Migrancy and Music on Film

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Abstract

This article discusses the Turkish-German director Fatih Akın's *Gegen die Wand/Duvara Karşı* of 2004, John Baily's pioneering ethnographic film *Amir: An Afghan Refugee's Life in Peshawar, Pakistan* of 1985, and Palestinian artist Jumana Manna's film-installation *A Magical Substance Flows Into Me* of 2016 through the lens of Mieke Bal's concept of "migratory aesthetics". It argues that music and sound illuminate important facets of Bal's argument about time's 'materiality' and 'stickiness'. But the article also offers a critical perspective. The three films – respectively products of commercial cinema, academic ethnography, and contemporary curatorial culture – portray complex struggles over time and history and the masteries and skills musicians bring to such struggles, while also questioning the narrative frameworks within which migrant and refugee musicians have been conventionally represented. They suggest some of the ways in which the study of music and sound might be more effectively harnessed to contemporary perspectives on 'the new diversities'.

Keywords: ethnographic film, ethnomusicology, migrancy, Mieke Bal, Fatih Akın, John Baily, Jumana Manna

Some would say that the field of music and migration studies has become 'impossible to map' (Ozan Aksoy, in Rasmussen et al 2019).[1] It is hard not to sympathize. Earlier paradigms, in which nation states and a problematic of integration were central, are no longer functional. Meanwhile, the Global North's 'migration crisis', the images of overloaded boats in the Mediterranean and the inflammatory rhetoric of the far right suggest that what is needed, from academics, is activism, not more reflection and writing.[2] There are options between the two, of course, such as Mieke Bal's by now well-known 'migratory aesthetics'.[3] This proposed artistic curation, collaboration and critical engagement is a means of 'remembering with' migrants and refugees. Here, I reflect on migratory aesthetics from the point of view of music on film, an aspect of the topic that has not yet been explored. Such reflection acknowledges the call for attention to be paid to the 'spatio-temporal' dimensions of migration in current research into the 'new diversities' (Salzbrunn 2018, Vertovec 2011). This implies the need for a more cautious and critical (historical) account of the kinds of artistic and curatorial collaboration proposed by Bal and others. It also involves both a recognition of the complex representational terrain that 'migrations' traverse and a quest to put them on a new footing.

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[1] A sense of crisis is clearly communicated in the Society for Ethnomusicology roundtable (see Rasmussen et al. 2019) from which Aksoy's comments are taken, representing a variety of thoughtful positions on the issue.

[2] The scare-quotes around 'migrant crisis' reflect the critical position of Bhabha and others on this matter (Bhabha 2018), and underline the constructed and often manipulative representations of it in the Global North.

[3] Here I draw primarily on Bal 2011. The introduction to her and Miguel Hernández-Navarro's edited volume (Bal and Hernández-Navarro 2011) contains a more theoretical explanation of concepts such as 'materiality' and 'stickiness'.

In this article, I explore such matters with reference to three films about music and migration. The films in question are the Turkish-German director Fatih Akın's *Gegen die Wand/Duvara Karşı* of 2004 (henceforth, in English, '*Head-On*'), John Baily's pioneering ethnographic film *Amir: An Afghan Refugee's Life in Peshawar, Pakistan* of 1985 ('*Amir*'), and Palestinian artist Jumana Manna's film-installation *A Magical Substance Flows Into Me* of 2016 ('*AMSFM*'). The comparative 'reading' of the three I propose is significant for three reasons. One is that they all juxtapose commercial, ethnographic and 'art' cinema, allowing us to see what they share, as well as how they might differ. I will show that they all find experimental and unusual ways of reconciling the representation of the temporalities of music and musicianship with film narrative. A second reason is that they all concern migrants and refugees in, and from, the Muslim-majority Middle East. The films all occupy and explore, knowingly and intelligently, what continues to be a (very) highly charged representational field. A third reason is that they all have something interesting to say about the changing shape of diversity in the three cities they explore.

It is worth saying a few preliminary words about both the films themselves and their locations. The background to Akın's film, a melodrama about star-crossed lovers in an unnamed city in Germany and Istanbul, is Turkish labour migration to Germany. This began in earnest following a labour-recruitment agreement between the two states in 1961. Entire neighbourhoods of Berlin and other German cities began to assume a Turkish aspect. A hybrid German-Turkish culture (including a dialect of Turkish – *kanakça/kanak sprak*) emerged in due course, though one quickly complicated and enriched by German reunification and immigration from other Muslim majority countries. The background to Baily's film, a study of a refugee musician building a life in Peshawar, Pakistan, is the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979, at the height of the Cold War. The West's sponsorship of the mujahideen resistance in Afghanistan lead to a protracted war, large Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, and, today, a significant Afghan diaspora in the UK, Australia and California. The background to Manna's film, which explores Robert Lachmann's ethnomusicological research in Mandate Palestine in relation to today's Jerusalem, is the Jewish immigration to Palestine that led to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, wars with the new state's Arab neighbours, the marginalization of its own Arab citizens and the occupation of Palestinian land. The 1967 war and Israel's subsequent annexation of East Jerusalem was a turning point. Complex histories of Jewish and Palestinian movement and their soundscapes inform Manna's film.

Each of these films might have been described by Bal as studies in the 'stickiness' of time and the '*mésentente*' (disagreement) of the migrant and the refugee, caught between the conflicting temporalities of home and those of their new location. The stakes of such struggles are high in all three cases discussed here. However, as the various protagonists of these films struggle to bridge these divides, so too they complicate but also enrich them. Musicians like the Roma musicians in *Head-On* are signs of difference, in part because of their (subversive) mastery of sound and associated emotions, in part because of their expertise in engaging with difference and diversity within their own societies. These masteries and forms of expertise travel with them, making musicians, in the spaces of licence afforded by their new homes, rather special kinds of cultural agents (Kasinitz and Martiniello 2019).

I make three arguments, then, with reference to these films. The first is that migratory aesthetics might pay more attention to music, particularly for the light it can shed on how migrants and refugees 'make' and manage time across environments. The second is that music and musicians offer a highly productive focus for understanding contemporary conditions of diversity, particularly as these involve migrants and refugees. The third is that films about music and musicians involve narrative and representational challenges, and that, in the light of Aksoy's

impasse, experiments with the genre might usefully be considered by ethnographers and historians of migration. I will explore each of these films in turn with these thoughts in mind.

Head-On

Head-On tells the story of the star-crossed lovers Cahit and Sibel, played respectively by Birol Ünel and Sibel Kekilli. It received various awards, and its director Fatih Akın went on to produce several more successful films about Turkish-German life. The overlap of actors' names with their on-screen characters, not uncommon in popular Turkish cinema, points to a blurring of on and off-screen identities. We are not fully in a fictional world. The untimely and recent death of Birol Ünel deepens this impression.[4]

But neither are we in a world of cinematic realism. *Head-On* is punctuated by song, in the manner of a musical. Indeed, the entire film is presented as a kind of musical performance in itself. In the momentary darkness that precedes the film, the opening song is introduced by an up-tempo verbal count-in: 'one, two, three, four'. We then see Roma musician Selim Sesler and his band accompanying vocalist Idil Üner, as though on a stage. But the setting and the static, unwavering gaze of the camera are distinctly odd. We are outside, evidently in the middle of Istanbul (we see the historic mosques and the Bosphorus in the background). Colourful traditional carpets are spread out across the foreground. The mise-en-scène, then, archly and self-consciously establishes a sonic tableau of 'Turkish tradition'; the camera establishes distance and irony.

When the song finishes, the action of the film starts. We meet the protagonist, Cahit, clearing up bottles after a rock concert somewhere in Germany. He has a beer with a co-worker, drives unsteadily to another bar, argues with his girlfriend, assaults a complete stranger, climbs back into his car, speeds through dark streets to the pounding of rock music, and drives himself at

top speed into a wall. After the crash, silence; a bandaged and badly bruised Cahit wakes up in a psychiatric hospital. The film proper begins. But the musical terms of this conflict of identities have been clearly set out in these opening minutes: a static, enduring, knowing 'Turkish culture' versus a dynamic, unsettled, self-destructive 'West'. 'Tradition' versus 'modernity', presented archly and ironically as a mismatched musical performance, beginning in one place, but ending somewhere else. Our hero, a symbolic car crash between the two.

The movie-musical references deepen.[5] We are quickly immersed in genre conventions of the domestic melodrama of the sort Turkish and German-Turkish viewers would identify as 'arabesk' (an Arabized Turkish popular culture associated with Egyptian-style film musicals until the 1980s; see Stokes 2010 for further discussion of the musical context). Cahit meets Sibel in the psychiatric hospital. She too has attempted suicide. She asks him to agree to a sham marriage so she can get her traditionally minded Turkish parents off her back. He agrees. Inevitably they fall in love, and inevitably there is violence. Cahit kills a rival and ends up in prison. Sibel's father sends her brother to kill her, since she has stained the family's honour, but she escapes, taking refuge with Cahit's work friend Şeref. As they are trying to get to sleep in his apartment, Şeref sings a well-known folksong, '*Ne Ağlarsın*' ('Why Cry?') in a cracked and tuneless voice. It is so cracked and tuneless that Sibel is forced to laugh. Suddenly she agrees to Şeref's suggestion that she goes to her sister in Istanbul. The rest of the film is played out there, as the two lovers seek one another, but fail to reconnect.

The musical set-pieces simultaneously underline and ironize the genre references. The characters, having spent their lives trying to escape it, are now trapped in a '*yerli film*' (a domestic melodrama), and they seem to know it. Until now,

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[4] Ünel died of cancer 3 September 2020 at the age of 59.

[5] I draw on Berghan's excellent analysis (Berghan 2006), following up on her questions about the play of genre in this film with questions about the implications of such play for music – and vice-versa.

the music has underlined the different worlds the protagonists live in – the city, the migrant neighbourhood, the home, the bar – each with their different tempi. It is 'sticky' material, provoking the visceral emotions and moods that keep everybody unhappily and uncomfortably in place. The prevailing tempo has been established at the outset by Selim Sesler's metronomic count-in and the chorus-like appearance of these musicians at regular intervals throughout the film. This seems to imply that all might change in these migrants' star-crossed lives, but that the bedrock of Turkish 'tradition' and the curse of its violent emotions will not.

However, Şeref's cracked rendition of '*Ne Ağlarsın*' interrupts this logic. At the time the film was made, the song had become well-known through pop vocalist Sezen Aksu's rendition and the album, *Işık Doğudan Yükselir/Ex Oriente Lux*, which reimagined the Anatolian folk music heritage from the perspective of the urban pop tradition. Many saw it as challenge to the Turkish state media's guardianship of this heritage and the cultural nationalism it espoused. Many also saw it as a secular, progressive and liberal articulation of the nation's ethnic 'mosaic' and of the vital place of women in it. It is a careful, and resonant, choice at this moment in *Head-On*. Two characters trapped by the genre conventions of Turkish arabesk (and the timeline of murderous jealousy and revenge) are allowed to escape them, make meaningful decisions and forge their own destinies. It is a classic moment of aporia, exposing the genre conventions not just to the viewer, but to the characters themselves. Understand the problems, the film seems to be saying, and you stand a chance of escaping them.

In doing so, it raises complex questions for the viewer about the place of music and musicians in the narrative thus far. Music and musicians are put on view. They underline the conflicted and contradictory temporalities that the characters must inhabit and negotiate: German/Turkish; bureaucratic/domestic; metropole/neighbourhood; male/female; first generation/second generation. The narrative invests these temporalities with both the materiality and 'stickiness' of heterochronicity, as Bal would say. It shows how they take shape in bodies, spaces, domestic objects and processes. It shows how they are invested with desire and need. For the main characters, their musical preferences resemble their drugs of choice – cocaine in Cahit's case, heroin in Sibel's, upping the tempo in one case, slowing it down in the other. They allow for escape and release, from others and from themselves. They establish both the compulsion and the deepening terms of both characters' alienation.

But alienation from what? And from what temporalities? In somewhat ironized terms (because, as we have seen, the film plays with, and inverts Arabesk genre conventions), 'East' and 'West' are juxtaposed as kinds of temporality – languorous and slow in the former, relentless and frenetic in the latter. Soundscape and camerawork combine to form starkly opposed temporal feels. Within these two broad temporal categories, the film shows various agencies attempting to impose other rhythms on the protagonists: two different nation states (the timelines of integration, of return), employers (the timelines of work and leisure), law (the timelines of revenge, of the state's penal system), German-Turkish women (the timelines of domesticity), and German-Turkish men (the timelines of café life). It is Cahit and Sibel's inability to accept, or manage, the terms of these competing demands that results in their constantly being a beat behind or a beat ahead. This, indeed, is the very essence of their ongoing crisis.

So, the depiction of music and musicians in this film also invites a question about heterochronicity as a field of governmentality and regulation, about the efforts of particular social actors or agencies to subordinate this multiplicity either to an ordered plurality or to a singularity. Music and musicians are themselves actors or agencies in this film, though they operate from a distance. They are always, if ambiguously, in some other space, never quite the space of action and diegesis. This distance is an important element

in how the filmmaker represents the narrative mechanisms of this agency. The characters are shown reaching for music for their own purposes, bringing it into their own worlds in energetic and forceful acts of will. Or we see music and musicians somehow reaching for them. The Roma musicians want, as it were, to tell Cahit and Sibel that 'Turkish culture' has got a language for their pain; Sezen Aksu wants to tell Sibel that she doesn't have to be trapped by being a woman. Music and musicians are thereby shown *imposing* temporalities on the narrative and thus becoming associated with different kinds of regulatory – or emancipatory – power.

We might conclude that Fatih Akın's 'migratory aesthetics' are indeed close in spirit and intent to Bal's. We might note, however, that unlike for Bal, musical *sound* is a very central aspect of it. *Head-On* plays with the ways in which the medium itself affords speculation about the relationship between sound and image. The historical conventions associated with watching and listening, shaped by and shaping, various facets of the psychic apparatus have made this a potent fact of film culture itself (Chion 1994). To bring the historically and culturally constructed figures of musicians and music (in the form of dance tracks, songs, or instrumental improvisations) into a narrative is to complicate and then play with the narrative process itself. To associate music and musicians with figures of migration, betwixt and between, serves partly to enrich this process of narrative play. It also serves to underline that migrants feel, as Bal would say, the associated *mésentente* – complications of narrative, time, and history – in sharp and uncomfortable ways.

Secondly, and relatedly, *Head-On* seems more concerned than Bal with struggles over the mastery of time. 'Heterochronicity', it suggests, is not just an enhanced, and philosophically enlightening, sensitivity to time's contradictions: it is an opportunity for some to exercise their power over others. Men impose their temporalities on women. Women's carefully prepared food is flushed down the toilet when men, wasting their time in cafés or bars, fail to show up to eat it. The

first generation of migrants impose the resentful and anachronous temporalities of the honour and shame code on the second. Young women must wait for marriage before they can have sex, and young men must avenge infractions of honour. The German nation-state imposes its temporalities in the relentless rhythms of work and play it organizes for its citizens and in the jail time it ordains for criminals. The modern Turkish nation state, represented primarily by Istanbul's traffic and crowds, imposes its temporalities subtly, but, as the very final scenes of the film suggest, more conclusively. Here, all efforts to master time, to arrange meetings, to make plans, run aground.

Head-On is a fictional film, made for the commercial market, with an eye on both international art-house cinema audiences and those in Turkey. Akın followed it in 2006 with a documentary film about Istanbul's rock and pop scene, *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul*. This too was a critical success. In concluding this section, we might reflect briefly on what these two films share. Both explore ways of framing musical experience through the representation of listening, dancing, watching, singing in a playful and experimental manner. Both have a rather similar listener-*flaneur* – slightly lost, moody, detached – at their heart in the form respectively of Ünel's 'Cahit' and Alexander Hacke, of German experimental rock band *Einstürzende Neubauten* fame.[6] Both portray Turkish-German cultural relations with a playfully 'ethnographic' sensibility. With this thought in mind, let us consider an overtly 'documentary' ethnographic film, John Baily's *Amir*, to think further about how engaging with music might extend Bal's conceptual universe.

Amir

Amir (1985), made by ethnomusicologist John Baily with documentary producer Wayne Derrick, describes the struggles of an Afghan refugee from the city of Herat to make a life for himself as a musician just over the Pakistan border, in

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6 Hacke was also music director of *Head-On*. A similar sound aesthetic prevails in both films.

Peshawar, in the aftermath of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Amir plays the *rubab*, a short-necked plucked lute, an important instrument in the ensemble accompanying professional singers. But he must now master a more learned music for new audiences. We see him at work as a musician, struggling to get by in his new city.

The production of this celebrated ethnomusicological film followed a period of training by Baily at the National Film and Television School in London. It reflected new sensibilities in documentary film-making that both extended, and reacted to, the observational cinema of the previous two decades.[7] It reflected, too, new thinking about realism and 'reflexivity' – a key word in the critical anthropology of the time. The role of the film-makers in the construction of the narrative and in the changing relationships between the protagonists would be addressed, in various ways, in and by the film itself. Nobody was simply 'looking on'. Such sensibilities, blurring as they did the line between ethnographic and experimental film, could already be discerned in the BBC's documentary-making and in Granada Television's influential *Disappearing World* series.[8]

Amir depicts in such terms a relationship between three men: John Baily, the filmmaker, Shah Wali, a star vocalist, and Amir, one of the latter's backing musicians. The tension in the film revolves around Baily's growing interest in, and sympathy with, Amir's efforts to adapt to Pakistan's musical scene. Amir is nothing if not determined. We watch him learning from master musicians in Peshawar, practicing, and honing his new skills in front of friends. The rhythm of this learning slowly imposes itself on the film, establishing its central timeline. Shah Wali seems unhappy with this. He, after all, is the star. In a wedding scene at the heart of the film, shot in an immensely long, single take, the camera shifts focus between the two, Shah Wali at the front, Amir at the back, with the band. The filmmaker has made his choice, but a tension and an ambivalence remain.

Baily wants his viewers to be able to see and hear exactly what Amir's progress entails, in terms of mastery of repertoire, handling of instrument, the judgment of peers. When musicians are at work, the camera is steady. One can follow the movement of hands, fingers and plectra on fretboards and strings, the expression on faces, the positioning of bodies. There is no voiceover. Musical numbers are represented in full, in their own time, not in edited highlights. The length and dreamlike stillness of these scenes contrast markedly with the movement and bustle elsewhere. In the final scene, we see Amir showing off his newly acquired skills to the evident approval of his friends. The conflict with 'real' time intrudes in a nice detail. One of the listeners has noticed that Amir, lost in musical concentration, has forgotten the cigarette dangling from his lips. He leans forward with a smile to remove it gently from Amir's lips and stub it out.

A narrative tension takes shape in the film between the representation of music and the representation of other aspects of refugee life. This is crosscut by another line of tension. This arises in a scene in which we see Amir at his infant daughter's grave, a small pile of rocks by a Sufi shrine. We see Amir paying his devotions at the shrine and then, in conversation with Baily, speaking about his grief. Words start to fail him, and we see tears in his eyes. The camera wobbles slightly as it steps back, as if to acknowledge the difficulty of this moment for the film-makers, or perhaps in their indecision over whether or not to carry on filming. As it pulls back, we see Amir on his own, a lonely figure in a desolate, dirt-brown landscape. Overhead, we hear the

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[7] The complex relationship between ethnographic film-making and observational cinema is succinctly analysed in Loizos 1997. The rigors of 'strict' observational cinema, with its long tracking shot conventions and its commitments to film 'speaking for itself' (without, for example, voice overs), had started to demand responses and elicit reactions. Kim McKenzie's *Waiting for Harry* of 1980, a film Loizos discusses in detail, anticipated important aspects of *Amir* in this regard,

[8] On the lingering nature of the debates about film and ethnographic realism, see Norton 2019, Grimshaw and Ravetz 2015.

rumbling of a military jet – the war-machine, the principal cause of his grief, a world away.

As the scene fades, the rumbling of the jet changes imperceptibly in quality. It slowly becomes the rumbling of water in a mountain stream. The camera shows us Amir and Shah Wali amongst the greenery, having a cigarette break on a journey. Evidently in high spirits, they tell us they are on their way to a refugee wedding on the border. The pivot around the rumble of the warplane and the mountain stream opposes life and death, community and loneliness, music and silence, green and brown, movement and stasis. It is an artful moment, and one that Baily has often spoken about, conscious of the ethical stakes involved in representing such scenes (Baily 2009). The challenges involved in filming the life of refugees were always going to be complex. In the wake of the various refugee crises of the 1970s, it might be said that a media problematic of 'distant suffering' (Boltanski 1999) was emerging: how to provide information and understanding of the human dimensions of these tragedies without aestheticizing or sentimentalizing them.

It is an aporic moment, in which various narrative pressures accumulate, spilling out beyond the frame. Perhaps the most intractable of these is the opposed, and contradictory, logic at play in representing Amir on the one hand as an Afghan, immersed in his culture, and on the other hand as stateless, a figure of what Agamben calls 'bare life' (Agamben 1998). In the first instance, we see Amir not so much 'immersed' in his culture as *crafting* it with his hands and fingers, his skill on the *rebab*. Indeed, one might say he is crafting the very terms of his resilience and adaptability. We see the precarious and threadbare nature of his existence when he shows the film-makers around his house at the beginning of the film. But we can also see his charm, his love for his family, his devotion to his art, his hunger for learning. He is making a place for himself in this world; he is not a victim of fate or circumstance.

On the other side of the equation, we see a solitary, weeping man and the grave of a dead child. Agamben shows how such images of 'bare life', of *bios* reduced to *zoe*, of humanity stripped of history, culture, community, personhood and the rights that go with it have historically provided the blank slate on to which the modern state projects images of its sovereignty (Agamben 1998). Such imagery has proliferated in media coverage of the more recent movement of refugees. When Syrian Kurdish infant Alan Kurdi's dead body was picked up by a Turkish policeman on an Aegean beach in 2015, the western world reacted in horror. The original image changed as it circulated (Trilling 2019), assuming some of the iconographic qualities of Michelangelo's Pietà as it did. Little was known about the dead child, including, for a long time, the correct spelling of his name. As with many iconic media representations of suffering, it has held the world in a paralysed gaze, which has so far mainly served to inhibit serious public discussion of the Syrian war, the refugees, or the causes of their desperation to reach Western Europe. The high currency of Agamben in refugee studies has not, many argue, exactly helped the situation (Owens 2009).

Both Baily's film and his subsequent commentaries seem to acknowledge the problem. The sonic pivot of the aircraft/stream pairs the representational modes in question – the representation of the refugee's lot as 'bare life', with its obverse: representation of the refugee as culture bearer and culture maker. In pairing the two, the film-makers compare the two framings of refugee life and emphasize the latter. The purposefulness of Amir's life within his community and culture is stressed more and more emphatically as the film goes on. By the end, the scene at the shrine has been reduced to a shadow, even if it has not entirely been forgotten. With the Syrian war (and the image of Alan Kurdi) in collective minds at the time of writing, the stakes of this decision have only grown in recent years.

Chronologically, Baily and Derrick's film precedes Bal's migratory aesthetics. However, it is concerned with similar matters. It sets out not only to explain and contextualize Amir's pursuit of beautiful and meaningful sounds and the livelihood associated with it, but to provide a well-

crafted and aesthetically compelling vehicle for them as film-makers. Part of the story of the film is, after all, how it came to be made in the first place. Baily wants his art to respect Amir's by matching it. In this regard, he anticipates Bal's call for a 'migratory aesthetics' that 'remembers with' its subjects, rather than objectifying them in ethnographic explanation and contextualization. It also anticipates Bal's interest in video not only for what it permits in terms of the representation of time, but as a means of aligning the artistic and creative processes of ethnographers and their subjects.

Ethnography poses some rather specific demands, however, as Baily himself is well aware. One of these, from an ethnomusicological point of view, is that film allows the ethnographer to represent the technical details of a musical performance informatively and indeed analytically, without the need for words.[9] Baily has a long-standing interest in the cognitive and embodied processes at play in the movement of Afghan repertories from one instrument to another, as well as the relations of prestige and cultural hierarchy with which such movements are bound up. These are complex: the *dutar*, a long-necked lute that involves motion up and down the fretboard, is associated with amateur musicianship, which is highly valued for its distance from the world of money. The *rebab*, meanwhile (Amir's instrument), involves movement across the fretboard; it is associated with professional musicianship, which is highly valued for its association with South Asian 'learned' theory and aesthetics (Baily 1988). Such movements cannot be understood without a detailed account of what fingers, hands, arms and bodies are doing in performance. Explaining these technicalities is a cumbersome business in prose, as any ethnomu-

sicologist knows. But film permits not only a kind of technical record, but also an analysis, a way of showing what, beyond the details, is important in music, and how.

Ethnographic film-making benefits from a situation that permits both the musician and the camera to remain relatively still, and for the latter to focus primarily on the movements of a single musician. And even in these highly limiting circumstances, one still has to take account of various kinds of interaction – at which point the camera must shift its gaze. The director must decide how and understand why. A film setting out with such reflexive purpose needs to make such choices visible and comprehensible to the observer.

One of the choices Baily makes has consequences for the narrative. We watch musical performances at length, unfolding, as it were, in their own bubbles of time. Baily is thinking of his ethnomusicological colleagues, who want a detailed understanding of what the instruments are and how they are played. Narrative time in this film stops abruptly when musical time begins. The musical time in question is, in Bal's terms, peculiarly 'material', associated as it is with the mastery of the *rebab*'s wood, metal and gut. And it is peculiarly 'sticky' – there is no quick way to 'get through' the time it takes to achieve that mastery. One simply has to move through it at the pace the medium (i.e. the *rebab*, and its social and material environment) itself imposes.

If *Head-On* allows us to think about how the fictional representation of music and musicians might put pressure on Bal's 'migratory aesthetics', *Amir* raises a similar question about *ethnographic* representation. We have seen how both use the representation of music and musicians to engage with the heterochronicity of migrant time, its 'materiality' and its 'stickiness', as well as struggles over its control. *Amir* raises familiar questions about reflexivity. The playful, if slightly tense choreography of the encounter between Baily, Amir and Shah Wali in the film permits subtle reflection on the play of power between the three, on the question of whose story this

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[9] As is often the case in Baily's ethnomusicological film work, verbal explanations, furnished by the musicians themselves, are given their full due. Amir proves to be eloquent in this regard. But Baily wants the viewer to be able to see, and hear, those things that verbal explanation do *not* reach as well, as these can often be vital.

actually is. But what might this obscure about the broader historical and political forces at play? Might Bal's 'migratory aesthetics' be exposed to the same charge? The next film, Jumana Manna's ''A Magical Substance', invites us to look more deeply into this question.

A Magical Substance Flows Into Me (AMSFM)

At its showing in London, *AMSFM* was part of a sculptural installation. The contrast between film and sculpture is stark. The film is saturated with colour, music and the imagery of cooking. The sculpture is lumpy, silent and drab, evocative of a building site or an empty lecture theatre, the (hollow) objects within it suggestive of amputated limbs or discarded pieces of monumental sculpture. One watches the film from inside this landscape, one that seems to be simultaneously an archaeological relic and a building under construction. The juxtaposition is evidently not intended to be cheering. The artist's blurb strengthens that impression: '[i]n a metaphorical excavation of an endlessly contested history, the film's preoccupations include: the complexities embedded in language, as well as desire and the aural set against the notion of impossibility. With the hackneyed one-dimensional ideas about Palestine/Israel, this impossibility becomes itself a trope that defines the Palestinian landscape.'[10]

The film tracks Robert Lachmann's field recordings in Mandate Palestine in the 1930s. Lachmann was a German comparative musicologist and Arabist. His earlier research on the music of a community of Jews on a small island off the coast of Tunisia was motivated by the insights its intricately layered cultural landscape might provide into the synagogue chant traditions of the circum-Mediterranean. Fired from his post in Berlin, he emigrated to Jerusalem. In 1936, while attempting to land an academic post at the Hebrew University, he offered the Mandate's BBC station a series of lectures devoted to the emerging immigrant soundscape there, based

on his own field recordings. Clearly, these were intended to boost his credentials, as well as provide an outlet for his busy mind and his instincts as an ethnographer. With so many immigrants there struggling to make homes for themselves, Lachmann felt that Jerusalem was the perfect ethnomusicological laboratory for studying music and social change (Davies 2013).

The academic post never materialized due to his untimely death, but his BBC lectures are still valued as miniature models of ethnomusicological thought and practice. The recordings depict Kurdish, Yemenite and Moroccan Jews and Bedouin, Coptic and Samaritan communities, as well as rural and urban Palestinian Arabs. They consisted mainly of his own field recordings, except for some commercial recordings of Egyptian urban song, which he used to illustrate the urban musical mainstream amongst Arabic speakers in Palestine. In highly compressed form, the lectures explored ideas about the history of song, the instruments, playing techniques, music in religious expression and much else. They drew on a very wide range of philosophical, sociological and comparative musicological references. The question of what we might call, by analogy with Western violin technique, variations in finger 'positions' on the Bedouin *rebab* (a bowed lute), for instance, raises a question in his mind about Weber's concept of rationalization, which he pursues in relation to Balkan *gusle* fingering and related data. They are, in other words, intellectually quite rigorous and demanding. From today's perspective, they paint a nostalgic picture of a Zionism that is capable of acknowledging both the diversity of Mandate Palestine, and the connecting links between the Arab and Jewish worlds.

Manna follows in his footsteps. We see representatives of the communities Lachmann recorded listening to the old recordings, at Manna's invitation, talking about them, reminiscing, reflecting on how much or little things have changed, and playing or singing themselves in response. The film mainly depicts life indoors, in kitchens, offices and living rooms. We are in

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[10] **https://www.jumanamanna.com/A-Magical-Substance-Flows-Into-Me**

a world of self-enclosed environments, lit by the same sunshine and permeated by the same smells of cooking, but quite separate from one another nonetheless. Each of these vignettes constitutes a kind of time capsule. In each the past is looked back to, the future looked forward to quite differently – more or less reverentially, more or less hopefully, more or less angrily. We observe these vignettes through a steadily held and slightly detached camera, as though with Lachmann's objective and dispassionate ethnographic eye. We see *saz*-playing Kurdish Jews, Moroccan Jewish vocalists, Bedouin *rebab* players, Samaritan cantors, Palestinian *'oud* players and *debke* musicians. Each vignette, like the separate elements of Lachmann's broadcast lectures, might be seen as a piece of the mosaic of modern Israel/Palestine.

But the 'mosaic' logic, one of people inhabiting local cultural worlds made, as it were, within their own bubbles, is confronted by another. This is represented by Manna's family home, to which we return at regular intervals. In it, we witness everyday domestic routines: coffee being prepared, yoga, watering the plants, sorting out the compostable rubbish, listening to music, preparations for a trip to the beach. We also see Manna's parents asking about the film, inquiring into its progress and commenting on what they hear. Her father researches Palestinian history. We learn that he is working on some important documents on the massacres committed in the Galilee during the Nakba.[11] He sees things in a different way – to Lachmann, that is. For him, the story of Jewish immigration accompanied the terrorizing and displacement of the native population. At play here for him are the historical mechanisms of settler-colonialism, purposeful and all-consuming. The film maker's father's and mother's cosmopolitan musical horizons, and consequently slightly quizzical attitude towards their daughter's film, are signified by their love

of Umm Kulthum, the Egyptian diva, a love established at the very beginning of the film. Music underscores, then, the narrative presentation of two opposed temporal and historical scenarios, one concerning immigration to the state of Israel ('the mosaic'), the other settler-colonial occupation and the erasure of indigenous populations.

One scene, at 37'22, troubles this neat and meaningful juxtaposition. It is the one moment in the film in which music-making seems not to be fully contained by the camera within the four walls of a room. Throughout the film, Lachmann is evoked in short texts from the lectures, as often at the outset of these vignettes. In this case we hear him ruminating on music and religion, on 'the prehistoric conditions of life', 'sorcerers, intoxicants, and magic…' But we are in a sparsely furnished and somewhat scruffy office, soon revealed to be an appraisers' office working for the various state bodies that are extending the occupation of the West Bank (including the 'Judea and Samaria Supreme Planning Council', whose logo we eventually see). A map on the wall shows a 'table of land expropriation'. We then hear a Kurdish Jewish musician singing to the accompaniment of an Anatolian *saz* (a long-necked lute). The musical and vocal style is that of Kurdish southeast Anatolia, the modernized Alevi *aşık* tradition. Hebrew religious lyrics have evidently been added. The camera moves unsteadily, on this occasion, between the singing office worker and the view outside the window, presumably the expropriated land in question. The camera view seems to be stolen, a fugitive glance. It is soon obscured by curtains moving in the breeze.

This scene raises two questions. One concerns the relationship between 'sorcerers, intoxicants and magic', and the modern bureaucratic apparatus of occupation and settlement. The other concerns the relationship between the histories imagined by the mosaic model of immigration and settlement – Kurdish Jewish culture in its own little space, alongside others – and the histories of those who previously inhabited this space and have been erased from it. If the mosaic

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[11] The Nakba ('The Cataclysm') is the term Palestinians use to refer to the war of 1948 that resulted in some 700,000 Palestinian Arabs fleeing or being forced from their homes.

model imagines the possibility of plural histories, of multiplicity, the other connects this very possibility with the logic of occupation and the erasure of Palestinian culture and history. As with the juxtaposition of 'sorcerers, intoxicants and magic' with bureaucracy, this juxtaposition is an 'impossibility'. We are reminded, by Manna herself, that 'impossibility becomes itself a trope that defines the Palestinian Landscape'.

Reflection on Manna's film prompts us to inquire into the stakes of heterochronicity in Bal's 'migratory aesthetics'. Temporality in such an aesthetic might be 'sticky' and 'material', as we have seen. But do some kinds of temporality have more adhesive qualities than others? Can one get 'stuck'? And can one be forcibly 'unstuck'? Neither seem desirable. Who and what, then, might be responsible for either condition? *AMSFM* suggests both possibilities. The microtemporalities of the vignettes present diversity, each operating according to their own particular rhythms, but diversity contained within domestic interiors. From this perspective, there is no 'outside' that might ground, or contextualize, this multiplicity. One of her interlocuters mentions that her grandmother 'created her own Morocco within these four walls'. Generations later, her descendants are still there. Manna's own father also lives within four walls, but he has been unstuck from Palestinian time by Jewish migration and settlement. In the vignettes of Manna family life, we see three people, father, mother and daughter, more or less restlessly looking outside. They have their own modes of attachment, of 'adhesion', we might say, to engage with Bal's metaphor: her mother's yoga, her father's love of Umm Kulthum. Her father's quest for the truth about the massacres in Galilee constitutes another. But this is a kind of cosmopolitan adhesion, not the fiercely sticky and binding localism we see elsewhere.

And stickiness to what? The installation implies that not all materials are equally sticky, that some ways of grounding the experience of time are more significant than others. The episode in the 'Judea and Samaria Supreme Planning Coun-

cil' office and the fugitive camera glances outside suggest there is an answer to this: land. To claim land as one's right is to attach oneself to that most sticky of substances. Could there be any stickier? To remove others from it is to remove them from history, and therefore from a future, in the most decisive way. This is the 'impossibility' for the Palestinian citizens of Israel, as well as those living under occupation in the West Bank. Other things might substitute for that attachment, for those with the intellectual and cultural means. The compensations – cultural citizenship of other worlds, cosmopolitan attachments – are not insignificant. But, as Niklaus Luhmann (2010) would have put it, something operates as an 'anchor of certainty' in this symbolic system – the land itself.[12] It is not enough to talk about the 'materiality' of time: we need to know exactly *which* materials ground it.

Manna's installation returns us to the kind of curatorial culture Bal's migratory aesthetics both emerge from and contribute to, thus closing a circle. As we have seen, it too is concerned with heterochronicity (diverse temporalities), with the materiality and stickiness of time, and the injunction to 'remember with'. Moreover, it is the third of the films to explore this injunction in fraught contexts – contexts defined by migrants and refugees. *Head-On* raises a question about the governmentality of heterochronous time (and with it, the question of who has the power to impose what on whom). *Amir* raises the question of the atemporal figure of 'bare life', and how that might be resisted. *AMSFM* raises a question about what happens when those who insist on the diversity of their own temporal and historical experience deny it to others.

Conclusion

I conclude by underlining how this necessar-

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[12] Luhmann describes the 'real assets' of his 'media systems' as 'anchors of certainty… reaching down into the organic sphere' – like sexuality in the media of love, physical coercion in the media of power, perception in the media of science, gold in the media of currency (Luhmann 2010: 37).

ily detailed reading of the three films supports the claims with which I started. The first claim is that Bal's 'migratory aesthetics' might have paid more attention to music and musicians for the light it sheds on how migrants and refugees 'make' and manage time. Each of these films, as we have seen, is a study in the 'stickiness' of time, and the ways in which migrant and refugee musicians struggle with it as music and musicians make new homes for themselves. If migratory aesthetics are intended as a critique of the aesthetics of 'transition', 'flow' and 'passage' (Durrant and Lord 2007), the neglect of music and sound, which lead us so directly to the handling of time, is unfortunate. That might change, I would suggest. The current wave of interest in migrant and refugee music-making in the Global North might also benefit from more rigorous (and sympathetic) critical engagement. This might encourage forms of collaboration beyond the often-exploitative positions once associated with 'World Music'.[13]

The second claim is that music and musicians offer a productive way of understanding contemporary conditions of diversity, particularly as they involve migrants and refugees. For all its attention to heterochronicity and the 'stickiness' of time, 'migratory aesthetics' were a product of their moment and not as attentive as they might have been to the longer histories of migration that shape these artistic and curatorial encounters. Collaborations with migrant and refugee musicians (for instance, in films) can shed considerable light on the rich cultural histories migrants and refugees carry with them, as well as those they encounter. They might also illuminate the rather particular skills in negotiating difference and diversity, skills honed in one environment that are (often) put to good use in another. They may be a useful key, in other words, to the 'new diversities'.

The third claim is that artistic collaboration

requires shared, or shareable, narratives. With the Global North's 'migrant crisis', and more recently the Black Lives Matter movement, these narratives are undoubtedly under pressure. Aksoy's comment about the impossibility of mapping the field of migrant music studies is symptomatic. If we are to re-engage with the question of how we might 'map' or narrate with an eye on Bal's still-powerful injunction to 'remember with', a fresh burst of energy is required. Such moments benefit from experimentation with forms of representation. As I hope to have shown, the representation of music and musicians on film puts pressure on both media regarding what we might call the 'handling of time'. These three films respond in different ways. From a theoretical perspective, one could say that the response has been anticipated in longstanding critiques of ethnographic representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986), which by now extend to the representational issues associated with film (Morphy and Banks 1997) and sound (Kapchan 2017). From the perspective of both 'migratory aesthetics' and the 'new diversities', they also suggest fresh models of dialogue, creativity and participation across divides that are becoming more rigid in the currently dominant politics of the Global North.

Filmography:

Akin, F. dir. 2004. *Gegen die Wand/Duvara Karşı*. Cinematography, Rainer Klausmann. Arte Bavaria Production Companies. Germany. 121 min,

Baily, J. dir. 1985. *Amir: An Afghan Refugee's Life in Peshawar, Pakistan*. Cinematography: Wayne Derrick RAI and NFTS. UK. 52 mins.

Manna, J. dir. 2015. *A Magical Substance Flows Into Me.* Cinematography, Daniel Kedem. Palestine and UK. 66 mins.

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[13] Critiques of World Music are by now routine, and World Music itself is in abeyance. For a critique of the newly-orientalizing attention being paid to migrant and refugee music, see Stokes 2021.

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