

**Postcolonial Passages: Migration and Cinematic Form in Michael Haneke's *Hidden*
and Alan Gilsonan's *Zulu 9***

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This essay examines two recent cinematic productions from France and Ireland, respectively: Michael Haneke's *Hidden* and Alan Gilsonan's *Zulu 9*. These two films are considered comparatively in terms of migration, postcolonial identity and global capital. But the essay also focuses on how the formal features of the two cinematic, visual texts act and interact with the primary thematic concerns cited above. Thus, the essay foregrounds technical form as a crucial aspect of any consideration of contemporary postcolonial texts, not just cinematic or visual. The essay explores how different "forms" can co-exist within one text and charts how these chafe against each other, particularly in Haneke's *Hidden*, as competing sides in France's colonial history come into conflict in the present – it is the issue of form that most explicitly underscores the violent tensions of the past erupting in the present. Likewise, Gilsonan's much shorter film makes the viewer highly self-conscious about the ways in which we view the tragedies and the hardships of "the other". As it is an Irish film, Ireland's own protracted colonial history obviously bears upon our reactions to this specific and tragic consequence of neo-colonialism charted by Gilsonan.

Keywords: France; Ireland; migration; postcolonialism; cinema

Emphasizing the transitional nature of diasporic artistic consciousness, and implicitly drawing upon the theorization of "third space", interstitial location and liminality by Homi Bhabha, the Irish art critic Liam Greenblade argues: "Its [diasporic art's] *raison d'être* lies in refracting the multiplicities of consciousness and multiple and often contradictory relationships within which

diasporic subjectivity arises. By its nature it is always partial and fragmentary since, at another level of discourse, epistemological, it is seeking the impossible; to give form to a 'not', a neither here nor there, a neither one 'thing' nor another" (45). The longer theoretical genealogy of Greenslade's case is, perhaps, to be sourced to Theodor Adorno's "negative dialectics" or even Ernst Bloch's theorization of utopian cultural politics, with traces of poststructuralist thought also palpable in his epistemological continuum. For our purposes in discussing the representational and political agenda of both Michael Haneke's *Hidden* and Alan Gilson's *Zulu 9*, Greenslade's point alerts us to the thematic continuity between works of art that are created by diasporic artists, or that focus upon the extremely precarious realities of diaspora and migration in the contemporary conjuncture. In addition, it allows one to interrogate these creative visual works in terms of their form; how do the formal strategies deployed by these film makers reflect upon and represent the idea of transition or of rootlessness? Yet even as he takes a degree of intellectual impetus from the differential critical inheritances of each of these theoretical domains, Greenslade is keen to assert a materialist caveat against the pitfalls of political abstraction. Elsewhere in the same essay he warns against "the concept of diaspora in art [. . . becoming] a descriptive artefact, a kind of reference spotting procedure for the culturally adept" (43). In other words, Greenslade is acutely conscious of the trend within fashionable theoretical schools-- postcolonial studies; postmodernism; deconstruction as instructive examples--to endow abstract concepts with inordinate levels of political cachet while remaining unmindful of the material conditions to which these ostensibly "liberatory" idioms refer. With these metacritical thoughts in mind it is still true, nevertheless, that such concepts have become the working tools across contemporary cultural studies and any serious consideration of cultural texts such as film, literature or any declension of popular culture requires critical engagement with them.

Cultural hybridity, liminality, diasporic consciousness, nomadism, migrancy, exile: each of these terms and conditions has become differentially privileged in recent theoretical challenges to the stasis of realist representation and its ossified cultural politics.¹ Dispersal, migrant

consciousness and motile communities of knowledge now additionally assail the very architecture of reason, thought and language, challenged in earlier decades by poststructuralism, postmodernism and feminism. Under such reconfigured imaginative and geopolitical boundaries “[t]hought wanders. It migrates, requires translation. Here reason runs the risk of opening out on to the world, of finding itself in a passage without a reassuring foundation or finality: a passage open to the changing skies of existence and terrestrial illumination” (Chambers 4). The liberating political possibilities of such physical and imaginative travel are further canvassed by James Clifford, who argues that: “[i]f we rethink culture [. . .] in terms of travel, then the organic, naturalizing bias of culture--seen as a rooted body that grows, lives, dies [. . .] is questioned. Constructed and disputed historicities, sites of displacement, interference, and interaction, come more sharply into view” (“Travelling Cultures” 101). In light of such theoretical debate, the very forms through which identities are narrated, produced and confined have come under intense scrutiny.

Edward Said invokes just such transitory populations in his efforts to imagine radical, material alternatives to the sedentary, and malignant, political agendas of global neo-imperialism. Said’s own biographical experience as an exiled Palestinian intellectual both modulates, and legitimates, his reflections on the disruptive capacities of the migrant mind. Drawing on the work of the French urban sociologist Paul Virilio, Said suggests that “the modernist project of liberating language/speech [. . .] has a parallel in the liberation of critical spaces--hospitals, universities, theatres, factories, churches, empty buildings; in both, the fundamental transgressive act is to inhabit the normally uninhabited” (395). He continues, further extracting from Virilio, “As examples, Virilio cites the cases of people whose current status is the consequence either of decolonization (migrant workers, refugees, *Gastarbeiter*) or of major demographic and political shifts (Blacks, immigrants, urban squatters, students, popular insurrections, et cetera)” (365). Ultimately, for Said, such population flows, which quicken political and economic consciousness, “constitute a real alternative to the authority of the state” (395). Said divines a

dynamic counter-hegemonic animus in the movement of migrant peoples; they possess what he terms “exilic energies”, profoundly disruptive and creative voltages that contradict the centralising reification of the modern, capitalist nation-state. These migrant figures, who persist between languages and between homelands, throw into relief the contingency of all historical and political narratives of possession, origins and authorship. Clearly, such politically charged actions are not always conscious affronts to incumbent political authorities. But rather the very existences of incommensurable mobile populations, who refuse to, cannot, or partially participate in the micro-theatrics of capitalist modernity, furnish affective rebukes to the complacent digestion of modernity’s self-validating narratives.

In an interview from 1991, Said elaborates further on his conception of the creative discontinuity of the exilic condition. Referring to the discordant musical form of counterpoint, he suggests to Bonnie Marranca that the mobile situation of the exile is an adjacent phenomenon: “If you’re in exile [. . .] you always bear within yourself a recollection of what you’ve left behind and what you can remember, and you play it against the current experience. So there’s necessarily that sense of counterpoint” (Marranca 26) Here Said captures the residual, and resistant, cultural freight of the exilic consciousness; moving within and between cultures the exile embodies a sense of critical recalcitrance, and also a measure of egalitarian invention, to the easy certainties of political and cultural “homophony”. Crucially, Said is alluding to the question of form, the manner, and extent, to which dominant cultural narrative forms are vulnerable to critical interrogation and expansion by previously excised authorial voices. And, indeed, his subsequent and most famous elaboration on the presence of contrapuntal energies, in *Culture and Imperialism*, divines such formal complexity within the canonical artistic texts of European culture. While narrative is, on the one hand, a stay against death, it is also a simplification, and in that way is also an agent of death for marginal or unrepresentable cultural constituencies. It is this sense in which form can be appropriated and can resound with the voices of exilic, peripheral or submerged populations that is crucial to the ensuing discussion. In reading the relative cinematic

engagements with the issues of migration, asylum and postcolonial politics, I want to explore the idea recently floated by Luke Gibbons that artistic forms are possessive of memories; art-forms house within them memories of oppression, violence and resistance.² But, as we well know, history is not confined to the public sphere--it insinuates itself into the intimate topographies of the private. Perhaps this is especially true of postcolonial societies, in which recent historical traumas remain unresolved.

In his pioneering study *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, the Iranian film critic and academic Hamid Naficy underscores an important metacritical point in arguing: “Approached stylistically, films can be read, re-read, and back-read not only as individual texts but also as sites of struggle over meanings and identities. By problematizing the traditional schemas and representational practices, this approach blurs the distinction, often artificially maintained, among various film types such as documentary, fictional, and avant-garde” (39). Naficy’s intervention is trained on the works of diasporic and exiled filmmakers, and his concern is to track the experimental or technically dissonant facets of their work in terms of their discrete experiences of personal and communal displacement. In reading both *Hidden* and *Zulu 9*, we have to concede ground to Naficy by the simple fact that neither Haneke nor Gilsean can legitimately be stabled with Naficy’s cast of diasporic filmmakers--notwithstanding the fact that Haneke is an Austrian confronting French colonial history. But where we can coincide with Naficy’s project is in its attentiveness to the stylistic features of cinematic texts. The two texts spotlighted in this essay may be at one remove from Naficy’s suite of films but, nevertheless, they thematize the same issues and do so by calling attention to the stylistics of filmic narration. As we argue below, Haneke’s and Gilsean’s films, in distinctive ways and contexts, chime with Naficy’s assertions that filmic texts are “sites of struggle over meanings and identities” and both resolutely problematize “traditional schemas and representational practices”, in dealing with the historical processes and contemporary implications of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

However, in comparing Haneke's and Gilseman's films, one needs to address a number of explicit discontinuities or disparities that exist within the overarching argument. From a macro-historical perspective there are irreconcilable differences between the relative political histories of France and Ireland. France can be enumerated among the erstwhile possessors of European overseas empires; its imperial heritage reaches back to the reign of Francois I (1515-47), under whose auspices Jacques Cartier completed three transatlantic voyages to Canada between 1534 and 1542. This imperial pedigree lingers today with France's array of departments, including Martinique, Guadeloupe and Reunion. Such historical endurance is matched by the geographical embrace of French imperialism, which under successive monarchical, republican and imperial regimes between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries alighted upon five continents. According to Charles Forsdick: "At its height, in the inter-war period [French imperialism] affected the lives of over one hundred million colonized people, living in area that exceeded eleven million square kilometers" (32). Naturally, having exercised its political and military will in such muscular fashion, France has had to come to terms with differential experiences of immigration from overseas colonies and protracted and violent processes of decolonization, as well as the cultural and political legacies of postcoloniality. It is the traces of this complex and weighty accumulation of historical legacies that Haneke's film attempts, *in parvo*, to mediate via the interpersonal relations of his inter-ethnic protagonists in *Hidden*.³

Ireland, on the other hand, cannot lay claim to the same narrative of historical imperial ascendancy and, in many ways, despite its ostensible identification with France in contemporary terms, its history is dramatically different from that of its larger European neighbour. Despite relative geographical intimacy, contemporary political alignment within the European Union, comparable economic profiles and contiguous racial ethnicity, Ireland and France occupy alternative spheres of historical and critical engagement within postcolonial studies. In simple terms, Ireland was England's longest held colony; most historical scholars date the initial occupying incursion to 1169, with the arrival of a Norman army under the military command of

Richard de Clare. The Irish Free State of twenty-six counties was not granted independence until 1922; thus over seven centuries of external colonial rule, marked by prolonged periods of political, cultural and economic disenfranchisement are the key features of Ireland's experiences of imperialism.⁴ Despite the obvious disparities between these respective histories of imperialism, it is critically futile to quarantine formerly colonized countries from past colonial powers. Granted, France was not the colonizer of Ireland, but by bringing them into conversation in this context one hopes to advance understandings of their discrete cultural responses to diasporic and migrant populations. This is not, of course, to divine facile critical analogies between the artistic texts and the historical contexts, but to strike for some sense of cross-cultural information or cultural dialogue between these texts and the histories that they represent. Furthermore, it is not intended to homogenize or to simplify the specific material conditions of these geographical contexts. Rather it is hoped that the discussion can be revealing in terms of broader theoretical and political debates within postcolonial studies, which touch upon issues such as: the legacies of colonialism and its persistence in neo-colonial forms; diasporic consciousness; the politics of migration; artistic form and the political realm; and the unstaunched wounds of colonial histories.

The second discontinuity embedded within the overall argument relates to the selection of cinematic texts. While their geo-historical foci are clearly differentiated, this is also the case when we consider the relative length of the respective films. *Hidden* is a full-length feature with a running time of 117 minutes; in contrast *Zulu 9* runs to a mere 11 minutes. Despite this difference in their narrative duration, both films speak productively to each other in terms of their formal self-reflexiveness and in the thematic concerns played out within their frames. *Hidden* is permitted the full scope of a feature-length narrative arc as it becomes a story of surveillance, clues, misdirection, suspicion and (potential) detection. *Zulu 9* has none of the latitude to exploit these conventional cinematic tropes at length, but in its own way it does exploit the conventions of mainstream visual representation--particularly that of the car-chase sequence. In other words,

while *Hidden* is given the range to tell the full story (which, in fact, it never does), *Zulu 9* is akin to the exposition of a snapshot or a fraction of a larger narrative--in this sense we might draw an analogy with the literary short story. Gilsenan's narrative abounds in suggestive density in a manner that is familiar from the short fictional mode. As we have said, their rich comparability stems from, firstly, the readiness with which we can discern formal self-reflexiveness within the visual texts; secondly, the thematic telescoping of issues such as [neo-] colonialism; migration; modernization; political and economic impoverishment; the open-endedness of the historical continuum and the legacies of empire; and thirdly, the relevance of these matters to countries with both colonial and colonized inheritances, who are now under pressure from increasingly mobile and desperate populations suffering under the aegis of neo-imperial global capital.

One of the primary formal effects of viewing *Hidden* is the way in which the politics of cinematic representation are crucial to the narrative momentum and dramatic tension. In this film we see the dramatic contest within visual art itself--the visual fetish of realism is ambushed repeatedly by the disjunctive intrusions of the fragmentary and obscure narrative codes of surveillance. Within the complacent, consoling narrative codes of the naturalistic there is the irritant of anti-realist representation; the scenes of surveillance, together with the scenes from childhood, function as incendiary violations from the past, from the unconscious and from silences excluded from the semiotic economy of narrative realism. Chafing against the confirmatory frame of realism's accepted mimetic contours, Haneke plants the contradictory energies of a postmodern visual medium. *Hidden* is an exceedingly rich film from a critical perspective, which touches on urgent social issues such as race, class, gender, imperialism, capital and the family. Likewise it is provocative in the ways that it confronts the textual forms--both verbal and visual--through which modern lives are mediated, and the narrative prisms through which personal and national historical narratives are refracted. Haneke articulated such sentiments in a recent interview: "My films are intended as polemical statements against the American 'barrel down' cinema and its dis-empowerment of the spectator. They are an appeal for

a cinema of insistent questions instead of false (because too quick) answers, for clarifying distance in place of violating closeness, for provocation and dialogue instead of consumption and consensus” (Norman).

Hidden is a part of an historical generic trend in cinema, and perhaps in modern art, which privileges formal self-awareness. In such art works there is a knowingness to the creative artefact; a concentration on the surface, on form and on the techniques of representation. Such anatomized forms typically centre on thematic material such as social atomization, violence, trauma, cynicism, or a loss of faith in society’s norms. The formal narrative structures, then, bear the freight of a disillusioned, withdrawn or subversive authorial intent. In this film we see an intertextual confection of artistic genres; *Hidden* is part detective story, part psychological drama, part autobiography and part historical narrative. Again, this formal mixing is symptomatic of the promiscuous dissolution of generic borders in contemporary art--a trend that is mirrored in the increasing pressure exerted on the integrity of national and continental geographical borders. In a typically playful postmodern strategy, Haneke’s film draws attention to itself as a constructed visual text through the use of surveillance footage within the central plot-line. Such matters as visual surveillance and the increasingly intrusive nature of visual culture in today’s world are consistent concerns of Haneke’s art.

In *Hidden* the central dramatic tension revolves around the life of a minor television celebrity, Georges, played by Daniel Auteuil, whose life is disrupted by the delivery of disturbing, and increasingly intimate and threatening, footage from his past and from his contemporary life. As the film unfolds, the primary suspect is revealed as a former childhood friend of Georges, an Algerian, Majid. Majid represents a guilty, and long-forgotten, secret from Georges’ childhood; the orphaned Majid was supposed to be adopted by Georges’ parents, but motivated by childish jealousy, Georges’ manipulated his parents into reversing their decision and Majid spent his remaining minor years in state care. At this level, then, the film is an allegorization of France’s and the West’s protracted history of exploitation and manipulation of

the populations of the third world. And in some way Haneke's film constitutes a visual conjugation of Rushdie's famous aphorism that the empire writes back. Indeed, in consistently adverting to the fabricated nature of visual narration, the film is preoccupied with the idea of authorship; it probes the links between authority, narrative, representation and authorship. Moreover, as Will Norman suggests in an insightful review of the film:

Hidden presents a bigger story than its plot suggests. Implicit in its tragic narrative is France's brutal colonial history--a ghost that refuses to be exorcised as the rioting in its deprived and forgotten *banlieues* only last year demonstrated. More than this, though, the filmgoers of any nation which has colonised and oppressed, which has exploited and looked down upon its immigrants, will feel the quiet power of this movie. I say quiet, because the real stories in *Hidden* are the ones happening off camera, in the minds of its viewers. (Norman par.4)

Anchoring a slick, and in many ways, self-regarding and oleaginous arts/book review television programme, Georges embodies the publicly articulated face of the liberal bourgeois conscience, one that cheerleads history's progress towards the future and salves itself with a commitment to tolerance and pluralism. In his hands the mechanics of the visual, the form offered by visual technology, retail intellectual debate, ideational complexity and liberal values. Georges' skilfully edited and smartly produced programme is an agent of social confirmation, as well as an index of his personal success. His profession offers him a level of comfortable familiarity with the visual; it allows him a manipulable visual version of himself, as he presents and edits the final drafts of his broadcasts. The unwelcome intrusion of clandestine, and uncontrollable, visual versions of himself, his family, and crucially, his past usurps his authorial autonomy. The visual texts of Georges' life: his TV programme, the visual record of the family unit (memorably theorized by Pierre Bourdieu as the family portrait)⁵, and the visual archives of his past are now infested by a contrary, and anonymous, authorship. In these ways memory and

history are being re-written; likewise the present, the marital status quo and Georges' version of himself are being assaulted.

The marginalized, postcolonial disenfranchized bear the repressions of capitalist imperial modernity in their bodies, their representational codes and their movement. In this sense the mobile bodies of the impoverished, of the disfigured, of the policed, of the indentured are globalized, perhaps postmodern, resurrections of the gothic. They are victims of history's legion violences--epistemic, ethnic, economic, political and representational. With their revenant emergence, with the seizure of representational space, or through their re-coding of that space and of received narratives and its forms, they attempt to rewrite the memories of those forms. Such populations mark the limits of modernity's spate. They embody its guilty conscience, yet they are burdened with its menial tasks and its frustrations. They are the exposure of its self-validating myths; they are the discordant voices, the disturbing images of neglected histories, and in Georges' case repressed memories. In *Hidden* history is personal; it is never confined to the abstract, or the textual--it is lived, carceral, violent and infective. In James Clifford's terms such populations and their individual and collective life experiences "produce discrepant temporalities--broken histories that trouble the linear progressivist narratives of nation-states and global modernization" ("Diasporas" 317). Georges is not only beset by the receipt of visual assaults in the present, but these serve to unstitch the seams of his personal history, summoning shameful and discomfiting memories from his childhood. These memories are not only reminders of past shame, but, equally, are suggestive of how different his current life could be if he had acted more honourably as a youth. These recalled events from the past now haunt the present but will surely reverberate into the future as guilty shadowings on Georges' conscience.

While the delivery of the intimate and increasingly violent surveillance footage is perhaps the most arresting of the visual devices in the film, other visual registers are also co-opted by Haneke in his critique of the naturalizing tendencies of visual complacency. The stalker from Georges' past also includes child-like drawings with his video packages--these drawings are

bloody images featuring a beheaded chicken and a child coughing up blood. In fact, blood is a recurring motif in the film, suggestive of the hematological contagion of paranoia, guilt, violence which infects the French body politic, and civil bourgeois society at large. The childish images, then, are firstly, the insertion of non-elite artistic visual medium within the traditionally artistic borders of the cinematic. But they also remind the viewer that memories, pleasant and unpleasant, active and repressed, are visually recalled. We do not remember in words as easily, effectively or as frequently as we do in images; such remembered images bear much more traumatic freight and are more permanently etched on the mind than those of the verbal text.

At one point in the film the action cuts to the living room of Georges' home, but the action on-screen is a *Euronews* report on the Iraqi occupation. The news story is recounting the details of a gubernatorial appointment of the Italian diplomat Barbara Contini to the Iraqi province of Nasiriyah. The sequence is a heavily layered allusion to the politics of colonial occupation, the complicity of the news media in the representation of such topographies and the normalization of violence affected by such visual narratives. Clearly, Haneke is once more weaving a politicized intertextual gesture into the broader narrative framework of the film. But during the report the entire aural canvas of the film becomes deliberately cluttered. At this point we can make out Contini responding to the media in Italian, at the same time that the *Euronews* report is translating these comments into French, and we, the viewers, are facilitated through English subtitles. Herein Haneke achieves a discordant Babelian effect, through which the evasive language of diplomacy, which conceals within itself the barbarism of its military accomplices, is exposed as a saturating, almost universal, language of political narration. But again, it is at the level of form that the author, Haneke, challenges the authorial privilege of such linguistic manoeuvres. Haneke's text is a political and aesthetic affront to the complacent digestion of confirmatory images that pervades Western culture. In this respect Susan Sontag's work is crucial; she concludes: "A capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anaesthetize the injuries

of class, race and sex” (qtd. in Berger, 59). *Hidden* reacts to such passivity by drawing its viewers into the speculative dynamics of its narrative; the film activates the implicit class-based and racial preconceptions of the audience and attempts to discommode the viewer through its extended sequences of ominous, and ambiguous, silence. The film, then, is a self-interrogating text, in the sense that it sees the irony of exposing the limits of visual culture through those very mechanisms. And its achievement is to never offer resolution or consolation; Haneke’s film ends but the issues and the questions it raises do not.

In an article in *The Irish Times* in mid-December 2001, Alan Gilsenan reflected on the eerie similarity between the drama of his 11 minute film *Zulu 9* and the discovery of nine dead refugees, together with five survivors, in the back of a container in Wexford, Ireland, the previous week. Gilsenan’s comments chime with Haneke’s concern with the increasing trend in contemporary culture, in which the representational boundaries between the so-called real and the fictional become blurred. But they also, without any sense of hubris, suggest the capacity of art to retain a proleptic, or at least cautionary, role in society. Gilsenan’s work has consistently engaged with what might be called the material reality of Irish society and its histories. The cinematic and documentary work of sociology graduate Gilsenan, including the recent RTE broadcast *The Asylum*, interrogates presiding political and moral complacency. The title of the film is taken from police slang: “Zulu 9” is a code word for explosive material, the connotations of which clearly extend beyond the confines of Gilsenan’s short feature--reaching out to contemporary attitudes to migration and the polyglot fabric of modern Irish society. It also invokes the tribal designation of the South African Zulu people, who became mythologized as fearsome and savage in the popular colonial imagination. The nine in the title refers to the number of victims in the film: eight die and one survives. The plot is harrowing but one that has been referenced occasionally in the news media; a truck driver, Kevin Montford, transporting an illegal cargo of toxic chemicals along the N11, hears noises from the container, including what sounds like a gun-shot. Instead of stopping there and then, he contacts the police via radio and they eventually

arrive to investigate the disturbance. While the viewer readily anticipates the likely outcome of the police search, the combined visual and aural effects, together with the unrelenting pace of the action, including hand-held footage and a layered soundtrack, ensure that the denouement retains its harrowing import.

Referring to the style of *Zulu 9*, Gilsenan admits that:

We tried to make *Zulu 9* as authentic as possible. We shot it as Sky News would shoot it. The crew wore flak jackets or fireman's outfits, so from the helicopter, filming above, it would look real. We tried to embrace reality without understanding its significance. We filmed on a then-unfinished section of the M50 motorway. Above the set was a bridge carrying commuters home from work. Many pulled over to peer from the bridge at the action below. Idly curious. (Gilsenan par. 17)

The film, then, represents a highly self-conscious text--one that actively interacts with, imitates and, thereby, implicates the dynamics of voyeuristic media coverage. For the "idly curious" commuter the fictive action of *Zulu 9* assumes the form of the real; it simulates the "reality" of police pursuit and media surveillance that are elements of our narrative comprehension of the material world. These individuals, then, are implicated in their own deception, but not only that, there is a sense in which they are also implicated in the fictive/real action of human trafficking and the tragedies that unfold in these practices too. And still further, the pitiful sight of a desperate people arriving in an alien country as economic migrants resounds in the Irish context, as it calls to mind the emaciated mobile bodies of Irish famine emigrants. Thus these inquisitive commuters, engaged in their own circuitous drama of daily movement, are witness to the recrudescence in modern form of their nation's traumatic histories.

Gilsenan's film is akin to *Hidden* at the level of form, as it harnesses the visually arresting medium of surveillance footage as a narrative alternative to naturalistic representation. In *Hidden* the contraband footage delivered to Georges' home violates the integrity of the

domestic and quarries the discarded recesses of his past--in other words this declension of surveillance footage enforces a discomfiting intimacy. In *Zulu 9* the employment of a helicopter and hand-held cameras captures the panicked, visceral and emotive footage from police chases, now a common feature of popular television. "Gilsenan takes considerable risks in *Zulu 9*", according to Cheryl Herr; "[t]he brilliantly rapid editing creates dimensionality in the footage and helps to disclose the encompassing environmental surround--truck, weather, highway, helicopter" (117). In a sense the urgency fomented by the choice of visual forms mirrors the desperation of the trucker's illicit human cargo. What is evident from the mechanics of the cinematic form on display here is the sense of disorientation; we are offered what we might call a spectacle of disorientation, which aims to represent the physical, cultural and psychological concussion of the illegal migrant. The disjointed visual narrative is married to a verbal/aural text; we hear the truck driver listening to a cassette reading of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

...you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once--somewhere--far away--in another existence perhaps. There were moments when one's past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare to yourself; but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence.

Not only is this an obvious instance of the playful intertextuality of postmodern culture, but it is clearly a signal of the political message of the film and a deliberate reference to the excesses of colonialism. Equally, it suggests that these migrants have been deceived. The success of Western cultural forms in advertising the prosperity, the freedoms, the opportunities and the superiority of the west to developing populations has tempted these people and others like them to risk their lives in order to sample this lifestyle. But in a sense, such alluring narratives, which the west tells

itself too, are illusions. Likewise the value systems that buttress such narratives: equality, pluralism, tolerance, etc. are equally hollow. Gilsenan's narrative, then, is not solely trained on the plights of the illegals recessed in the interiors of articulated trucks and ships; he is equally exercised by the ways in which these people are received and perceived in Europe. Rather than presenting an unreflective morality tale, Gilsenan's film exposes the interface between the traveler and the host; it makes us question the limits of iron-willed legality when confronted with moments that demand more than law, and reach towards ethics and morality.

For these traumatized and/or deceased migrants, the journey represents a post-industrial descent into a "heart of darkness". Again the Irish context recalls a further detail of Irish emigrant history; these deathly containers are postmodern versions of nineteenth-century coffin ships bearing a morbid cargo--a cargo that has invested its security and prospects in politico-cultural conjuncture that has occasioned the very journey they are undertaking. Indeed it is telling that such containers are frequently deployed as vehicles for such clandestine travel; in effect what we witness is the further reification of the human body as a transportable commodity. But, of course, their journey as commodity anticipates the future that, potentially, awaits them as functions of a market-oriented social system. The viscid darkness of the container constitutes a liminal zone of transition for the migrant; escaping an undesirable past life and now propelled towards an uncertain and unknowable future. As Herr suggests: "The person in the dark enclosure, the imprisoning container, is caught up in an apparatus of transport; the person becomes an epiphenomenon of the smuggling mechanism" (112). The migrant is evacuated from history; he or she exists in interstitial narrative territory through which their burdensome bodies are smuggled within the heavily policed borders of the future. According to Herr, "stripped of engagement with a fully social environment [. . .] human cargo occupies a certain kind of limit situation in our understanding of what it is to be in-the-world" (112). In other words, the migrant undergoes a form of breakdown of identity during the transportation; the journey, the destination, the languages, the geography and the prospects for migrants are unpredictable and potentially

volatile, if not life-threatening. They are physically and culturally adrift, beyond the limits of their familiar cultural and social coordinates.

At 11 minutes in duration, *Zulu 9* is a brief penetrating meditation on the doubled nature of Irish historical experience. The film embodies Gibbons' point cited above--that artistic forms are possessive of memories; in its formal structuring Gilsenan's film harbours the after-effects of Ireland's protracted colonial and postcolonial histories. It gestures towards our complicity with these migrants both as historical fellow migrants and as contemporary western consumers. Gilsenan's film extends, however, beyond the limits of contemporary human trafficking. The narrative effectively explodes the historical continuum with its allusions to past historical suffering in an Irish and international colonial context, its indictment of those currently involved in the exploitation of the vulnerable and the impoverished, and its implicit request for ethical vigilance, a matter all the more pertinent to a postcolonial society such as Ireland. Again, Herr is suggestive when he reflects on the ethical freight of *Zulu 9*: "Irish filmmaking looks in two directions. Glancing backwards, Irish filmmaking carries the indelible trace of indigenous colonial trauma. Facing ahead, the old emigration stories reach out to engage with the global trauma that today touches people in all countries. This double orientation of Irish film precisely mirrors the split at the heart of the postcolonial situation" (120). Both films, in fact, can be read in terms of Herr's point; both enhance our awareness of the material and the representational violences associated with migrancy, displacement and exile in postcolonial and neo-colonial capitalist conjunctures. *Zulu 9* partakes of what Gibbons elsewhere calls "lateral mobility" (180), which relates to the capacity to think across borders between cultures that have undergone historical repression, and, also, to include those that remain under the sway of uneven political and economic distribution in the present.

Mobility is both a condition of possibility, and a disruptive, potentially traumatic experience. Declensions of such movements, such as exile, migrancy, hybridity and liminality are, as has been well documented, part of the poststructuralist, postmodernist and, later, adjacent

postcolonialist interrogation of tendentious identitarian absolutes. Critics such as Bhabha, Said, Chambers, Hall and Appiah have differentially urged the enabling potential of defiantly fluid individual and communal identities, what Bhabha terms “unhomeliness” (9), or “differential communality” (qtd. in Chambers, 14). Writing in 1982 in an essay entitled “Imaginary Homelands”, Salman Rushdie reflected on the nature of exile or expatriation for the contemporary writer. While mobility granted newly calibrated angles of creative perception for the artist, perhaps even distant clarity of vision, it is nevertheless leavened by a feeling of loss. Yet the weight of that loss is itself countered by the imaginative impulse, the creative yields that unfold and that seek to compensate for the uncertainty of alienation and exile:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge--which gives rise to profound uncertainties--that our physical alienation from India almost inevitable means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (10)

This sense of absence is, perhaps, a symptom of all travel--once one has departed from one's “home”, it can never be experienced as entirely the same place again. Both the traveller and the sanctuary place alter with mobility, distance and absence, or as Stuart Hall suggests with reference to the migrant's condition: “Migration is a one way trip. There is no ‘home’ to go back to” (44). But Hall's point also alludes to the fact that mobility is not merely a traversing of space/time between fixed locations. Such anchored positions are founded on historically naturalized versions of individual and communal identity--brands of identity that are no longer theoretically sustainable or beyond political challenge.

Aggregating Rushdie's concern with the mechanics of fictive remembrance and Hall's notion of identitarian fluidity, even contingency, we are not only alerted to the enabling trajectories of liminality, provisionality and transition, but we must accept these cultural and political conditions as the most urgent in the contemporary global world. These combined insights are relevant to the manner in which both political and artistic languages do and must change to accommodate new social conjunctures. Experiences of loss, displacement, exile, trauma, alienation and marginality, as the two texts under scrutiny in this paper suggest, have the capacity to interrogate and to expand the formal limits of dominant representational mechanisms --developments which do not necessarily sit easily with those at the "centre". So while artistic migrancy and critical travel have a discordant creative yield, it also has the effect of displacing the narrative certainties of dominant constituencies and of provoking urgent ethical responses from the viewer. It is this critical issue that is central to the disturbing narrative structures of both *Hidden* and *Zulu 9*; the viewer is challenged, and offered a looking-glass through which they can confront conscious and submerged prejudices. Representation is power and in producing such dissonant texts, Haneke and Gilsean expose the inequitable power structures of dominant representational modes. Both filmmakers seem to coincide with the conclusion of Robert Stam's essay, "Eurocentrism, Polycentrism, and Multicultural Pedagogy: Film and the Quincentennial", where he argues:

The powerful are not accustomed to being relativized; most of the world's representations are tailored to the measure of their narcissism. Thus a sudden relativization by a less flattering perspective is experienced as shock, an outrage [. . .]. Subaltern groups, in contrast, are not only historically accustomed to being relativized, they also display a highly relativizing, even irreverent attitude towards the dominant culture. (119)

Haneke's film interrogates the narcissism of George's class and profession; the historically endowed certainty of authority is severely tested on a number of levels in Haneke's treatment. Georges' capacity and freedom to manipulate interpersonal and televisual versions of himself are undermined by the guerrilla media tactics of his assailant, and this is indeed an "outrage"; it is the victor turned victim. In another way, Giltsenan portrays Ireland's confrontation with its own past; the headlong surge towards modernization has blinded Ireland to the legacies of its own colonial past and to the presence of versions of that past within its borders in contemporary times. Giltsenan's short sharp "shock" is an alarming reminder of the ethical responsibilities Ireland retains as a postcolonial society, particularly as one that has subsequently accrued enviable economic wealth and political cachet. Both films, then, embody trenchant challenges to the ease with which visual media and iconography are complicit in the semiotics of complacency under the contemporary politico-economic conjuncture, as well as furnishing us with instructive Benjaminian shards that emerge from the respective colonial histories of France and Ireland. The myths of historical exile and displacement and the emotional strains of more recent Irish emigrant experiences are now replaced by the challenges of accommodating large incoming communities from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. It is now a question of how we narrate the present and the future as much as it is about contesting embedded historical narratives. Likewise, resident emigrant populations within former imperial powers such as France have become increasingly disillusioned by what is perceived as decades of social and political disenfranchisement, and this has led to intermittent outbreaks of extreme violence. Both of these differing contexts present opportunities to interrogate the narrative, representational codes of western, European cultures in terms of discrepant colonial histories through visual texts that emphasize the mutual implication of the displaced and the host.

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Notes

¹ James Clifford writes: "An unruly crowd of descriptive/interpretive terms now jostle and converse in an effort to characterize the contact zones of nations, cultures, and regions: terms such as *border*, *travel*, *creolization*, *transculturalism*, *hybridity*, and *diaspora*." ("Diasporas" 303).

² Gibbons explored this idea in a panel discussion at the *Association of Art Historians* Conference in Belfast in April 2007.

³ For more on French colonialism and cinema see Sherzer.

⁴ For more on Ireland, Empire and Postcolonial Studies see Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*.

⁵ See Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*.