes that Ryan will not be able to help him. The sequence ends with Murphy appearing in the street only to disappear immediately afterwards as he abandons the scene, walking in the opposite direction to the camera. He crosses the scene while the camera stops with a close-shot on a graffiti showing a grotesque figure that resembles a clown, a fictional creature, a phantom; it is the iconographic representation of both Ryan and Murphy's elusiveness.

I consider Amiro and Murphy's fading presences as the symbol of Naderi's own sense of displacement and even the actual "alterations" that depend on his experience of migration. What do those disturbing shadows and graffiti on the screen indicate if not Naderi's own hauntology emerging from his subjective deferral? Moreover, it is important to ask where or when this movement towards an ontological disappearance takes place. Does it originate exclusively within the process of migration or is it not rather anterior to it? I am referring to the role played by the mediascapes in the constitution of the multiform identity of a migrant subjectivity.

Still, by taking into account Appadurai's observations about the constant interaction of global and local cultural practice, we can, in fact, appreciate the continuity between Naderi's pre-exilic childhood and his exilic adult life. Liminality and transnationality inform his life as well as his filmic autobiography from the very beginning. Appadurai's analysis of the modern relationship between individual imagination and the global circulation of media, along with its effects on agency, identity and homeland, illustrate how the phenomenon of migration, even in its imaginative dimension, is informed by transnational elements:

> There is a peculiar new force to the imagination of social life today. More persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of possible lives than they ever did before. One important source of this change is the mass media, which present a rich, ever-changing store of possible lives. ... One of the principal shifts in the global cultural order, created by cinema, television, and video technology, has to do with the role of imagination in social life. ... In general, imagination and fantasy were the antidotes to the finitude of social experience. In the past two decades, as the deterritorialization of persons, images, and ideas has taken on new force, this weight has imperceptibly shifted. More persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms. That is, fantasy is now a social practise.[24]

[24] Appadurai, *Modernity*, 53-54.

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If we apply these observations to Amiro's pre-exilic childhood, we can say that although the child's longing for exile is produced by his condition of misery and his dwelling on the liminal spaces of seaports and airports resonating with imaginative possibilities, it is his consumption of foreign magazines that fires his imagination and enhances his desire to escape from his homeland. Naderi himself remembers how his fascination for foreign magazines as well as his consumption of English films provoked his longing for a life in a distant country:

> at age twelve, I became aware of periodicals. It was in the cargo ships anchored in the Abadan port that for the first time I encountered film periodicals, and at that very time I decided that I would go to the United States. Most of the films that I used to see in Abadan in those days were in English, and this attracted me to English-speaking people.[25]

[25] Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 246.

Thus, if the many borders of Amiro's life envisage the possibility of exile, the presence of foreign magazines coming daily from an apparently more and more reachable elsewhere fires his imagination and also invests him with a new power of action. Although Iran, Amiro's homeland, with its poverty and repression, is depicted as a *terra nullius* or empty space, nevertheless it is inexorably caught in the web of global fluxes, with unpredictable and imperceptible effects. Far from representing uncontaminated and isolated 'origins', both his nation and his identity are already influenced and constructed by transnational elements and subjected to the changes of the modern diasporic context. Naderi does not underestimate the fact that the constant presence of some discontinuous intersections in his life contaminates his identity and dismantles any identification with the nation. His experience of mobility contributes, through a process of cultural translation, to re-defining the transnational aspects of his identity which already exist, however marginal and in a process of becoming they may be. Migration amplifies Naderi's displacement, thus fracturing and multiplying his identity to the point of making it insubstantial, groundless, powerfully resistant to any radical sedimentation.

If Naderi seems to establish a dichotomy between past and present, he shows at the same time that difference and transformation, through which diasporic identities are produced and reproduced, constitute a process of hybridization involving the culture of both self and other. Naturally, in this complex process, there is a high potential for conflict.

Hauntology & Antagonism

Homi Bhabha maintains that the process of negotiation between tradition and translation is inconclusive, antagonistic, and enmeshed with ambiguity, sometimes producing traumatic effects:

[Hybridity] is not simply appropriation or adaptation, it is a process through which cultures are required to revise their own system of reference, norms and values by departing from their habitual or 'inbred' rules of transformation. Ambivalence and antagonism accompany any act of cultural translation because negotiating with the 'difference of the other' reveals the radical insufficiency of our own systems of meaning and signification.[26]

We could argue that Naderi's preoccupation with his origins is a consequence of the conflictual aspects produced by his American re-positioning: his refusal to be considered as an Iranian exile filmmaker reflects his fear of being ghettoized as an "ethnic artist" and associated with his homeland, which Western media sometimes label as a Third World or "pariah" nation. This fear acts as an obstacle against an unproblematic negotiation between the old and the new, yet it does not prevent Naderi from reconceptualizing his origin in the light of his experience of migration, transculturation and in-betweenness. The danger of ethnic labels does not compromise the possibility of enjoying the most exalting aspects of his actual phantasmatic and interstitial identity by welcoming a third space of being and working.

Contrasts between ghettoizing and stereotyping, universalism and ethnic sacredness, tradition and modernity, hegemonic representations and subaltern intertextual visuality or, to use Appadurai's words, the disjunction between homogenization and heterogenization, are all inscribed in the modern antagonistic process of cultural translation. What this process highlights, as Bhabha suggests, is "the dissonances that have to be crossed despite the proximate relations; the disjunctions of power position that have to be contested; the values, ethical and aesthetic, that have to be 'translated' but will not seamlessly transcend the process of transfer."[27] Attempts to discuss the relation between modernity and the visual representation of cultural identity need to consider the multiple contradictions, dissonances, disjunctions and discontinuities, as well as the mediations, conjunctures and continuities created by diasporas.

The success of Bollywood in Hausa society mirrors, for instance, that kind of conflation between the alternatives of cultural collusions and antagonisms. If Bollywood helps Hausa society to redefine its cultural specificity in opposition to Southern Nigerian societies, it simultaneously works against Hollywood hegemony and national homogeneity. Moreover, the growing production of Hausa videos, enhanced by Indian romance, ends by undermining Bollywood's very undisputed success. By linking Mirzoeff's insights to Bhabha's concept of cultural antagonism, I suggest that hauntology is inscribed in these antagonistic processes of cultural contamination. The hybridity that characterizes Hausa videos is phantasmatic because it emerges in between the interstices of multiple global *filmscapes* and threatens the ontology of the dominant film production.

[26] Homi Bhabha cited by Stuart Hall, "The Multi-cultural Question", in Barnor Hesse, *Un-Settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, "Transruptions"* (London: Zed Books, 2000), 226.

[27] Ibid.

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Similarly, Naderi's transnational biography is embedded in the tension between the collusions and antagonisms stemming from cultural translation, and his personal filmscape reproduces the hauntology which is inherent in the process. Then, I would turn once again to Chow's observations about cinema as the ideal means through which cultural crisis can be explored and apply them to subjectivity rather than to culture at large. It is possible to say that any reflection on the filmic representation of diasporic subjectivity needs to take into account that filmic visuality is a means through which it is also possible to explore the subject's conflicting relation between past and present involved in the experience of diaspora, while rethinking the past, the origins that gave rise to the present moment. The film's projectional mechanism renders what is left behind instantaneous, thus re-producing the cultural fractures and crises which mark the diasporic experience of the self in new, different forms. As regards Naderi, for whom the experiences of exile and filming are strictly interrelated at the level of subjectivity, those fractures and crises of the self are perpetually projected and differently reproduced. The subject is continually deferred: by his desire of exile, produced by media images coming from elsewhere, by his actual movement between different nations and cultures, by filmic transposition that re-creates a hauntological identity. Naderi consigns himself to the phantasmagoria of the filmic medium. In the passage from *The Runner* to *Manhattan by Numbers,* the autobiographical mark disappears; the fractures and crises of the experience of diaspora become pure, autonomous images erasing the persistence of the original self. As with Hausa videos, it is precisely in the disappearance of the "origin" that is inscribed the possibility of openness to hybridity. If Amiro's persistent run towards an elsewhere makes room for George's uncertain and rhapsodic wandering, displacement envisages the possibility of constructing a polymorphous identity. Both society and subjectivity are crossed by the *spectrum* of differences that cinema helps to develop through its deferring frames.