



## Surrogate Nature, Culture, Women – Inner Colonies. Postcolonial Readings of Contemporary Hungarian Films

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**Abstract.** The article examines a group of films which take place in Romania, in Transylvania: stories of murders, incest, self-jurisdiction are implanted into the geographically and culturally localised nature and they are represented as the nature of the respective culture. From the viewpoint of postcolonial theory, I examine the stereotypical image that these films transmit about the represented culture. From the angle of the chronotopes of geographical culture, postcolonialism itself becomes a problematic term, in this way I identify here a specific local version of the colonising logic. The colonial relationship between the own and the other is transformed into the foreignness, the otherness of the own, thus the Balkans are represented as Europe's inner colony, its Wild East. The arriving white man does not conquer a foreign virgin land, on the contrary, the homecoming male heroes make attempts to recapture the mother earth. However, the mothers, women are surrogate ones, raped or voluntary whores. If the female protagonist becomes a traveller, then this means transport: they are transported to the West, where their homeland becomes their stigma, and this empowers the Western males to hire them. I regard the term surrogate borrowed from Jacques Derrida – simultaneously bearing the duality of the organic and the foreign – as being suitable for grasping a special version of colonialism, proliferating nowadays, in which nature, culture and women respectively, localised in Romania, are represented as surrogates of foreign (male) conceptions.

*“– She is of that kind. – Of what kind? – Of the ‘Szépasszony’ kind. – I don’t understand. She is either of the evil type or a whore! – She is not a whore. The whore sleeps around. – Then why is she the evil type?” (Dezső Zsigmond: *Witch Circle*. A male detective interrogates a local male inhabitant.)*

## In the Voice of the Native – Harshly

I start the present study with confessing my personal involvement: I come from the landscape, from the culture about which the films<sup>1</sup> I will discuss hereafter transmit images and make them transportable. I know its air, the taste of its foods. The critical tint of my paper (also) derives from this subjective position, from the sensitive viewpoint of the native. As every confession, mine is not devoid of stylisation either, on the other hand, it (re)produces the opposition of power between the coloniser and the colonised of colonial discourse. Still, I consider necessary to raise the topic of the native, as the films below pretend as if they had no knowledge whatsoever about the colonising gaze and, respectively, about its postcolonial criticism in film theory. I cannot see the trace of the presence of this viewpoint in Hungarian film criticism to such an extent that I formulate my statements on the soil of doubt, in the (discursive) wilderness. I will try not to lose sight of the fact that sensitivity and bias is blindness at the same time, this is why the reader should regard the tendency perceived by me and its problematic character as marks of crumbs scattered among the trees in the woods of a particular tale. Thus I examine in what way the ever increasing group of films can be regarded as stigmatising from the viewpoint of a given culture.<sup>2</sup> Being aware of the fact that the respective film “may be read differently by different audiences” (Stam and Spence 1983, 19), I do not wish to generalise, instead, my aim is to discuss the manner in which, as a Romanian, Transylvanian female spectator, I *cannot* regard these films as aesthetic products irrespective of culture and geography, about the manner in which their constitutedness from this view *cannot be separated* from the ideological expectation – foreign, at first sight, to the inherent mode of the artwork – referring to what kind of image these films make

1 In order of their appearance: Zoltán Kamondi: *The Alchemist and the Virgin* (*Az alkimista és a szűz*, 1998), Kornél Mundruczó: *Little Apocrypha No. 2* (*Kis Apokrif No. 2*, 2004), Róbert Pejő: *Dallas Pashamende* (2005), Zoltán Kamondi: *Dolina* (2006), Csaba Bollók: *Iszka's Journey* (*Iszka utazása*, 2007), Kornél Mundruczó: *Delta* (2008), Béla Paczolay: *Adventurers* (*Kalandorok*, 2008), Peter Strickland: *Katalin Varga* (*Varga Katalin balladája*, 2009), Zsigmond Dezső: *Witch Circle* (*Boszorkánykör*, 2009), Hajdú Szabolcs: *Bibliothèque Pascal* (2010). *Katalin Varga* is an exception so far as it was not produced in Hungary; it is a British–Romanian–Hungarian co-production created by the British Peter Strickland living in Hungary, with a Hungarian staff and Transylvanian actors.

2 In order to realise how efficiently cinematic representation makes transportable the historical image of a culture, it is sufficient to think of the Dracula automatism immediately popping up to the word ‘Romania.’ For the viewpoint of a historian, see the recent volume entitled *From Vlad the Impaler to Dracula the Vampire* by Neagu Djuvara (2011).

transportable about a given culture. Ever since the shifts of emphasis of cultural turn, the constitutedness of a film cannot be considered irrespective of its attitude to the represented culture and also to nature itself, viewed from the angle of cultural geography, emphatic since the 1970s. As according to cultural geography and, within, postcolonial geography, the represented nature is no longer some kind of *ab ovo* virgin land (I will return to this metaphor), but it is connected to cultures, it is a cultural carrier, and the other way round, it is the place of culture (see also Ryan 2004). On the other hand, *terrae incognitae* is accompanied by the association of some kind of (European) *imaginative geographies*. As Edward Said (1979) expounds in relation to orientalism: the East, as an imagined place, colonised by discourses, created through stories and stereotypes, will become the community illusion of Europe.

According to postcolonial criticism, in colonial identity formation “Europe constructed its self-image on the backs of its equally constructed Other – the ‘savage,’ the ‘cannibal’ – much as phallocentrism sees its self-flattering image in the mirror of woman defined as lack” (Stam and Spence 1983, 4). The fact that the term ‘postcolonial’ itself is Europe-centred is highlighted in David Chioni Moore’s study, the author being of a Lithuanian origin (Moore 2011). It becomes evident from the very viewpoint of cultural geography that even the deconstructive, highly reflected terms can have a colonising effect if applied to a field with distinct mechanisms. The referred author analyses the Baltic and Soviet (power) relationship and points out the extrusion of the post-Soviet region from under the postcolonial term. Thus, even such generally accepted terms as ‘postcolonialism’ become problematic from the angle of chronotopes of geographical culture.<sup>3</sup> In my study, when I speak about *inner colonisation* from a postcolonial angle, I use the (universal) viewpoints of ideology criticism of this theory and, at the same time, I modify the use of the term in accordance with the territory and geographical culture examined by me. In my view, in the uneven opposition between Europe and the Balkans, in its construct in form of an

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3 The Estonian–Finnish authoress Sofi Oksanen speaks about a similar place-boundedness in an interview in which she highlights that the trauma of the Gulag cannot be told in the language of the Holocaust trauma (cf. Oksanen 2011). In other words, the sounds according to which stories are bound to culture, land and geography, according to which one’s mode of narration cannot be transposed to the other, are increasingly amplified, and this seems to be extending to the theoretical discourse as well. Magic realism, of Latin-American origin, or ethnofuturism, the term for the trend after postmodernism, of Estonian origin, spread nowadays in other Finno-Ugric cultures, in the Udmurt culture for instance, are concepts working in a similar way. In the digital age, the “spirit of the place” is simultaneously amplified and becomes an irrelevant viewpoint. (Foreign) stories can be located anywhere. And this is why the manner in which the surrogate culture, the surrogate geography is represented becomes relevant.

asymmetrical concept, the logic of colonisation prevails.<sup>4</sup> The Balkans appear as a virtually moving terrain in Europe's identity image: it is simultaneously its part and its other, its inner Wild East. On a smaller scale, restricting the terrain of asymmetrical concepts, in the self-definition of Hungarian culture, Romania (Transylvania) appears as the *other* of the Hungarian nation, as the cradle, the horrifying depository of atavistic or primitive, desired or lost, envied or rejected wild passions.<sup>5</sup> Whereas in the case of classical colonialism (and cinematic representations in which this view prevails), the conquest of a foreign territory, the colonisation of a foreign nation took place, in the phenomenon perceived by me an inner colonisation, self-colonisation can be detected, which can also be called *reterritorialisation* taking place in representation.<sup>6</sup> This is the very reason why, from among the several films transmitting images on Romania along similar stereotypes, here I examine those with a Hungarian reference.<sup>7</sup>

The films mentioned above do not form a homogeneous group, and though I will not analyse them exhaustively but only group them along their characteristics, I will try however to nuance their aesthetic differences along the questions how they position the spectator and, respectively, how the represented

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- 4 On the asymmetrical concept as the mechanism of expropriating a general term [*Singularisierung*] and consequently, of excluding others from it, see Koselleck (1975).
  - 5 In the Hungarian reception of the films examined by me, the metaphors of this relationship proliferate in an ironical or affirmative way. Here I only quote a sentence referring to *Iszka's Journey*: "There [in Transylvania] there still exists the quantity of suffering and despair sufficient for a likely art movie" (Földes 2007).
  - 6 The relationship among Transylvania, Hungary and Romania becomes historically burdened right through geography, through where the territory of Transylvania belongs to. It is worth taking a look at the international press reaction of the films *Delta* and *Katalin Varga* also from this viewpoint. Not in one place downright geographical and cultural anomalies can be found in the articles. *The New York Times* speaks of the Hungarian Danube, the *Guardian* is compelled to publish a correction in connection with the premises of *Katalin Varga*, cf. "When the liveliest character in a movie is the heroine's pet turtle, you know you're in for some seriously stately filmmaking, and »Delta« does not disappoint. Set in a village in the edge of the Hungarian Danube, this visually demonstrative, emotionally constipated drama observes the fallout when a towheaded prodigal son (Felix Lajko) and his frail younger sister (Orsolya Tóth) decide to become better acquainted" (Catsoulis 2012); "The award-winning movie *Katalin Varga* was said below to have been filmed in Hungary. In reality it was filmed near the heart of Romania, in the Székely area of Transylvania (the fact that many inhabitants of the area in question are of Hungarian ancestry often gives rise to confusion)" (Bradshaw 2012).
  - 7 Romania as a *surrogate country* is a much more widely spread phenomenon. Among others, the film entitled *Borat* (Larry Charles, 2006) is an outstanding example of *transportable representation*: the 'surrogate' enactors of the Kazakh village and its dwellers are a Romanian village and its dwellers; it was carried out in a stigmatising way, to such an extent that, after the presentation of the film, vehement dissatisfaction broke out both on the Romanian's and on the Kazakh's part.

world gets shape. Thus my questions are as follows: can the way of constitutedness of the artwork be distinguished from the postcolonial gaze, from cultural geography? Can a film which stigmatises a given culture be aesthetically evaluated? In the case of the two most problematic films from my viewpoints, the *Delta* and the *Katalin Varga*, the award nominations, the Hungarian and the international press reaction testify that it can. These films prove to be the carriers of exoticism transported to the western spectator,<sup>8</sup> of the horror that can be experienced in the relieving darkness of the auditorium, and through them Romania and Transylvania gain their faces as the spaces of rough wilderness as well as oriental magic, as the Wild East of Eastern Europe. In order to exemplify the divergence of the aesthetic and the culturally coded view (though it cannot be separated in this way), I mention here the moving of the boats in the film entitled *Delta*, which can equally be the “favourite part” of a recipient<sup>9</sup> through its aesthetic constitutedness and, at the same time, without contesting its beauty, the image sequence evoking the native attacks of colonising films in my reception. The boats are approaching threateningly, then we can see the silent, distancing motion of expressive faces. [Figs.1– 4.]

## Nature and Culture – the Nature of Culture

The short film entitled *Little Apocrypha No. 2* (Kornél Mundruczó, 2004) is connected to the Hungarian culture only by the director's name and by Orsi Tóth acting the female character speaking Romanian with an accent. The scene is the place of mythical fishing: reeds and water; it is because of the language that we connect the landscape to a culture – we can see the “miracle story” of Romanian fishermen. Four years later a Hungarian-language story is embedded into “the same” nature, also directed by Kornél Mundruczó. In the film entitled *Delta*, linguistic nuances are within the Hungarian language this time (the uncle and the protagonist, Mihail speak different Hungarian accents), a Rou inscription on a ship, which we can see framed by a door window, alludes to the Romanian space (earlier we could see a cow in a structurally similar frame),

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- 8 Mikhail Bakhtin writes about the opposition inherent in exoticism: “Exoticism presupposes a deliberate *opposition of what is alien to what is one's own*, the otherness of what is foreign is emphasized, savorized, as it were, and elaborately depicted against an implied background of one's own ordinary and familiar word” (Bakhtin 1981, 101). In colonialism this opposition turned into a structure of power.
- 9 “The dénouement can be surmised after the first half an hour of the film, however, the focus is not on the closure but rather on the overwhelming nature and, of course, on the ominous signs. My favourite part is when the boats move in the channel, accompanied by slow, grievous music” (Földes 2008).

and respectively, the sight of an onion-domed church also ejects the Hungarian-language story (as it does not belong to the orthodox cultural area). Thus, the landscape and its magic are given, in which stories can be placed, no matter in what language, and the landscape is forced to *bear it to term*, as if it had both a Romanian and a Hungarian face.<sup>10</sup> However, the female figure (Orsi Tóth) and the nature are common – and in representation they are identical.<sup>11</sup> Another kind of nature is presented in the film entitled *Katalin Varga* (Peter Strickland, 2009), but it fits into the above series of films so far as the spectacle of the mountains also holds the spectator spellbound. Nature is not a phantom background here either, but rather the fragrant and booming medium of happenings.<sup>12</sup> In it, the wild, natural, cultural prohibitions, events prior to law, such as self-jurisdiction, murders and incest/blood relation prior to society, overwriting the nature–culture opposition, come to life.<sup>13</sup> This is the very reason why they are effective, as the acultural events are placed into nature: delta, forest and mountains.<sup>14</sup> The laws of nature reign, and this could be seen

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- 10 I borrow the term ‘surrogate’ from Jacques Derrida’s interpretation. For *surrogate mother* as the figure of questioning ontological certainty, see Derrida (1993). The surrogate mother is simultaneously the structure of foreignness and organicity. The problematic character of these films can be grasped, in my view, along this duality: they represent foreign, general, stereotypical stories as organically belonging to a given culture and nature.
  - 11 They were also identical in classical colonialism; with the conquest of the virgin land, the innocent black native was also forced to surrender. As for the connection between geography and female representation in the colonising gaze, see, for instance, Shohat (1991).
  - 12 It is not accidental that the soundtrack technique evoking the acoustic universe of nature films was awarded with the Silver Bear prize at the 2009 biennial. Frogs, crickets, night bug buzzing sound like the authentic booming of the place, on the other hand, we can hear electronic sounds with the effect of creating tension as Katalin Varga’s “inner voice” as she approaches the forest, as a tone “superimposed” upon the subjective perception of nature.
  - 13 Cf.: “We know what function is fulfilled by the incest prohibition in primitive societies. By casting, so to speak, the sisters and daughters out of the consanguine group, and by assigning to them husbands coming from other groups, the prohibition creates bonds of alliance between these natural groups, the first ones which can be called social. The incest prohibition is thus the basis of human society; in a sense it *is* the society” (Lévi-Strauss 1976, 19).
  - 14 As for the interpretation of the relationship between nature and culture, see Derrida’s text fragment interpreting Lévi-Strauss: “In order to follow this movement in the text of Lévi-Strauss, let me choose as one guiding thread among others the opposition between nature and culture. In spite of all its rejuvenations and its disguises, this opposition is congenital to philosophy. It is even older than Plato. It is at least as old as the Sophists. Since the statement of the opposition – Physis/nomos, physis/techne [nature/culture, nature/art or making] – it has been passed on to us by a whole historical chain which opposes »nature« to the law, to education, to art, to technics – and also to liberty, to the arbitrary, to history, to

as universalism, that is, this could happen anywhere (though different places have different laws of nature) if a chronotopically (spatially and temporally) defined culture were forced to bear to term this aculturality.<sup>15</sup> However, these films culturally localise these wild acts, preceding cultural prohibition and out of law. And from here on, murder, incest and self-jurisdiction will appear as the (*universal*) nature of a particular culture. [Figs. 5–6.]

As the nature of a culture where it is a recurrent constant of representation that women are raped, thus they are turned into surrogate mothers, and where nature and culture are stigmatised by cinematic representation, female figures are stylised as surrogates of literary and cultural archetypes. Similar stereotypical constants in the films are as follows: pig screaming (*Delta*, *Katalin Varga*, *Witch Circle*, the first frame of *Borat* is a pigsty), horse running free, wild horse, riding on horseback (*Witch Circle*, *Bibliothèque Pascal*), aggressive male acted by Tibor Pálffy<sup>16</sup> (*Katalin Varga*, *Witch Circle*, *Bibliothèque Pascal*), dance in an inn (*Delta*, *Katalin Varga*), fire burning in nature (*Little Apocrypha No. 2*, *Delta*, *Katalin Varga*), and besides, love-making and murder.

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society, to the mind, and so on. From the beginnings of his quest and from his first book, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Levi-Strauss has felt at one and the same time the necessity of utilizing this opposition and the impossibility of making it acceptable. In the *Elementary Structures*, he begins from this axiom or definition: that belongs to nature which is *universal* and spontaneous, not depending on any particular culture or on any determinate norm. That belongs to culture, on the other hand, which depends on a system of *norms* regulating society and is therefore capable of *varying* from one social structure to another. These two definitions are of the traditional type. But, in the very first pages of the *Elementary Structures*, Levi-Strauss, who has begun to give these concepts an acceptable standing, encounters what he calls a *scandal*, that is to say, something which no longer tolerates the nature/culture opposition he has accepted and which seems to require at *one and the same time* the predicates of nature and those of culture. This scandal is the *incest-prohibition*. The incest-prohibition is universal; in this sense one could call it natural. But it is also a prohibition, a system of norms and interdicts; in this sense one could call it cultural.” (Derrida 1978, 357.)

- 15 Further signifiers of the chronotopes of the two films: porridge flour with the inscription ‘Mălai’ can be seen, on the improvised shelf, on close-ups several times; Popol Vuh *On the way* the music composed for Werner Herzog’s film entitled *Nosferatu* can also be heard in *Delta*, evoking the Dracula topic, although the use of the euro (the homecoming foreigner pays with it) and the name of the inn, Suez (rhyming to the film music Ingo Ludwig Frenzel’s *Close to Suez*) tries to lift the story from the cultural landscape. The modern Katalin Varga, travelling on a horse cart, wearing a traditional dress, looks for ‘sign’ (and not for reception) for her mobile phone. Although her destination, Jászszereda is a non-existent settlement, Szereda however may have manifold references (Csíkszereda, Nyárádszereda), and the word ‘iad’ means hell in Romanian. Arriving at the village, on the cart, she starts singing the folk song *Aluszol-e te juhász* [*Do you sleep shepherd*].
- 16 Tibor Pálffy will get rid of the role of the aggressive male in *Dallas Pasahamende*, in this film he can give evidence of another side of his talent as “the village idiot.”

At the same time, the cultural specificity, for instance, in the case of the name Katalin Varga, which could displace the image of the “bloody individual avenger” from the female Dracula claim, for the eponymous woman was a Transylvanian historical figure, is totally absent – there is no reference in the film in this respect. To be more precise, a certain Katalin Varga, in search of legal remedy for her individual injuries in Vienna, will later head the Romanian serfs against the Hungarian landowners and becomes the advocate of the 1840 miners’ movement, deserving the address “Our Lady” (Doamna Noastră) (cf. Tóth 1951 and Kiss 1980). A literary parallel can be found also in this case (Heinrich von Kleist: *Michael Kohlhaas*), just as in the figure of Katalin Varga colonised as the Transylvanian Tess. I do not miss the realism of a historical figure; I consider that the film moves the female trauma created in the nineteenth century, and writes it further in the context of another culture in the twentieth century and, disregarding the cultural and local co-efficients of the personal name and of history, it presents it as the own of Transylvanian culture.<sup>17</sup> The film stages right the opposite of what the historical name is connected to: Katalin Varga as a Hungarian supported the Romanian serfs, whereas in the film she is murdered by a Romanian policeman in the whirl of revenge. In my view, it is – among others – the past of the heroine of Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) that resounds in the surrogate character of the Transylvanian Katalin Varga. In 2009, the director creates the deliberately cruel murderess version of the gentle and innocent Tess, forced from love to murder. The film is connected to this novel, as the literary (female) subconscious of Katalin Varga’s act, not only at the level of the theme, but also poetically, in the identification of nature and woman. Through the superimposition of the inner and the outer points of view, we can see the images of nature as the projections of the protagonist’s feelings, we perceive the forest in an individualised way, with Katalin Varga’s eyes and ears, as being magically fearful (see mins. 19–21. of the film), and, in this way, we start perceiving the heroine herself as being inscrutably dreadful.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Thus it is not accidental that the author of an article in *The Independent* speaks downright about the Middle Ages in connection with the film: “Filmed and set in Transylvania, Katalin Varga takes place in the present, although only the occasional baseball cap or mobile phone tells you that. Otherwise, the story is so timeless that we could be in the Middle Ages, or watching a historical tragedy that might have inspired an opera by Bartok or Janacek” (Romney 2009).

18 “The world is only a psychological phenomenon” – the director creates a dark and wild version of Hardy’s principle in associating Katalin Varga with the forests and mountains. Hardy writes about the harmonious connexion of nature and the female figure, as well as about the antagonism between the law of society and nature: while Tess becomes part of nature and nature becomes one with her story, the anonymous phantoms of society hover around her, keeping her in a constant state of distress,



## Identification of Nature and Woman – Cultural Violence, Surveillance

In the opening of *Delta*, the position of classical colonial films is evoked: we approach the natural landscape of the rising sun from the outside, by ship. After the title denoting the Greek letter, on the first image we can see a ship approaching, or rather our viewpoint approaches it, and with a cut the viewpoint is moved to the ship, we contemplate the land at dawn from there, together with the arriving person. The duality of outside–inside, of foreign–own is created in the arrival that opens the film.<sup>19</sup> [Figs. 7– 8.]

It is difficult not to discern the similarity to the awakening gaze of the white male traveller/coloniser arriving at the virgin land. A horn startles our gaze revelling in the landscape and we can hear the voices of/stigmatising the land together with the arriving man: barking, mooing, pig screaming for long, then a shot and the first human voice, a question. “Who are you looking for? – My mother,” the answer sounds. And glasses of brandy are clinking. A foreigner has arrived “home.” But he does not have a place, he withdraws, more to the outside, into nature, into the waterfront cottage of the absent father; and he builds a house upon a place without a place, showing this way his power upon nature. [Fig. 9, the house on the water.]

It seems as if in this return it would be possible to turn back into a state prior to culture and to restart the creation story, to transcribe the incest prohibition.<sup>20</sup>

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the heroine being trapped between the poles of an incomprehensible difference, between the mutually erasing forces of acceptance and rejection.

- 19 The film entitled *Transylvania 6-5000* (Rudy De Luca, 1985) is based on openly assuming these dualities implying colonialism, and creates the parody of the western Dracula-phantasy in form of an entertaining fable. As real enlighteners, the two American journalists and their female compatriot, whom they meet there, do not only domesticate the western phantasy but also the fears of the local people: the werewolf, Frankenstein and the rest of the monsters get out of the forest, of the cellar to the open main square and find a physical, medical explanation. This time the former Yugoslavia offered its natural and built culture as the surrogate scene of the myth of the Transylvanian monster. A 1963 cartoon bears the same title; in it, Bugs Bunny reads the Transylvanian vampire a lesson with the help of his readings; he knocks at the door of the vampire’s castle by way of the misleading similarity between Pittsburgh Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh Transylvania. In fact the difference of the letters of the two names takes shape only in the cultural specificity of vampire and monster romanticism in both films, and in the titles *Transylvania 6-5000* one can hear the echoes of the American (colonial) tone of *Pennsylvania 6-5000* (Glenn Miller).
- 20 This claim bears a striking resemblance to the archetype of the inherently innocent American Adam arriving at the virgin land. In connection with this, the Prospero-complex expounded by Ella Shohat can be referred to; she describes the

However, the mythical state outside space and time is bound to the soil by a “barbarian” local culture, the story of the ancient, first brothers is woven into an inn-faced society; in spite of the fish multiplication and bread breaking, those born more “within” push them out, in a lifeless state, back into nature. Apparently, the classical colonising structure does not work, as the newcomer arrives *home* (and not in the virgin land to be conquered), in the motherland, looking for his mother, as one who was born *within*.

The foreign/familiar man arriving in the homeland (whom we can regard thus as a homecoming emigrant) constitutes a basic narrative structure forming element of the films *Dallas Pashamende* and *Dolina*. They arrive home, with an outlook essentially differing from that of the locals, to take their dead or absent fathers’ place; they embody versions of the *readmission/extrusions* of the motherland. (In *Dolina*, we learn of Colentina Dunca as the lesbian ancestress of the place gradually, in parallel with the cocooning of the homecoming son.) And this is the key issue, whether the returning men come as “more civilised” colonisers and reconquer (with the camera) the nature, the culture, the women or, as belonging to the place, they can make the spectators experience the profound sense of foreignness of the own (land). *Dallas Pashamende* is partly an exception, as while it makes transportable the miserable images of a garbage dump, it also tries to make us believe that for a short period of time this environment is also suitable to provide happiness. Tony Gatlif’s film entitled *Transylvania* (2006) is a variation on the narrative scheme of colonisation with gender role exchange and a happy ending. A foreign woman arrives in Transylvania and is looking for the father of her fetus in the foreign land. Her search route leads through the panorama, accompanied by music and dance, of Transylvanian ethnic groups, and, although the real father does not receive her, she becomes a mother and finds her home through experiencing the hell of disappointment in love in muddy Transylvanian forests, as the only example of motherhood shown as happy among the mother and woman figures appearing in the films under discussion. Based on these films, it seems that the used nature and culture can turn into motherland for foreign women, however, the women living there are either transported abroad or made surrogate, being represented as whores. (Mona, the heroine of *Bibliothèque Pascal* is also a loving unmarried mother, however,

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relationship between the East and the West in terms of the so-called Prospero-complex: the barbarian island expects the western knowledge to start evolution in its primeval soup, and this civilising knowledge endowed with social gender is unequivocally phallogocentric. Released from the bonds of European history, the American hero is the creator himself, in this way he can rightfully confer names, at the same time he himself is conferred the feature of innocence itself (cf. Shohat 1991, 45–84).

the nature of her motherhood can manifest in the “familiarity” of the Ikea shopping centre, that is, in the stylised environment of displaced home created among the furniture and objects available for purchase; by imitating the meal motherhood also acquires a sense of being simulated.)

Thus, the attempt of recapturing the deserted, the lost takes place in these male returns, similarly to (Romanian) geographical areas “hired” by cinematic representations. However, in the case of *Delta*, the mother earth that lies at the symbolic river mouth is simultaneously a primeval nature with a wonderful sound universe and a place of industrial defloration, just as the mother lives with a lover instead of the father. In the social gender and role division presented in the films, the role of the whore is associated with the roles of mother and woman, more precisely, the woman is identical with the whore. The whore, bound to mythical origins with the personal name Fauna in *Delta*, and as an apocryphal version of Christ’s story as the fisher of men, as the wonderworker figure of the *woman-fisher of men* in *Little Apocrypha No. 2*, where as the white apparition of the burning reed she offers herself for money, displays paid pleasure-giving as the inherent nature of femininity. [Fig. 10.]

The unreflected evocations of the two films by Mundruczó maintain the classical (colonial) association of the virgin (land and woman), while rewriting only the virgin attribute. Not a foreigner arrives at an unknown virgin land; the son returns to motherland, this is why the human relationship breaking the social contract, the incest can be presented as natural. Women, in turn, are not virgins, but already “conquered” bodies, women raped and made surrogates of motherhood.

“Say that you are a whore!” – the *Delta* ends, while Fauna is killed into the water. And *Katalin Varga* starts with “The whole village will take me as the husband of a whore, of a bitch!” In the latter, the spectator is also clearly positioned: the film starts with the dark voice of the supervising male power, and later on we can see from an inner viewpoint who the object of this supervision, the addressee of the voice is. A female figure quivers to the policeman’s instruction in Romanian. [Figs. 11–12.]

The eponymous protagonist of *Iszka’s Journey* chooses the freedom provided by the alcoholic mother instead of the structure of orphanage supervision and gets from the mud of the mining colony to the desired real sea, into the bilge of a ship which transports her, together with other Romanian girls, supposedly towards a western shore.<sup>21</sup> For the girls speaking Romanian and Hungarian, the

21 *Iszka’s Journey* figures in this group as one which contributes to the series of images that transport vulnerable Romanian girls for the western gaze with a moving documentary story. This feature of it is reinforced by the context created by the other films, at the detriment of the individual performance of the film.

craw of the ship is the chronotope of shedding; as a heterotopic place, it is a surrogate, from where the shipment will get out raped and dressed as whores.

The speech situation of the interrogation frames the film entitled *Bibliothèque Pascal* as well: a child protection officer with a human face sits opposite to the protagonist, Mona and asks questions, urging her to tell her story. One of the film's merits is that the supervising male position is displaced and turns into solidarity, as, in spite of the fact that for the interrogating party, Mona's unrealistic story unequivocally belongs to the sphere of the unreal (this is why he has her translate her story into a more believable version), still, he gives the child back to the mother.

Those women who travel (Iszka and Mona) and bear the motherland as stigmata on/in themselves, do not *arrive* to the West, as men do in the opposite direction and as Tony Gatlif's only western female figure, Zingarina does to Transylvania, but they are *transported* out to the West, under supervision. They are identified with this *transportedness*, that they come from somewhere, they belong to somewhere else, and they bear this otherness as stigmata on themselves, that they were brought as objects to the West so that they should never become mothers, but only surrogate women. Pascal, who is otherwise also an immigrant, inquires about Mona's nationality and after the supposition of her being Albanian he directly asks: "Or Romanian?" As he does not ask further questions, and as there is no response, this nationality remains inscribed upon the image of the woman huddling herself up on the floor. This is also important from the standpoint how Mona's double – that is, both Romanian and Hungarian – *self-definition*, as she uttered this earlier in the film, gets reduced in the western expropriating gaze. [Figs. 13–14.]

Although *Bibliothèque Pascal* also centres on this female transport, it deconstructs the stereotypical western cultural construction of nature = woman, civilisation = man. In the depository of culture, that is, the library, *the woman (can) take shape as something wild in the readings of the civilised man*, while female nature remains concealed as the carrier of these readings, and *female bodies function as surrogates of cultural references, intertexts, archetypes and literary heroes*.<sup>22</sup> In this way the film questions the cultural superiority of the western civilised man as well as the consciousness of superiority of the "users" of the masterpieces of western literature. It queries the masculine consciousness

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22 The two female literary figures embodied by Mona as a whore, Saint Joan and Desdemona, the latter also being her namesake, bear a rich depository of issues related to male-female roles, social codes (cf. "Men's clothing is an unnatural thing" on a female body), respectively, to the contact between the European woman and the foreign (Moor) man. All these show that the film "uses" the "exploitedness" of the female figure in a reflected way.

which shows the female figures as dead, which objectifies them as beautiful phantoms, with an aesthetic lust. In the case of *Delta*, we can see Fauna as dead while she is still alive, represented with a picturesque beauty evoking Andrea Mantegna; after being murdered, Katalin Varga gets gradually mummified, acquiring a phantom face. [Figs. 15–16: Female (image) aestheticised as dead; Figs. 17–19: Phantomisation of the female face.]

## The Place of the Magic –You Wild Girls, don't do it!

It is a common specificity of these films that they choose natural scenes that can be transformed into mythical ones – river mouth, Danube delta, mountain, forest, cave –, on the other hand, they choose the unreal space of dream, which metaleptically intersects the diegesis of harsh reality, or general moods that have their own (autonomous) laws.

*Dallas Pashamende* (2005) and *Dolina* (2006), though the former is realistic, whereas the latter strives to an opposite effect, display several similarities: nature and culture meet in the waste in the visual presentation of both films, further on, they also share a grotesque mode of representation. *Dolina* rather mummifies the nature and the characters into stylisation, while *Dallas* impresses the spectators with its naturalistic, olfactive images.<sup>23</sup> [Figs. 20–23.]

Most often, the objects of grotesque representation are women. The image of the lady with a parasol and in a lace dress from the smelly dump-universe of *Dallas* rhymes with the image, also with a parasol, of the lesbian ancestress seesawing in the white sterilised landscape from *Dolina*. Not even on the awaiting image of the tabby-brides can we regard the lace and the boots on the white rock of *Dolina* as being other than the tragicomic, controversial imprints of female exposedness. The institution of marriage is represented in these films as the only alternative to the whore existence. The single women are either kept in confinement or they are transported away. [Figs. 24–25.]

The twofold world structure of wife-whore is also well illustrated by the formation story of the heroine of *Bibliothèque Pascal*; even her initially independent female existence is represented as depending on male judgement

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23 The film entitled *Dolina* is the adaptation of Ádám Bodor's novel entitled *The Archbishop's Visit* (*Az érsek látogatása*, 1999). The film and the literary work mostly differ in the very respect that in the novel the narrator is one of the "insiders," so the reader perceives the created universe from this inner viewpoint, and does not view it as being objectified from the outside. Another essential difference between the two works is that while in the film we can see a mummified nature, stylised into unreality, throughout the novel we can perceive the sounding, smelling nature of the written landscape mediated by the visual, acoustic and olfactive senses.

(when getting acquainted, one of the first questions the father of her future child addresses to her is “Are you a whore?” – indicating thus that the existence of a free woman other than a whore is profoundly questionable), and even her freedom falls victim to paternal emotional tyranny. In the analysed films, the family as the public space of the intimacy of parents and children does not exist, it cannot be created for this geographically localised culture, it only functions as a social institution with the structure of supervision. Not even the status of a wife exempts one from the assigned role of being a whore (see Katalin Varga or the female figures of *Dolina* and *Dallas Pashamende*) or an alcoholic (Iszka’s mother), or living together with a lover (Mihail’s mother in *Delta*); there is one single “pure” wife in the shape of the maidenly wife of Katalin Varga’s raper, however, she does not have any other alternative than committing suicide.

It is right by the time she grows old that the wife of the Székely primary school teacher, of a respectable age, of the road movie entitled *Adventurers* (*Kalandorok*, 2008) loses her mind, more precisely, the prescribed role of the wife, and realises her being cheated on in the self-mirror of the popular soap operas watched on television. This is why the respectful old husband is compelled to call his only son home from Budapest, who also calls his only son to come to rescue him from the clutches of the ferocious wife finding herself at this late age. And while the three generations of men are escaping from Transylvania towards Hungary, leaving the wife behind in the disorganised household with a Székely gate so that she can watch the television series in the absence of the husband and find herself and her feminist consciousness, as they are leaving the mountainous country, they meet other women, a good-looking Hungarian lady transporting in the boot of her car her freshly murdered Romanian guy. They also meet on their way the teenager daughter of the big Roma family, after that they try to flee across the green frontier together with Afghan refugees. It is through no fault of their own that they stray to this way, they fall victim of manly chivalrousness, with respect to the lady, as they have connected to their own car the above-mentioned car with the boot, which has broken down in the meantime. This is why they also hope that she will solve their housing problems on the other side of the frontier. We can only hope that the lady does not have such a big boot which would have enough room for all these three respectful men. In spite of the excellent performance of the actors, the viewer cannot forget the version understood as inner colonisation of the colonial narrative: an emigrant son arrives “home” from Hungary to Transylvania, but the motherland, more precisely, the mother does not receive him back, what is more, she also

extrudes the father from the household/marriage.<sup>24</sup> The Romanian male corpse, tattooed from top to toe, the representation of the Roma family, in addition to these, the Afghan refugees betray such a degree of unreflected cultural consciousness on the part of the filmmakers that we finally have the impression that we understand why the Székely woman, in order to find herself as a woman, is forced to take her models from Spanish soap operas.

Zoltán Kamondi's earlier film, entitled *The Alchemist and the Virgin* (*Az alkimista és a szűz*, 1998) is also built on the route Budapest–Transylvania. The inundated village in Transylvania (Bözöd) appears as the successfully functioning scene of alchemy; in the spirit of the place, the people living on the water are ardent believers worshipping the blind clairvoyant. The virgin is not a local this time either (as they are manipulable herd-creatures), she arrives from the outside, from Budapest as the clairvoyant himself, to contribute to the exploring spirit of the place, so that the promising experiment should be born in the rocky, watery ancient cave. It seems that the natural conditions, specificities of Transylvania and Romania (such as the heterotopia of the Hungarian village inundated in the period of communism) attract filmmakers, as the simulation of nature can be realised the least in the film medium. The illusion of buildings, city details can be built, however, mountains, villages under water with a church tower rising in the middle of the lake can hardly be constructed. At least it is more costly than hiring the place itself.

It is in a natural environment similar to the previous film (though not in a cave, but in a mountain stream surrounded by rocks) localised in Harghita county (as we can see the name of the county on a map on the wall) that we can peep, with the eye of the detective, at the wild girl while bathing in Dezső Zsigmond's film entitled *Witch Circle* (2009). [Fig. 26.]

The latter film strives to record the local legend on the screen, it can also be called an ethnographic feature film, by the superimposition of natural images and human faces, it suggests the stratification place–people–belief. Although it makes use of stereotypes (dance, brandy, fighting) and of the opposition wild nature – domesticated culture (bound to houses, to husbands), it strives to capture the local free spirit of the wild girls shown as free on the analogy of wild horses, or of the 'Szépasszonyok' – who do not fit into the social/linguistic order in the conversation between two men quoted by me in the motto. In the identification nature–eroticism–woman and in their joint impossibility to be harnessed, the independent wild girls, as embodying the archetypal *couleur locale* of today's singles, become the geographical creatures of imagination in a way that they can

24 One personifier of the colonial structure of the return to the homeland can be the figure of the emigrant. This type is examined from the viewpoint of memory by Strausz (2011).

be regarded at the same time as the cultural (phantom) projections of the primeval male fear of the reversed power relations.

Whereas the scene of executing the man/lover in *Bibliothèque Pascal* is raised into virtuality through series of references to visual representations (Manet, Magritte, Robbe-Grillet), in *Witch Circle* we can see the male detective, caught by darkness on the mountain, as disappearing without a trace in the circle of the wild girls' white veils, in the bosom of nature. And the latter can seem fearful not only because it is not men who kill with weapons in an allusive visual representation, that is, in accordance with western codes, but because the wild girls, veiled as phantoms, charm away the detective from the face of nature in a way that no trace is left behind, not even as a dead image. Not a sign remains as a testimony that he has ever existed. The dead man gets out of the cycle of representation. [See Fig. 27: visual allusion in the execution scene of *Bibliothèque Pascal* (Éduard Manet: *Execution of Emperor Maximilian of Mexico*, 1868; Alain Robbe-Grillet: *La belle captive*, 1983).]

In relation to the analysed films, I did not miss the representation of some kind of original, organic, real culture, instead, I identified the specific scheme, created in this space, of the colonial viewpoint in the inner colonising relation between the homecoming/foreigner/emigrant and the motherland contradictorily receiving/ rejecting him. In the hired geography of Transylvania and Romania, stories have been settled along similar stereotypes: the one arriving in the landscape, in the space, meets humans and animals (beside the head of the local inhabitant a calf head can be seen, for instance, at the arrival of the protagonist, wearing glasses and an iPod in *Dolina*), pig scream, horses, cows, and, of course, bears also create the non-urban environment of the locals. Most of the time the public places are inns and main squares where the fights take place.

The protagonists of the films are all homeless characters who do not find their place, they move to places without a place (into a house on water in the *Delta*), they get to such places (Iszka into the crew of the ship, Mona into the library-brothel), they "live" in a village under water (the inhabitants of *The Alchemist and the Virgin*), they loiter in mummified nature (the ancient dwellers of *Dolina*), they haunt in the mysterious bosom of nature (the wild girls of *Witch Circle*). However, all these heterotopic places do not distance the stories from the concrete cultural geography, they rather present heterotopia as the nature of the given place and this is why my hired homeland can become, through these cinematic representations, the balladistic depository of magic, alchemy, dreamworld and myth.



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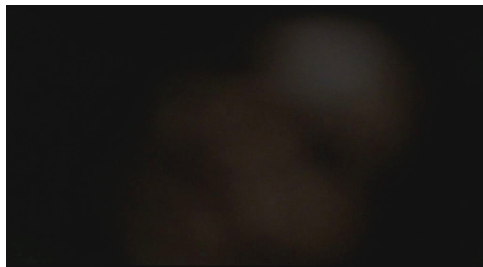
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