



The Role of the Refugee and The Impact of Fragmented Identities In Diasporic Filmmakers. A Review of *Dogville* By Lars von Trier

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Abstract

In this article I will review the film Dogville by Lars von Trier through the perspective given by Hamid Naficy in his book An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking. The main purpose is to understand how identity is described and performed through the allegory of Grace and the image of the refugee, and the role homelessness and displacement play both for the filmmakers and the content of diasporic films. I will demonstrate how the relationship between minority (Grace-the refugee) and the majority (the population of Dogville) is a topic of transnational cinema, and which conclusions can we make by taking into account the role of identity and sense of belonging for transnational productions.

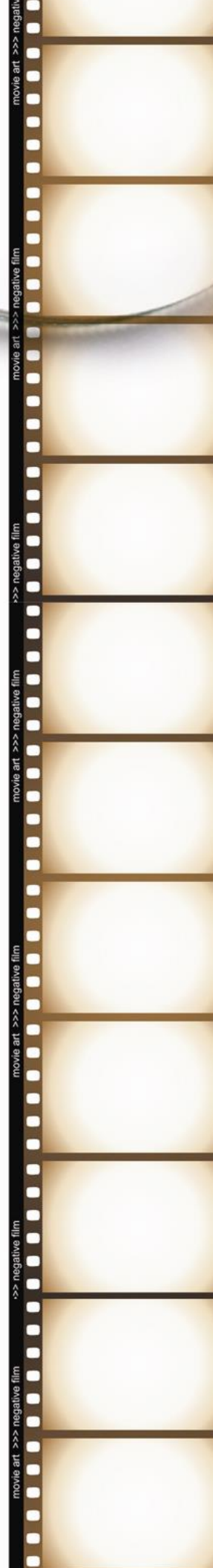
Keywords: *transnational cinema, diaspora, accented cinema, Dogville, Lars von Trier, Naficy, exile, refugee, sense of belonging, identity.*



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The role of the refugee and the impact of fragmented identities in diasporic filmmakers. A review of *Dogville* by Lars von Trier

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Situating *Accented Cinema*

Hamid Naficy's work, *An accented cinema*, offers an engaging overview of the film directed and produced by postcolonial, Third World, and other displaced filmmakers living in the West. First and most straightforwardly the focus is on how post-1960s filmmakers from the Middle East, South Asia, and Latin America reverse their personal experiences of exile or diaspora into cinema. This general overview includes, among many others, a reflection on the works of Trinh T. Minh-ha, Ghasem Ebrahimi, Mira Nair, and Ann Hui, as well as some filmmakers who grew up in the West, but have undergone experiences of displacement. Naficy takes into account the problems and challenges of placement, displacement and replacement from a professional and personal point-of-view which involves the different aspects and participants of the process of filmmaking. Each topic is illustrated by several examples that he calls “close-ups” of film directors and/or producers such as Kusturica and Guney among others, and includes a specific film related to the subject being discussed. By considering creativity as a social practice, the author demonstrates that the films are in dialogue not only with the home and host societies but also with audiences, whose desires and fears are often narrated in diasporic films.

Comparing these films to Hollywood films, Naficy calls them ‘accented’.

“If the dominant cinema is considered universal and without accent, the films that diasporic and exilic subjects make are accented. [...] The accent emanates not so much from the accented speech of the diegetic characters as from the displacement of the filmmakers and their artisanal production modes’. (Naficy 2001:4).

The term ‘accented’ is borrowed from Linguistics. In its original sense, an accent refers to a different pronunciation that qualifies the speaker as being a foreigner or from a different social or educational background. The accent becomes a mark of identity and a clear indicator of status and geo - territorialisation. In Naficy’s case the accent is related to geographical displacement or “deterritorialised locations.” According to him, “all exilic and diasporic films are accented” (Naficy 2001:23). Language is a main component of the exile and a fundamental symbolic mark. The experience of diaspora, or exile¹, cannot be fully understand if we not take into account the impact that loosing one’s own language has on personalities that go through an inner journey of self repositioning in a foreign environment. In diasporic productions, the ‘accent’ comes from the experience of displacement of the filmmakers; the style, which is fragmented, multilingual, self reflexive; the themes, which include displacement, identity, sense of belonging, liminal subjects and places. In this ‘taxonomy’ of accented productions, the

¹ Exile and diaspora are often used as synonyms while there is a very important difference between the two terms, as stated in the Postcolonial Theory (see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1992). Exile has been deployed as a concept beyond simply a forced removal from a given physical location. Exile invokes images of political dissidents who are sent overseas or large groups of people banished to distant lands, forming various diasporas. What lies behind the concept of exile is the act of displacement and the effect such displacements have on the exiled's perception of his/her current location. Diaspora, as stated in Cohen (1997), is made of people people who live outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories and recognise that their traditional homelands are reflected deeply in the languages they speak, religions they adopt, and the cultures they produce.

directors are deeply involved with territory and territoriality, where the ideal 'role' is played by transnational spaces such as borders, airports, hotels, trains, buses and other mobile places. Every inhabited space always hide an emotional journey, in the course of which old identities are sometimes shed and new characters are performed. Identity is described as a process in constant transformation, even a daily and suffered performance.

As Joel Gordon pointed out in his review of Naficy's book, "the accent refers not simply to pronounced speech, but to an entire 'performance of identity' that is the outgrowth of displaced, deterritorialised exiles living in a diaspora that will never truly be home" (Gordon 2002:150).

That idea of 'performance' must be seen as a key topic for the understanding of the impact that the politics of diaspora and the experiences of mobility - either voluntary or forced - have on what Naficy calls the 'accented style'. Accented cinema is an emerging genre, one that requires new sets of viewing skills on the part of audiences, who are often involved as characters of the narrative.

Filmmakers of 'accented cinema' have 'liminal subjectivity and interstitial location in society and the film industry' and 'are the products of [...] dual postcolonial displacement and postmodern or late modern scattering'. Following this perspective, the conventional realism of feature films are "if not subverted, at least inflected differently," (Naficy 2001:987). Typical motifs are distinct pronunciations, ethnic font tropes, 'visual homeland fetishes,' decentered narrations, liminal perspectives, ambivalence, journey stories, 'everyday - but - particularised authoriness.

The several components of the accented style, together with their constituting elements, are listed and exemplified in the appendix. This form of illustrating each theoretical point allows

the reader, even if s/he is not so familiarised with exilic and diasporic films, to follow the progression of Naficy's outline of the book.

Deterritorialisation and displacement are a continuous topic in Naficy's writing. There is also what the author calls a 'third optique' between the practises of placement, displacement and replacement: the border. Dangerous and liminal, the border is a space of ambiguity, ambivalence, and chaos (Naficy 2001:31). In this sense, *narrative hybridity* is a typical characteristic of accented cinema: films are often "hybridised and experimental".

Together with this hybrid narrative, another key topic for transnational cinema is the idea of "double consciousness"²(Naficy 2001:22). As mentioned before, we can describe it as "border consciousness", a constant perception of liminality and interstices. In most cases, diasporic films are created in the interstices of social formations and cinematic practises: they signify upon exile by expressing, allegorising, critiquing the home and the culture of the host societies. Living in the border also means to cross standard boundaries and try to place a hyper-cinematic realism instead of the common cinematic Hollywood-like rules we are used to. Perhaps bearing this in mind, several critics pointed out the brutality of the image conveyed by Lars von Trier with regards to American culture and hypocrisy, even if the director himself defined his perception of America as 'mirrored' and 'second hand', via the movies and the television content he watched in Denmark. Furthermore, he refuses to fly and he never visited the U.S.;

² Double Consciousness is a term coined by Du Bois to describe an individual whose identity is divided into several facets. In his book *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois describes "double consciousness" as follows: "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity". For reference see Du Bois (1994).

that is why *Dogville* is von Trier's search for, and interaction with, America: the image of this country as seen in photographs and television productions. There is no marks, no walls, no streets, no postcodes, that could describe this small village as a place as we know it. As von Trier argued during an interview "Dogville is about the United States but it's also about any small town anywhere in the world". As I will explain further, this village places itself in a liminal space, in the interstices of the standard cinematic rules: with its minimal set, sparse lighting, painted streets and no walls or doors, the film "breaks" with the cinematic conventions and conveys an anti-narrative that goes beyond and against the standard and common rules of cinema conventions.

Accented films, as Naficy often remarks, are personal and unique like fingerprints, particularly because they are autobiographical and authorial. Sadness, loneliness and alienation become the favourite themes as a consequence of this personal 'investment'. The idea of a desired home and narratives of return often mark these personal diaries: therefore, Naficy demonstrates that there are three types of journeys with which these filmmakers try to make sense of their lives:

1. outward journeys of escape, home seeking, and home finding;
2. inward homecoming journey,
3. journey of quest, homelessness, and lostness.

In some sense, diaspora includes all of these journeys put together. If we take for granted a generic definition of diaspora, as something that "often begins with trauma, rupture, and coercion, and it involves the scattering of populations to places outside their homeland," we

immediately understand how important is this topic, and how emotional this journey can be, when involves the feeling of nostalgia for the motherland, the sense of displacement in the host society, the perception of loneliness that comes from the “in-betweenness”. Immigrants are often stuck in this space “in-between” the home - alive in the memory - and the host society -where they work and live. As a result, immigrants do not completely enjoy their ‘recollection’ of home memories nor their new life in the country of arrival, and loneliness comes as an inevitable outcome of trans-nationality.

According to Naficy, diasporic filmmakers convey epistolary narratives, where “place” appears as a segment of space that people imbue with special meaning and value. House is a key topic in this kind of narrative: stuck in displacement, the idea of rebuilding a “home away from home” gives back a sense of ontological security (Giddens 1991) that is essential for immigrant’s lives. By definition, for immigrants and refugees who have left their native country and might have lost their former house, the concept of ‘home’ might have a special value. These values include “home” as security and control, as reflection of one’s ideas and values, as something to act upon and modify, as permanence and continuity, as a comfort zone, as a refuge from the outside world, as an indicator of personal status, as a material structure and as a place to own.

Peter Somerville thus argues that the concepts of privacy, identity and familiarity are essential in the understanding of the ‘home’ because they are related to spatial, psychological and social conditions, each of these being necessary dimensions in the concept of home (Somerville 1997).

According to space and time structures, the home is centrally placed in everyday life and even though the home is not necessarily the place where most hours are spent, it certainly is the

space where we depart from and where we return to. In other words, home is not only important in the daily organisation of everyday life, it is also a fundamental aspect of how we perceive and recognise the world.

As Naficy argue, home is a charged space and a *signifying trope*. As a trope, it signifies deterritorialisation more than re - territorialisation. As I will further explored during the review, the importance of space and home cannot be underestimated, together with the importance of transnational spaces and exilic borders, who seem to have a much better importance for the author. In *Accented Cinema*, Naficy often highlights the role of border crossings, which are inscribed not only in fixed transnational sites (airports, hotels etc) but also in mobile spaces such as vehicles and suitcases, which may contain souvenirs from the homeland, another key topic when we talk about consumer culture³.

Naficy seems to focus the reader's attention towards the experiences of diasporic filmmakers rather than the content of their productions. Naficy takes a step forward rather than a step back, insisting that the author is a situated and un-situated, located and dislocated social being. By reclaiming the author, Naficy also reclaims the audience, and by describing an accented cinema with (dis)located authors, he also insists on the social configuration of the audience, who may come from a variety of backgrounds and accents that may or may not being reproduced in the films.

An accented filmmaker lives in the otherness and his work reveals this kind of transnational identity in different forms “of fragmented narratives, consisting of ellipses, ruptures, and

³ For a more specific overview of the role of souvenirs within material culture, see Urry (1990) and more recently Hitchcock and Tague (2000).

generic juxtapositions” (Naficy 2001:271). Biographical elements and feelings of this otherness are interwoven in the film and therefore make it “accented”.

By situating non-dominant cinema in terms of its accent, Naficy presents a wide range of possible lectures for examining diverse cinematic styles and for recognising alternative films as part of a unique conversation. This perspective nonetheless crashes with the more global panorama, given that - as the author argued - accented films have been not only excluded from the dominant cinematic discourse but also they have been marginalised in the greater social arena.

The only cinema without an accent is the dominant cinema, which, although Naficy does not name it, is assumed to be Hollywood. Hollywood is a dangerous, dominant cinema because of its absorption of other nations, societies, and worlds into itself in a *solo* that erase the differences and the accents towards a unilateral vision of the world. In this sense, what Dogville does is spreading an anti-Hollywood narrative: the unusual is represented and the “mise-en-scène” shocks the audience with something that is unknown and unexpected: a theatrical representation of a chalk painted set, and the deliberately self-reflexive presentation of its own status as a narrative film, constituted by a prologue and nine chapters.

Meeting Dogville: A Beautiful Little Town In The Midst Of Magnificent Mountains.

I think the world would be better without Dogville.

Grace.

Dogville is a 2003 Danish film written and directed by Lars von Trier, and starring Nicole Kidman, Lauren Bacall, Chloë Sevigny and Paul Bettany amongst other. The film is intended as the first contribution in a trilogy that included *Manderlay* (2005) and *Washington* (2010): the U.S. trilogy.

Dogville is a very small American town in the Rocky Mountains with a road leading up to it, but nowhere to go but the mountains. The film begins with a prologue in which we meet a dozen or so of the fifteen citizens. The external narrator (John Hurt) describes them as decent, good people with small flaws which are easy to forgive. The town is seen from the point of view of Tom Edison (Paul Bettany), an aspiring writer (despite having not written work to provide as evidence) and philosopher who tries to educate his citizens on the subject of “moral rearmament”. It is Tom who first meets Grace (Nicole Kidman), pursued by gangsters who apparently shot at her, while she is wandering in the dark trying to steal a bone from the dog Moses. Grace, who wants to keep running towards the mountains, is reassured by Tom that the mountains are too difficult to pass. As they talk, the gangsters approach the town, and Tom quickly hides Grace in a mine. One of the gangsters asks Tom if he has seen the woman, and they offers him a card with a phone number to call in case Grace shows up. Tom decides to use Grace as an the best example of his moral concerns towards the community for the next day meeting. Tom wants to teach the community the “gift of acceptance”, which will remind them the kindness and the goodness that they may have forgot by living in isolation. The community remains skeptical at first, so Tom proposes that Grace should be given a chance to prove that she is a good and trustful person. The town agrees, and as a token gesture Grace is accepted for two weeks during which Grace offers them all an hour of work a day, divided amongst eight households. Grace is accepted only on condition that she will offer something of

herself in exchange: companionship, labour (she becomes teacher, gardener, carer, confidant, friend) and the assumption of certain roles that the community does not need but desires to be absolved, until her final exploitation as a sexual slave at the mercy of everyone. Grace's arrival slowly enlightens the economy of desire that lies at the bottom of every social relations, even in a community of such decent people as Dogville.

The situation degenerates until Grace is regularly raped and used as slave labor. Despite all this, Grace cannot hold them responsible. She forgives them, but when the town decides to turn her in for a reward from the gangsters, the gang boss turns out to be her father, and after a fascinating and psychological discussion between them, Grace decides to remove Dogville from the world. The citizens are killed and the town is burnt down: she orders that Vera's kids are shot in front of her eyes; she shoots Tom in the head because "There are some things you have to do for yourself". She then reconciled with her father and symbolically she sits at his right hand.

An Accented Dogville

I will begin the present review by articulating three aspects, or 'accents', that can be translated from Naficy's book into Dogville. First of all, I will define the issue of displacement.

As people who experienced the displacement in first person and at the same time narrators on a screen, transnational filmmakers are capable of producing ambiguities and doubts about the absolutes and taken-for-granted values and norms both of the home and the host societies. They are also capable of transforming their own individual or cultural affiliation in order to produce hybrid and syncretic narratives. How does the displacement of the author impacts on

the narrative of diasporic films? As mentioned before, when it premiered in Cannes in 2003, the international jury (and several critics even after) criticised the film for its lacking humanism and anti-humanistic perspective. In particular, they pointed out von Trier's perverse desire in watching and filming women suffer, since *Breaking the Waves* (1996) and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) with the Icelandic singer Bjork. American critics denounced the film as a crude anti-American review and brutal perception of its citizens' hypocrisy and corrupted moral. Even when von Trier admitted that his perspective was the consequence of a "second-hand knowledge", the critics did not stop. American audiences took von Trier's theatrical representation of *Dogville* as an accurate depiction of American cultural identity, so losing the real point the director was trying to make: a critique to the universal human condition. In this sense, *Dogville* is both a philosophical experiment and cultural political intervention concerning the question of democracy today.

Looking at this specific film, the issue of displacement does not completely derive from the personal experience of von Trier, who never really experienced the displacement in first person, but from the image of Grace, the migrant, the refugee who left her home to find a better and less dangerous life away from the violence. In a more generic sense, the film seems to allegorise the contemporary plight of economic refugees and political asylum seekers, who are forced to go through suffering, deprivation and humiliation. Following this perspective *Dogville* is interesting in relation to the figure of the immigrant for different reasons: first of all, because a female is immediately assigned as the scapegoat *par excellence* through its gendering. Second, because the absence of any built environment evokes the questions of where is this place, who is the community, who is the migrant. By definition, when we talk

about migration, a topic issue is the practise of homemaking, which emphasise the built environment in contrast to the absence of it in Dogville.

At the same time and from the perspective of a transnational migrant, building a new home abroad acquires a multiple symbolic importance in terms of site where insecurities and anxieties of separation are mixed with the idea of a comfortable place where memory, sense of belonging, homesickness can be lived and experienced in private. Following this perspective, we can easily understand the violence shown in Chapter 7, where Vera, blaming Grace for spanking her son Jason and for seducing her husband Chuck, threatens to destroy the porcelain figurines Grace purchased with her poor and hard-earned wages. As a symbol of her slow and suffered process of integration within the host community, these figurines are not simple objects, but they symbolise every migrant's emotional attempts to join the community via the consumption of material icons.

In this sense, as von Trier confirmed during an interview, Dogville can be 'every migrant's journey', in America as elsewhere; in fact, Dogville is just an illusion made out with von Trier's pieces of information collected in Denmark and transmuted into allegory. Here also comes the displacement of the place, because the whole film was not shot in America, but in the small town of Trollhättan in Sweden.

Like every migrant we might now, Grace finds herself in a liminal position, a guest who is not destined to become a member of the community, but more likely to create a feeling of uneasiness, because of the ambiguity of her position in both structural terms and temporal dimensions. She is 'the Other', she cannot become 'one of us'.

Strongly linked to this first point is the second ‘accent’ Naficy highlights in his book: the theme of diasporic films. As I mentioned before, diasporic filmmakers are often focused on identity, a sense of belonging, liminal subjects and places. In my opinion, *Dogville* seems to contain all these accents again in one single character, Grace, a cinematic metaphor for God and the perfect liminal subject as the incarnation of the refugee. On the one side, Grace represents God’s grace with her blessedness, virtue and forgiveness even after the rapes. On the other, she is the stranger, the excluded who wants to be accepted and admitted into the community but she is first subjected then rejected by it. After Tom admits his love to Grace and the whole town expresses their agreement that it has become a better place thanks to her, the police arrive again to replace the ‘Missing’ poster with a ‘Wanted’ poster. Tom argues that because of the increased risk to the town now that they are hiding someone who is wanted as a criminal, Grace should provide more services for less pay. At this point the situation worsens and escalates, with the male citizens making small sexual advances to Grace and the female ones becoming increasingly abusive. Even the children are perverse: Jason, the perhaps 10-year-old son of Chuck and Vera, asks Grace to spank him, until she finally complies after much provocation. Soon thereafter Chuck returns home and rapes Grace. Grace is then blamed by Vera both for spanking Jason and for being raped by Chuck. In revenge, Vera threatens Grace with destroying the porcelain figurines created by the town shop that she had acquired with the little wages she was given. The symbol of her belonging in the town gone, she now knows that she must leave. With the help of Tom and Ben, the freight driver, she attempts escape in his apple truck, only to find herself raped by Ben and then returned to the town. Given this attempt to escape, Grace’s status as slave is finally confirmed as she is collared and chained. Even more, a bell is attached to her collar and announces her presence wherever she goes. Grace is

now propriety of the community, and an object of perverse desire that must be kept. In a more generic sense, Grace seems to embody the ancient myth of the scapegoat, blamed for the sins of others, whose sacrifice was believed to remove the nation's sins. More specifically, while the scapegoat mechanism is directed toward an internal member of the group, what Grace is going through -and with her all the marginalised migrants who populate our streets- is more a sacrifice, a ritualised repetition of the scapegoat mechanism which is directed toward a sacrificeable being.

As noted by Andrea Brighenti (2006), the treatment Grace undergoes is particularly similar to that of sacrificeable prisoners of war in many primitive societies: from the initial, apparent progressive inclusion into the community to 'preparation' of the victim through provocations, the ritual incitement to escape and subsequent chaining and locking of the prisoner. In this sense and in relation to Grace, *Dogville* reveals its hypocritical realism and the narrow mindedness of local communities, by definition unable to deal with the arrival of the Other. *Dogville* does not make the refugee a citizen, it only seemingly accepts the stranger into the community. She remains a foreigner, never at home, never welcomed, never accepted.

There is also an underlying meaning behind the displacement: the journey. As Naficy noted, there are different kind of journeys: outward journeys of escape, inward journeys of homecoming and finally journeys of quest and lostness. *Dogville* is three journeys in one. Starting from the outward journey, the escape from the big city, Grace lives the entire shades described in *An Accented cinema*: she attempts to build a better life by becoming a member of the group (the quest) and then she goes through the homecoming journey, prepared and anticipated by the apocalyptic devastation of *Dogville*. The themes of journeying, border crossing and identity crossing are perfectly explained and embodied in the allegory of Grace.

As mentioned before, another frequent topic in transnational films is the idea of border. “The sad tale of the township of Dogville” - as John Hurt, the narrator, intones, is set in a theatrical stage which represents an imagined small town in the Rocky Mountains during the 1930s. Its minimal set, sparse lighting, chalk painted streets and the absence of doors and walls make this place a ghost *mise-en-scène* that could be anywhere. As presumed in the title - Dog/ville-, the theatre symbolises the small mindedness of its residents and their suspicion for any kind of ‘difference’. Even though we do not experience the typical transnational spaces I mentioned before - airports, buses, hotels, suitcases etc - we do have the representation of the liminal. Dogville is a place of transitions, waitings and not knowing what is next, a place in between the journey of Grace’s escape from the big city and the homecoming journey to the Father. Both Grace and Dogville live in a liminal and precarious status: the community defines itself through its own customs and mores, which may be poor and humble, but they have their way of living. In this context, Grace is an alien who does not share the same old ways common people content themselves with. Despite her best efforts to avoid raising any political issue, Grace is the bearer of a revolutionary attitude that disturbs the routine. Common people are unanimous, especially in hate: “The unanimous mimetic contagion transforms the disastrous violence of all against all into the healing violence of all against one. The community is reconciled at the cost of one victim only” (Girard 2004). Just like Moses the dog, whose chalk lines come to life at the very end of the film, the portraits of American poor appear to warn us that reality is violence and that there is a trajectory of deprivation.

Last but not least, there is the performance of identity. As characters on stage, everyone has got a specific part and script. Despite her homelessness, Grace turns the male dominated space into a habitable space through the cinematic assemblages with objects and other characters. By reflecting on the character of Grace, we can also summarise some conclusions with regards to the question I placed at the beginning of the article: the impact of fragmented identities in transnational filmmakers. The performances shown in *Dogville* are made of fragmented identities in constant change during the viewing experience.

The connection between performativity and the film has been explained by Elena del Rio, who introduced the term ‘affective-performative’ to describe a process in which the mirroring of identity is replaced by performative moments that fragment the body:

“From the affective-performative perspective I propose, spectacle does arrest narrative, but such arresting by no means inhibits the force of the body. If anything, it favours the unleashing of that force by freeing the body from the tyranny and the rigidity of narrative requirements. Spectacle in this sense is no longer a framed view or fetish, for it indeed becomes an actively dislocating or deforming force”. (Del Rio 2008:33)

Turning to our narrative, this performativity seems particularly clear in Chapter 5, when Tom explains to Grace the town’s decision to make her work longer hours after the second police visit. The camera alternates between him and Grace. When Tom announces to her the news the camera stays persistently on the right side of his face. While he keeps speaking to Grace, the camera moves back and forth abruptly and we expect that it has assumed his point of

view to produce an eye line match. Surprisingly, the camera returns to Tom again and he is now placed at the centre of the frame⁴.

The way von Trier uses the camera complicates the communication of the narrative. What the camera makes visible and even more complicated to understand is the character's body, which is manipulated in order to reveal all the shades and peculiarities of fragmented identities in constant change. The importance of the body and the identity is also clear in a scene in Chapter 3, where Grace forces Jack (Ben Gazzara) to admit that he is blind. Same as before, the camera is used to emphasise gestures and body behaviours, so that performativity turns to be a process of movement and readjustment. The sequence reaches a climax when Grace opens the curtains in Jack's room and the light accentuates the performative space.

As Koutsourakis rightly affirms: "(...) von Trier's manipulation of the body in space becomes a process in which character, identity, and space are set apart and analysed. The actress'/character's relation to the diegetic space becomes multifaceted. The space encompasses the actress performing the character, the character as a narrative agent and the character as a performative persona, namely, as a person who is caught in a process of working to embody and display certain social qualities. Formally and thematically, the scene addresses Grace's performative struggle and the very performative contradiction, which is that an act of kindness results in an aggressive enforcement of values. (...) Grace's performativity involves both the process of integrating herself in a set of relationships that contradict her 'ideals' and the means she employs to resist her complete assimilation into Dogville" (2012:348)

⁴ See Koutsourakis Angelos *Politics and open-ended dialectics in Lars von Trier's Dogville: a post-Brechtian critique*, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 11:3, 334-353.

The camera interacts with the performing body in space for reasons that exceed narrative coherence. The focus on the individual as performative is also clear in Grace's shift from her unconditional generosity and forgiveness to a mass-murderer. The 'fragmentation' of the character hits the audience even more in these final sequences, as we understand that Grace legitimises violence using her standardised moralist rhetoric. This statement is intensified by the voice-over which asserts that it was one's duty to reinstate order "for the sake of humanity and for the sake of other towns". In this particular sense, the end of a whole community is seen as a sort of gift "for the sake of humanity", because "the world would be a better place without Dogville".

Action, images and the text are here in conflict and the effect is that Grace's identity is deprived of any notion of interiority or psychological motivation. The fragmented identity is complete, there is no space for redemption.

Fragmented Identities and Dislocated Senses Of Belonging: A Final Note

By definition, transnational cinema explores the questions raised by diasporic communities, or feature protagonists in exile (either voluntary or not) from their nation of origin, "minority" cultures within a nation-state, protagonists whose identity comprises elements from various nation-states (hybrid identities), protagonists who travel across various nation-states, and/or protagonists whose nation-state finds itself influenced (whether positively or negatively) by foreign forces (economic, political, cultural, military). Identity in relation to migration is, needless to say, a very urgent contemporary issue for all governments and public policies.

In its essence, *An Accented Cinema* gives us a general and at the same time detailed overview of these new cinema genres, which are becoming more noticeable and valuable given the increase of festivals, conferences, seminars and screenings that talk about diaspora and other types of migration. Following the author, we are able to understand some of the most important core topics of what he called accented productions, such as identity, memory, displacement, sense of belonging, territoriality. Less investigated but equally important is the relationship between the minority and the majority, which is very well explained in *Dogville*, through the different stages of involvement and rejections that Grace lives within the community. This is indeed a point that diasporic filmmakers do consider in their productions - voluntary or not-, which can help us understand why minority media cultures develop in Western countries the ways they do. Furthermore, it allows us to examine how important public policies, history, traditions and national particularities are; finally, it assists us in developing theories about processes of exclusion and inclusion and the significance of policies and politics of and for minorities and the media. Diasporic films can really, in this sense, overcome one of the biggest pitfalls of national cinema, because instead of targeting international markets and reifying national identity into familiar stereotypes, they dramatise the weakening of the national and the increasing importance of micro-identities as resistances to the homogenising effects of globalisation.

The stories of deterritorialised, displaced people and their real lived experiences, revealing the diverse modalities of diasporic experience began to be told by their own people who refrain from using stereotypes and speak their own language and dialects. Hamid Naficy states that diasporic films are not only alternative and critical but also “minor” with respect to the deterritorialisation of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy and

the collective assemblage of enunciation. Language is, so to speak, a paramount element in the dynamics of fragmented identities and home memories: our dialect tells everyone where we are from, it is our expertise, our suitcases, all of which are socially and culturally defined.

Strictly engaged with the experience of border and identity crossings, we must register the collective and political consciousness that animate most diasporic filmmakers. In this specific case, *Dogville* can be seen as a critique of the narrow mindedness of local communities with regards to refugees and political asylum seekers; furthermore, von Trier himself admitted that *Dogville* can also be relevant to Denmark's treatment of immigrants. It is not about the content itself, this consciousness aims to revitalise the audience's consciousness. This point is particularly clear since the beginning. How can we give credibility to someone that shoots a movie set in a country he has never visited? By considering that von Trier did not attempt to create the illusion of a different time and place at all. *Dogville* is shot entirely on a soundstage not dressed up to look like anything other than a soundstage. von Trier renders the set transparent to the audience. We can spy from the keyhole, observing without having the possibility to do anything but watch. Are we co-responsible for the treatment Grace undergoes? Or are we just mere viewers that can, at least, be shocked and annoyed for the violence and the hypocrisy that clearly animate the village? Are we similar to *Dogville* when it comes to give hospitality to someone different or shall we support Grace when she destroys the whole village as a result after all the brutality?

Diasporic films can really wake up the audiences and invite them to reflect on contemporary issues, such as migration and the melting pot of cultures and ethnicities. In this sense, diasporic filmmakers can represent a very thoughtful and important voice in various debates, and raise important questions by letting the Others speak, voices often misrepresented or

underrepresented at best. The question is also anthropological: humans are conservative by their nature and they face the challenge of life when foreigners come to settle permanently on their land, especially those that have markedly different values. Peace, prosperity and harmony are premised on the assumption that a society functions best when it is homogenous and uniform, when diversity is reduced to an absolute minimum - even if, as Chuck said, the community is already rotten from the inside -.

The prosperity and the stability of a community can be guaranteed only when the community remains as closed off as possible to the foreign influences. Grace's appearance palpably saves the illusion of a lost innocence; her appearance did not bring the chaos out of nothing. There are innumerable signs in the film that point out that Grace merely made visible what was boiling underneath all the time. Her presence as a scapegoat embodies the point through which society tries to elude, conceal the antagonism constitutive of any social order, the impossibility of the 'gift acceptance'. This is the much more important and difficult lesson that we can learn from *Dogville* and other diasporic films. We have to come to terms with the fact that society and culture are not homogenous or unilateral and that even without strangers there will always be something that will be able to make visible the hypocrisies we live within.

Migrant and diasporic filmmakers have been and continue to be a major inspiration in present times. If we cannot consider these productions as pure reality and neither as a mere mirror of it, we should place them within a more general self and public reflection on society and culture, on how the traditional unilateral and fixed categories are now fluid and somehow inconsistent, on how transnational cinema can challenge the common concepts of national identity and Europeaness.

“Whether Grace left Dogville, or on the contrary Dogville had left her - and the world in general - is a question of a more artful nature that few would benefit from by asking, and even fewer by providing an answer. And nor indeed will it be answered here”.

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