On the Cinematic Road to Multiculturalism?
A Cambodian Perspective

Dual citizenship, three sets of parents, four breathtaking languages, fourteen different homes around the world and thousands of awe-inspiring people—this is what describes my life in brief until now. Given that, I have always been interested as to how film directors develop new visions of representing multicultural heritage, specifically by way of geopolitical imagination and cinematic innovation. In turn, are these film directors on the cinematic road to constructing an imagined multicultural community, which engages in power structures and/or relations? Or are they (unconsciously or consciously) experiencing some sort of multi-identity crisis onscreen? I will investigate the aforementioned questions by examining two films dealing with the contextual representation of Cambodia as my cinematic case studies, in particular: (1) Roland Joffe’s “The Killing Field” (1984) and (2) Wong-Kar Wai’s “In the Mood for Love” (2000). The first case study investigates the function of a voice-over recursivity and a lack thereof, with examples drawn largely from illustrative competing American, French and Cambodian voices. I will argue that there is an attempt at an imagined community in “The Killing Fields,” but the happily-ever-after Hollywood ending produces a sense of inauthenticity to the communist subject matter and some disloyalty to transnational cinema. To contrast that, the ending scene from the second case study will be used to delineate the usage of the term ‘transnational’ in the study of fusing Chinese cinema with a Cambodian element. Herein, “In the Mood for Love” takes the opposite direction from the first case study by questioning if not challenging the celebratory tone that greets mainstream cinemas in places such as Hollywood, for the film ends in Angkor Wat, Cambodia, while the voice-over completely disappears in perplexing ambiguity.

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