

She-Stranger in Paradise: Transnational Gendered Imaginaries in Kurdwin Ayub's *Paradise! Paradise! (Paradies! Paradies!, 2016)*

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Abstract

The present paper examines the construction of overlapping transnational and gendered (female) imaginaries in Kurdwin Ayub's *Paradise! Paradise! (Paradies! Paradies!, 2016)*. Drawing, among other sources, on Lipovetsky & Serroy's (2007) theories about the multiplicity-image, this essay argues that Ayub's re-negotiation, and self-representation, of her own hybrid identity in (and through) the film results in the co-alescence between, on the one hand, global media culture and traditional (Kurdish) folklore and, on the other hand, between pseudo-ethnographic filmmaking and the aesthetic deregulation associated to new media practices.

Keywords: Digital Culture; Documentary Film; Identity; Multiplicity; Transnational Cinema.

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1 Intro: (Re)situating Transnational Cinema in the 21st Century

Since the 1980s, a plethora of concepts came to designate the cinematic renderings of the exilic and migrant experiences in the contemporary world (Higbee and Lin 2010: 11). Many times used interchangeably, and with little attention to nuances in meaning and ideological scope, terms like *diasporic*, *postcolonial*, *transnational*, *cinema of migration*, *accented* and/or *(post)migrant* have been proposed to describe the specific political economy and artistic practices associated to émigré and/or culturally displaced filmmakers. Among these conceptions, Naficy's theorisations of *accented cinema* (2001) succeeded in providing a comprehensive thematic and aesthetic insight into the status of the so-called accented filmmakers as liminal subjects whose works permanently fluctuate between diverging levels of inclusion/exclusion in relation to established social milieus and professional frameworks (Naficy 2010: 13).¹ Being the "products" of the "dual postcolonial and post-Soviet displacements and postmodern scatterings" (Naficy 2010: 14), accented filmmakers should be grouped into two main generations (Naficy 2010: 13-4). The second age grouping (the one emerging from the 1980s onwards) simultaneously witnessed and promoted the dispersion of the interstitial praxis of accented filmmaking over the vast realm of mainstream cinema. This gave rise to a phenomenon sometimes described as *multiplex cinema/multiplexing* (Naficy 2010) or *multiplexity-image* (Lipovetsky and Serroy 2009: 94-123). This updated formulation is, in itself, a site (of enquiry) that demands a frontal engagement with the very fragmentary and 'nomadic' condition of cinema in the age of globalisation, the widespread use of digital technologies, and the related overabundance of "mutant" images across multiple platforms.

It is in the context of these ongoing theoretical discussions that I will approach the work of Vienna-based, Iraqi Kurdish young filmmaker and performance artist Kurdwin Ayub. I will be adopting here transnational cinema as the most suitable terminological cue to account for "the fractures and interstices that disturb rigid notions of national identity and stress the hybrid, flexible and interchangeable characteristics of the global subject" (Palacio and Ibañez 2015: 30).² Also drawing on Higbee and Lin (2010: 11), it is the word *transnational* the one that would more aptly encompass the other categorizations, acting as a covering or umbrella term, as it addresses issues about cross-border film production while consistently challenging essentialist notions about national identity. In the following sections, I will argue that Ayub's first documentary feature *Paradise! Paradise!* (2016)³ serves as an example of new trends in (self)representation and (self)thematization of the (post)migrant subjects and groups in the digital era. Ayub's debut feature brings to the fore the gap between a previous generation of transnational filmmakers (or, using Naficy's terminology, an early second generation of accented filmmakers) and a younger age grouping. For the latter, 21st century global imaginaries (those diffused on/across social networks and the current multifaceted media ecosystem) are having a significant impact on the way the experience of hybrid identities is registered and (auto)mediated. In my reading of Ayub's movie, I will note the interdependency between a set of formal and stylistic (filmmaking) choices and a specific representation of transnational identities and the diasporic experience in the current century. As I will discuss below, *Paradise! Paradise!* both raises questions, and helps to clarify, issues about the "composed" nature of the neo-documentary (Lipovetsky and Serroy 2009: 146-154), its coalescence with new media formats, and the extent to which this combination eventually adds to the project of re-constructing transnational and gender(ed) imaginaries in film.

2 A Father's Paradise?: Filming Omar's Travelogues

In 1991, during Kurdwin Ayub's first year of life, her family was forced to leave their homeland (Iraq) and find a new life in Vienna (Austria), where she was educated as an artist. Displaying precocious talents for both filmmaking and the performing arts, Ayub's early short animated and live action works⁴ already address a

1. Grassilli (2008: 1240) elaborates on Naficy's accented cinema by noting how the term is subject to two potential readings: one points out to "the emergence of a new artistic wave"; an occurrence that, nevertheless, cannot be radically dissociated from the successive evolutions of the Third Cinema traditions of the 1960s. For a critical review of Naficy's theories, see also Suner (2006).
2. An extensive discussion on transnational cinema can also be found in Ezra and Rowden (2006) and Palacio and Türschmann (2013).
3. The movie was awarded the best documentary prize in 2016 at both the Seville European Film Festival (Spain) and the Diagonale Festival of Austrian Film (Graz), as well as the *carte blanche*/prize for young talents at the Duisburger Filmwoche in Germany.
4. For a complete and updated catalogue of Ayub's works, visit: <http://www.kurdwinayub.com/films/>

consistent exploration of her own mixed identities as a member of a “diasporic imagined community” (Brah 2003: 617): a second generation Kurdish diaspora in Europe. Most of these initial pieces repeatedly engage with the topic of self-representation: Ayub herself dominates the frames, placing herself in front of the camera within brief performative sketches that mimic the casual aesthetics and recurring clichés of adolescents’ Internet-based videos. The Iraqi Kurdish director manages to further reverse the (presumable) irrelevancy of this formal template by situating it in the context of (post)migrant identity-building endeavours. That is the case with, to name but one remarkable example, *Summer Holiday (Vaginale VII) (Sommerurlaub [Vaginale VII], 2011)*, in which, during a stay in Kurdistan, Kurdwin Ayub films herself wearing a eastern wedding dress as she frantically dances and sings in playback to Lorraine Ellison’s soul hit “Stay with Me”. The overall combination of dress (too large to fit into Ayub’s body) as symbolic identity marker, song, and performance allude to the irresolute dilemma about being and living across cultures and gender(ed) borders. *Summer Holiday (Vaginale VII)* serves then as a sample of Ayub’s ongoing artistic concern with “the myriad processes of cultural fissure and fusion that underwrite contemporary forms of transcultural identities” (Brah 2003: 632).

Paradise! Paradise!, Ayub’s first feature, encapsulates many of the topoi and stylistic strategies previously shown in her short videos. In this documentary, the filmmaker, camera in hand, joins her father (Omar Ayub) in a journey to their native land, Kurdistan, in northern Iraq, where he is intending to buy a retirement house. The much invoked chronotope of home-returning, a thematic constant among (post)migrant filmmakers, takes here the shape of a filmic travelogue. As Berger notes, this specific cinematic mode “offer[s] an advantageous way to study questions of search of identity in trans/national contexts as well as in the in-between spaces of ‘homelands’ and ‘foreignness’” (2016: 169). Implicitly adhering to this assumption, Ayub’s plan for the film was to show the “real Irak”; to portray the joyous and most intimate side of the country in an attempt to prove that its conflicts can be equated to those of the West (Moran Ferrés 2016: 76).

The most obvious precedent of *Paradise! Paradise!* is Ayub’s own short *Family Holiday (Familienurlaub szenen 1-17, 2012)*, another filmic construct at the crossroads between travelogues and home movies, consisting of seventeen sketches about a family trip to the city of Dohuk. *Family Holiday* offers brief glimpses of Ayub’s siblings, interactions in domestic spaces, Kurdish landscapes, and improvised mise en scènes in which Kurdwin and her younger relatives try to escape a pervasive sense of boredom. But, most importantly, *Family Holiday* foreshadows the underlying ‘tension’ that permeates both the thematic and formal construction of *Paradise! Paradise!*: on the one hand, Kurdwin and Omar confront their respective attitudes with regards to the idea(l) and reality of home-returning, and, on the other hand, their diverging views are given specific cinematic expression via the encounter between the filmmaker/filming subject (Kurdwin) and the main filmed subject/social actor (Omar). Because, if *Paradise! Paradise!* revolves around a (not so) ritualistic return to the homeland, the main return journey in the film is that of Omar, that is to say: a middle class, (post)migrant, male subject in pursuit of a lost private paradise.

Omar’s centrality is made explicit since the very opening sequence of the movie. In it, a succinct caption places the spectator somewhere in Vienna: in a long shot, the camera registers a room that is quickly identified as Omar’s practice. Kurdwin’s father is a doctor and he appears on-screen, for the first time in the film, as he is welcoming a patient (someone under the name of Hassan, a fact inviting us to infer that the practice may be mainly frequented by expatriates from the Middle East like Omar and his family). Kurdwin’s father then addresses the camera as a way to introduce both his clients and us, the audience, to her daughter, while stating right from the start (and not without an almost involuntary but self-referential irony), the nature of the movie: “This is my daughter, Kurdwin, I hope you don’t mind. She’s making a documentary about me and Kurdistan”. The prologue clearly establishes the dynamics of the film (namely, ‘this is Omar’s movie/journey’) in what constitutes a meaningful shift from the much more plural portrayal of the Ayubs in *Family Holiday*. Whereas in the short, Awini (Omar’s wife) and Kurdwin’s sisters are present through sketchy but recognizable enough physical and subjective traits, the focus on Omar’s personality, subjectivity and activities is unparalleled by any other character/person in the feature. To this respect, *Paradise! Paradise!* seems to almost organically evolve from three of the sketches (numbers 1, 10 and 13) in *Family Holiday*, those in which Kurdwin Ayub’s portrayal of his father already prefigure much of the contents and formal choices in the filmmaker’s documentary debut.

From the above, it can be deduced that the return journey in *Paradise! Paradise!* supposes but a re-enactment of Omar’s male fantasies of belonging. This fact is better understood when attention is paid to the double role

performed by Kurdwin's father throughout the movie: the aspiring proprietor, on the one hand, and the enthusiastic Kurdish nationalist, on the other hand.⁵ This double role conditions and is mirrored in the very narrative structure of the film. Approximately, two-thirds of running time has as its main motif Omar's successive visits to building developments and his exchanges with real estate agents. The last section of the film, however, deals with the meeting and, in some way, outlandish experiences with the Peshmerga, the Kurdish guerrilla organization. To the first role corresponds Omar's demeanour as a sort of demanding *nouveau riche* in search of the perfect home. Visually, this quest is conveyed by Ayub through long sequences with little contextualisation in which she follows (and interacts with) her father across a continuum of almost empty construction sites in desertic areas of rapid urbanisation. As a result of this, Omar's wish of finding a home of his own seems to be invariably deferred. Such deferral, and its accompanying feeling of frustration, is counterbalanced by the nationalist exaltation derived from the acquaintance with the Peshmerga. The introduction to the Kurdish freedom fighters, as some other hints in the movie at the geopolitical standing of the Kurdistan, is channelled first through short scenes in which Kurdwin's siblings are watching the news on television. The Peshmerga episode is subsequently divided into two main sequences: one happening at a clothes store and, as an unexpected aftermath of this, the journey to the Islamic State (IS) territory. Both sequences stage a sense of reinvigorated masculine fervor on the part of Omar, a process that feeds on martial and nationalistic values as shared by male subjects (the migrant doctor and the guerrilla fighters) who express mutual admiration through histrionic cheek-kissing, picture posing, and automated "V" sign-making.

Given Omar's frantic attempts and (mis)adventures, one pressing question remains to be solved: how does Kurdwin as a 'situated' filmmaker approach this reality? In other words: how does she, as a female, younger (post)migrant (than Omar) cinematically convey this disparate set of affections and allegiances (towards the homeland) while coping with her father's nostalgia and protagonism? A first indication is provided by Ayub's own thoughts about registering the journey: as she stated in an interview (Morán Ferrés 2016: 16), she soon realised that she was spending much of her time in Kurdistan just 'holding the camera', continuously filming as if from a distance. Additionally, she admits that keeping the process as such made the act of looking a much easier, less painful task. But the very nature of the film provides evidence against an unequivocal reading of Ayub's feature as a sort of detached, non-intrusive observation about the lived experiences of other Kurdish (post)migrant and native social actors. On the contrary, the prevailing mood of the film is built around Kurdwin's role as both an ironic observer-participant as well as a performer. It is from this standpoint that *Paradise! Paradise!* delves deep into the complex condition of those who navigate across (diaspora) spaces and cultures.

3 "Do it more like Rambo": Kurdwin Ayub as an "embodied" filmmaker

At first glance, Kurdwin Ayub's approach to the topic of the travelogue conforms with Lipovetsky and Serroy's (2009: 152-4) claims about certain tendencies of the neo-documentary being preferably focused on the most banal and intimate aspects of reality. There is certainly an almost pseudo-ethnographic look at social actors and their environment (the singular ethnoscapes of the Kurdistan) in *Paradise! Paradise!*. In the movie, however, these preferences are accompanied by participation, interpellation and expressive surplus. The distance to the filmed object/subject is willingly trespassed through the very inscription of Kurdwin's body on-screen. The filmmaker shifts positions (from behind to in front of the camera) very often so as to become herself a(nother) subject, physically present, and involved in the experience of return to the homeland. As a sentient body, she lets her emotions flourish, be known and registered, even if sometimes these emotions are just aurally, but not visually conveyed. That is the case, for example, in the second sequence of the episode with the Peshmerga, in which, as Kurdwin and her father are driven by one of the guerrilla, her voice from behind the camera tells both of them (and the audience) about her fears of entering the ISIS zone. Also, once they reach the encampment of the Kurdish freedom fighters, she begs Omar not to let her in the company of so many male and armed strangers. In both sets of scenes, as in the film as a whole, Kurdwin is being much more than a dispassionate on-looker with a camera to act instead as a genuine embodied filmmaker. This ethical and aesthetic (re)location of the filming subject is described by Cerdán and Weinrichter as follows:

5. As stated by Akkaya (2013: 110), Kurdish "diaspora circulations" are based on "strong ethno-national ties" and very active and politicised standpoints.

The term “embodied” refers to the degree of epistemological authority over the world exerted by filmic documentary enunciation; instead of the disembodied voice of the classic expository mode, which offered a global and fixed discourse from outside and from above the world shown [...], today we only accept a voice that is embodied in that world, that forms part of it and tells us about that subjectivity and from that belonging. (2007: 21).⁶

Nichols also addresses the contrast between expository/observational modes of documentary and the performative mode by stating that: “The referential quality of documentary that attests to its function as a window onto the world yields to an expressive quality that affirms the highly situated, embodied, and vividly personal perspective of specific subjects, including the filmmaker” (2001: 132). Kurdwin’s role as embodied filmmaker in *Paradise! Paradise!* implies awareness about her uneasy condition in Kurdistan. Being a woman, she is subject during her visits to the challenges faced by Kurdish women at large who, as Ghaderi-Mameli points out (2012: 24-27), “inhabit” the paradox between the modernising and democratising effects associated to relentless urbanisation and the persistence of pre-modern customs and gender relations.

The paradox is that Kurdish society is undergoing extensive urbanisation. The education of young women is moving forward and large numbers do attend school. In the cities, women are a growing part of the economy and some of them assume high responsibilities in administration and political spheres. Thousands of women have joined the guerrillas. Female writers, poets, painters, journalists, teachers, scientists and parliamentarians constitute an important aspect of the transformation of gender relations in urban areas. These women are actually reshaping the political and social life of Kurdistan. (2012: 25).

Nevertheless, Ghaderi-Mameli also indicates how these positive outcomes are somehow compromised by the disparity between rural vs. urban areas of the country, the social and political obstacles exerted by Islamist groups (including Islamic feminism), and the permanence of deeply ingrained practices like honor killings and female genital mutilation.⁷ In the movie, Kurdwin becomes both a witness and an experiencer of some of the implications of this paradox at the core of contemporary Kurdistan. Even when she certainly enjoys a notable degree of autonomy and spatial mobility, she is sometimes constrained by local cultural habits that codify the visibility/invisibility of the female subject in public vs. private spaces. The filmmaker complains several times to her father about being left at the family house while he goes out; and so does she when her oldest cousin (Haiman), an expatriate like Kurdwin herself, lets her know that the reason why she cannot smoke or drink alcohol during her visit is that half the city are family acquaintances, and that they would disapprove her behavior. A related sense of vulnerability or estrangement lies in Kurdwin’s inability to speak the Kurdish language. Following the trend of many transnational films, this creates a multilingual dialogue that, in *Paradise! Paradise!*, results in the filmmaker’s dependence on her father (they always speak to each other in German) as an interlocutor and mediator when in the process of grasping the reality of the homeland. Kurdwin is very often caught in perplexity about this world, about its folklore, as shown in the scenes in which she, Omar and some of her relatives witness an incident between Arabs and Kurds outside a city pavilion, or when they overtake a funeral procession (a line of vehicles), and the filmmaker is horrified at the sight of women hitting themselves in pain.

A further extension of the embodied filmmaking stance in *Paradise! Paradise!* is derived from Kurdwin’s contrapuntal participatory role in relation to Omar. The filmmaker constantly interacts with her father in the movie, not only during the unfruitful visits to real estate developments, but also in the most private scenes at her uncle’s house in Kurdistan and at the family home in Vienna. Out of this constant exchange from different sides of the pro-filmic space (Kurdwin is mostly behind the camera while Omar is part of the world in front of it), an ironic and implicitly defiant attitude is born. Very often in the film, Kurdwin’s off-screen voice questions her father about her actions and decisions. One early example of these dynamics of interaction between father and daughter happens during their first appointment with real estate agents in Kurdistan. Noticing Omar’s preferences for a bigger house than the one he is being shown, Kurdwin plainly asks her father what is the

6. My own translation.

7. For an informed assessment of gender coding in Kurdistan, see King (2014), chapters 3 (66-101) and 4 (102-37). Additionally, for an insight into the complex interpenetration between national(ist) politics and Kurdish women’s movements in Iraq, see al-Ali and Pratt (2011).

point about buying such an expensive house given the fact they now are based in Vienna. The same applies to several other scenes, like during the visit to the retail wholesale clothing warehouse (owned by her family), in which Kurdwin disrupts Omar's profuse praises for both the entrepreneurial activities of the Ayubs and the quality of the products by speaking out an inconvenient question (namely, why, if produced in Kurdistan, are the clothes labelled as "Made in Turkey"?).

By displaying this incredulous and ironic participatory stance, the filmmaker eventually reverses Omar's assertive demands and outward manly "leadership". Under this light, the film can be seen as an evolving (re)positioning of the roles and representational values of the daughter/filming subject and father/filmed subject. This process is very aptly conveyed in all those scenes in which Omar asks her daughter to film him in a particular way, like the very illuminating one of Omar posing as he looks at himself in a mirror of one of the empty apartments. To level this disparity, the filmmaker sometimes arranges or conditions her father's on-screen appearance, like when he asks him to "do it more like Rambo" while she is filming him as he is holding a gun at the Peshmerga encampment. Additionally, the ultimate, both skeptical and kind, cinematic gaze at Omar can probably be found in those moments in which Kurdwin registers, in a very naturalistic manner, her father as he stays in pleasurable contemplation of his homeland/Kurdistan and muses on it obsessively repeating the titular "Paradise! Paradise!".

In this way, Omar's travelogue subtly turns into yet another challenge to the centrality of the father figure, one infused at equal parts with tenderness and aloofness. A side-effect of this irreverent look at the progenitor is the de-construction of "the most important and consuming narrative of all –the grand, happy epic of family life", which, as stated by Zimmermann (1995: ix), is at the core of the home-movie as a filmic mode, especially once the younger generations appropriated of the technologies for audiovisual recording. It follows from this that *Paradise! Paradise!* ironises many of the conventions of family narratives, while it simultaneously develops a quite unromanticised representation of the return journey of the (post)migrant. Multiple indications reinforce the ever failure of Omar's attempts to come back: one of the sketches in *Family Holiday* shows him trying to persuade his wife to support him on his prospects of buying a house in his native land; in *Paradise! Paradise!* is Farid, one of Kurdwin's uncles, the one who almost picks a quarrel with Omar over his brother's mildness and his never fulfilled plans of owning a house in Kurdistan. This very same idea is symptomatically depicted in the very last scene of the movie: back in Vienna, Kurdwin films her parents' bedroom: nothing has changed: Omar is watching some videos of Kurdish music on his tablet and the mother (Awini) is sleeping.

The longing is going to stay, as not only does the father figure smoothly 'fade out' in Ayub's view, it is the very idea of return that also dissolves as a mirage, as just another form of wishful-thinking.

4 "You've got the sweetest ass in the world": Performing transnational (digital) heterotopias

So, what is left once the dream of returning is flawed? If, as I stated above, *Paradise! Paradise!* stages Omar's efforts as routinary and unrealistic, what does Ayub's film offer in the form of compensation for the reality of displacement? Berger (2016: 171) recalls deeply ingrained thematic patterns among accented filmmakers by stating that "[a]s a concept, 'home' is a utopian construction, especially when looking at narratives of migration, diaspora and exile [...]" What is home/paradise, then, in Kurdwin Ayub's feature? A close scrutiny of the documentary would lead us to the conclusion that, once the homeland turns into either a chimeric dream or a non-fixed position, the possibility arises of striving for alternative or complementary sites of belonging. Within a transnational framework, these multi-sited, cross-cultural, and intersectional identity patterns correspond to "diaspora spaces" in which:

[...] multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition. (Brah, 2003: 631).

Subsequently, the "other (transnational) spaces" in *Paradise! Paradise!* can be linked to Foucault's well-known theory on *heterotopias*, those:

[...] real and effective spaces which are outlined in the very institution of society, but which constitute a sort of counter-arrangement, of effectively realized utopia, in which all the real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable. (1997: 332).

Heterotopias, as mixed spaces both critical and deviant (Foucault 1997: 332-33), relate in the movie exclusively to the young migrant generation (Kurdwin and her cousins) and few selected sites: the kids' bedroom and the rooftop. These are the spaces in which the youngsters' uneasiness about their condition in Kurdistan gives rise to other takes on reality. Just like Ayub, her younger siblings are émigrés living in-between borders. Given Kurdwin's skills as a filmmaker, they spontaneously use cinematic (auto)mediation as a way to come together and create their own haven, a site of fantasy and self-awareness. This self-staging inclination was already indicated in *Family Holiday* (specifically in sketches 5, 6, 12 and 16), in which Kurdwin and her young siblings present two performances through very simple mise-en-scène. The first one revolves around a short fiction about making friends; in it, non-diegetic music is used in stark contrast to the overall realistic approach of the piece. The second example (sketch 16) reveals Kurdwin's British cousins dressed in Native Indian costumes and singing Shakira's global hit "Waka-Waka (This Time for Africa)". Both instances of (auto)mediation of young migrants are characterised by a performative approach to reality.

As stated by Nichols, "[t]he free combination of the actual and the imagined is a common feature of the performative documentary" (2001: 131). In this vein, the expressive outlook (and surplus) introduced in Ayub's film derives from the young expatriates' desires, anxieties, hybrid identity markers, and transcultural background. An early set of scenes located in Kurdistan illustrates the intermingling between the realms of the real and the imaginary as experienced by the young (post)migrant subjects. The sequence starts with Kurdwin interacting mainly with Haimen, who is sharing his wishes for a quick return to Germany. Like Kurdwin, Haimen and his family lead a provisional existence in Kurdistan, one that he openly despises. The exchange continues at the rooftop, the very space in which youngsters can express themselves without the company of the adults in the family (Farid's) house. There, at night and looking from above at the flashing lights of the city, Kurdwin's accounts about her independent life in Vienna mix with Haimen's performance of a rap song in German. (Maybe) not incidentally, the sequence cuts then to the kids' bedroom and ends with a brief shot, in selfie fashion, of all of them together (Kurdwin, Haimen and the kids) as the filmmaker directs the camera to the wardrobe mirror. It is a very intimate moment of identification and self-representation at a space whose childish decoration (branded products for Winnie the Pooh and Hello Kitty are noticeable) seems to evoke the utopia of the home as a site penetrated by transnational commercial culture. Besides intimacy and self-recognition, this is also the site of multiple transgressions. Peters and Seier partially address these processes by noting the transformative and heterotopic nature of the adolescents' bedroom:

If we wanted to define teenager's bedrooms as heterotopias as described by Foucault, they might be understood as equally private *and* public, actually existing *and* utopian, performative *and* transgressive spaces. At issue in this utopia is not an imaginary that appears in strict separation from the given as its "beyond," but the transgression and transformation potentials of the given. (2009: 199).

One significant indication of the infringement of the borders of the "given" in *Paradise! Paradise!* involves a much wider environment than that of the home and family life, so as to deploy, additionally, an irreverent look at the complex geopolitics of the Middle East. In this particular scene, Kurdwin and three of the kids stand in front of the camera in what looks like their own fancy dress party. Using the usual frontal perspective of videos shared by teenagers on platforms like YouTube, Kurdwin and her siblings parody the liturgy of mediated ritual executions carried out by ISIS fighters. It is precisely this global jihadist imaginary that is being mimicked through (re)mediation in Ayub's film: as the victims wait to be executed, one 'actor' (dressed in the Peshmerga uniform) enters the scene from the right and shoots the ISIS fighter dead; all the performers start jumping and dancing at once as music is playing in the background. A similar relief from the constraints of the real/real life or the "given" happens in the kids' bedroom later on in the film. Another short scene edited in-between two main sequences concerning Omar's quests suggests, again following a performative style and YouTube-like aesthetics, liberation from gender coding. Kurdwin and Haimen set the scene by finding another frontal

camera perspective over one of the beds and using the laptop and a projector to screen a giant Universal logo on one of the bedroom's walls. Against the backdrop of this image of an unequivocal icon of (global) popular culture, Hendrin (Haimen's brother) jumps on the bed and seductively dances to Alex C.'s German version of "You've Got the Sweetest Ass in the World", thrusting his hips in a highly sexualized manner. Strictures on gender identities are parodied and subverted; bodily performance at this moment represents, too, the cultural inscription of the (post)migrant subject into the transnational imaginary of US-dominated popular culture. A "situated" identity exceeds the regulations and allowances of a given national-cultural framework so as to re-connect with a site of belonging that is diffuse but networked and effective. As Peters and Seier put it in relation to YouTube home dances: "the individual body is both rendered open to experience and deterritorialized, and also inscribed in a general archive of gestures, poses and images through imitation and procedures of repetition" (2009: 196). The re-appropriation on the kid's part of an emblem of global capitalist culture (the Universal logo) plays a subversive role, as it signals the rise of a(nother) habitus (in Bourdieu's terms), a system of thought and praxis that transcends the limits of the (post)migrant experience of "going home". In this context, *Paradise! Paradise!* shows how for some young migrants the process of (self)identification/identity formation is inseparable from the adoption and refinement of an epochal (social) media language. Because, as Ayub's film seems to imply, the last remaining utopia for the transnational young subject in the 21st century is no longer the homeland, but a global imaginary called upon by acts of performative self-mediation.

5 Outro: Towards a new (migrant) memory

In the preceding sections I have approached Kurdwin Ayub's *Paradise! Paradise!* as a case in point for the emergence of new forms of transnational filmmaking in the 21st century. I argued that the movie illustrates the evolution of (auto)mediated representations of the (post)migrant subject within a framework characterised by the overabundance of images and by constant flows and hybridisations. I stated that distinctions should be established between the members of a previous generation of transnational filmmakers (or second generation of accented filmmakers, as theorised by Naficy), and what we may consider as a third generation, due to the fact that those born as digital natives are incorporating the new digital media formats in ways that significantly differ from the recurring attributes of transnational cinema from previous decades. As displayed in *Paradise! Paradise!*, a distinctive feature of this new stage in the self-thematization and self-stylisation of the (post)migrant subject in film derives from the fruitful merging of "embodied" documentary approaches and new media languages. Similar insights, although not specifically focused on exilic experiences, can also be noticed nowadays in related hybrid pieces like *Out* (Denis Parrot 2018), *Selfie* (Agostino Ferrente 2019), and *Gender Derby* (Camille Ducellier 2019). All these films concern teenagers/young individuals whose conflicts (sexual and [trans]gender identities and "coming out," in the case of Parrot's and Ducellier's films, and social stigmatization in Ferrente's movie about adolescents from Traiano's district in Naples) are staged according to mixed cinematic templates: a combination of documentary, participatory video, and the exhibitionist aesthetics of YouTube.

This ongoing development of (trans)cultural modes of representation finds in Kurdwin Ayub's feature debut an illuminating example in which issues about gender and family life coalesce with the never fully solved question about migrants' identities. As I stated above, there is no sense of nostalgia left in Ayub's view on the homeland; the feeling is replaced by the ultimate realisation of identity and belonging as just a set of temporary attachments that can be better grasped when conveyed through successive, and to a certain extent banal, (re)mediations. This self-staging of unstable, non-fixed identities, in turn, happens by connecting situated everyday life with overarching global imaginaries, which sometimes act as emancipatory spaces. The resulting blend attests to the "confluence of narratives" that informs the contemporary diasporic experience as "it is lived and re-lived, produced, reproduced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory" (Brah 2003: 617). This seems to be precisely the preferred environment for the emergence of a (new) "digital network memory" (Hoskins 2009), as dependant on our daily occurrences and interactions as on the new technologies of mediation and connectivity; a new memory that necessarily involves that of exile and displacement. It may be, then, that Kurdwin Ayub's *Paradise! Paradise!* does not only work as a current manifestation of this ongoing process of mediated identity building and remembering, but also as a call for the need to find new critical approaches able to render the (post)migrant experience of the 21st century in

its full complexity.

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