

CINEMA, MIGRATION AND ARCHIVES*

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CINEMA AND MIGRATION

Throughout its history, cinema has been associated with migration. It was, after all, the first form of audiovisual entertainment to transcend national boundaries and language barriers. In this sense, filmmaking has always been an essentially mobile medium, in terms of both production (from the first Lumière camera operators to the large number of immigrants who have worked in Hollywood, for example) and consumption (with huge communities of displaced people and exiles being among the first regular film-goers around the world, using the public event of a film screening as an opportunity to come together) (Allen, Gomery, 1995). In general, however, apart from a few studies of specific cases (e.g. the massive emigration of German directors and cinematographers to Hollywood during the interwar period), it would not be until the 1990s that film scholars would begin focusing on phenomena of human

mobility as a key to understanding the history of cinema. Research in this area would be associated specifically with multiculturalism and post-colonialism, with particular importance given to studies focusing on exilic, diasporic and migrant experiences (Shohat, Stam, 1994; Naficy, 1999, 2001). It was no coincidence that these studies should have begun to appear around the same time as the rise to prominence of work by professional filmmakers who established filmic discourses related to their own experience (or that of their families) as migrants to countries with consolidated film industries, such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the United States. Collectively, these filmmakers have developed a set of concepts that are essential for making sense of the relationship between cinema and migration in clearly political terms, both in relation to access to representations of migrants and at the level of the potential development of alternative modes of production and distribution to the hegemonic

model established by Hollywood and the big media corporations. At the same time, the emergence—also in the 1990s—of studies of appropriation and found footage (Bonet, 1993; Russell, 1999) as historiographic, creative, narrative ways of exploring migration flows constituted another pivotal point on which the shared knowledge of the possibilities for subversive readings of the archive would turn.

THE INCLUSION OF PRODUCTIONS MADE BY AND ABOUT MIGRANTS IN TRADITIONAL FILM ARCHIVES IS FAR FROM A STRAIGHTFORWARD OR SIMPLE PROCESS

In this context, the inclusion of productions made by and about migrants in traditional film archives is far from a straightforward or simple process. Established as national institutions, film archives have been conceived with the objective of constructing and preserving the unity of a national narrative, a mission undermined by the tensions caused by human mobility. It is therefore clear that migration phenomena, involving both emigrants and immigrants, tend to destabilise and challenge the territorial logic on which the nation-state is founded.

In our era, in view of the consequences of human displacements, the collection, preservation, study and exhibition of these productions has acquired the utmost importance. Both through historiographic approaches focusing on the study of “film exile networks” (Carter, 2021) and through attention to contemporary migration movements, the interaction of cinema, migration and archives has been considered (albeit in less depth than might be expected) from the transnational, cosmopolitan, global and decolonial perspectives that have dominated a whole sector of film studies for the past few decades.¹

For our purposes here, the triangulation of cinema, migration and archives has been approached through an exploration of the tensions existing between the codifying mandate of the archive and the volatility and dispersion resulting from human and material mobility associated with migration. On the one hand, it has been founded on a critical review of the role of national archives, in a kind of reflexivity that sometimes originates directly within the institution and aims to identify the very basic essence of an archive (cinematic, but also historical, artistic, literary, administrative, etc.) and the principles of “archivability” (Mbembe, 2002). From this perspective, the archive is in itself a “meta-intervention” (Appadurai, 2003: 24), wherein the process of collection of material it holds already forms part of (and is itself) a reflection on public activities and processes of selection, cataloguing, preservation and cultural promotion. In consonance with the key issues explored in archive studies since around the mid-1990s (if we take works such as Derrida’s *Archive Fever* [1995] as a benchmark), any academic, creative or institutional investigation of the archive is based on considering or reconsidering the following questions: Who is archiving? What is being archived? What are the principles governing the archiving of certain materials? For what and for whom is it being archived? Who accesses the archive and how do they use it? In these questions it is easy to identify an opening for decolonial and postcolonial reflections in which institutional criticism takes a dominant role, resulting in the activation of all kinds of archives, as will be discussed below. For now, suffice it to say that in the case of film archives there is a call to develop “a more diverse conception of ‘heritage’” based on principles “that transcend traditional conceptions revolving around national cinema, auteurist approaches, and film-as-art discourse” (Fossati, 2021: 130).

After all, migrant experiences themselves are often unstable, and as Appadurai observes in a text that we will return to below, “the diasporic

story is always understood to be one of breaks and gaps” (Appadurai, 2003: 21). With this in mind, and in view of the nature of these migration experiences, it is hardly surprising that there is no single archive capable of compiling and uniting all migrant stories; instead, as the studies and conversations included in this issue demonstrate, the marks left by filmmakers and films (both professional and amateur) dealing with migration are scattered (often in incomplete form) in different repositories, film libraries and other types of archives all over the world.

THE MIGRANT ARCHIVE

The concept of the migrant archive is therefore used here as a way of approaching the vast range of possibilities offered by the study of film footage produced by displaced persons. For example, previous publications have analysed videos made by undocumented African migrants on their way to Europe (Fernández Labayen & Gutierrez, 2022), in an effort to understand how many of these random recordings, made under conditions of forced (im)mobility and in situations of danger and uncertainty, give rise to a (self-)archive of their own wanderings, and, as suggested in the name of one of the associations contributing to this issue, an archive of migrant memories.

In short, as has been made clear in previous publications that have used the term “migrant archive” (Appadurai, 2003; Lazo, 2010), the inclusion of migration experiences in discussions about archives brings questions of identity and memory into play; moreover, the migrant archive is “characterized by the presence of voice, agency and debate, rather than of mere reading, reception and interpellation” (Appadurai, 2003: 22).

This activation of the political dimension of the archive (in terms of both the material archived and the archiving processes) effectively expands the parameters of film studies related to migrant cinema, which thus not only facilitate analytical

readings of on-screen representations in different film texts, but also help us to understand films made by migrants as “ways for the immigrants to find a context for themselves” in which “film is just one part in a cultural process of creating locality, a future context” (Andersson & Sundholm, 2019: 5, 14).

We therefore seek to position this issue of *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos* right on the intersection where the analysis of and engagement with migration phenomena connect with film studies and archives. The articles contained here offer a series of findings in film archive studies in recent years, either through the activation of pre-existing archives, or through the creation and consolidation of new digital archives focusing on migration issues. These findings are listed below, as a guide to this monographic issue on cinema, archives and migration:

1. The archive should be understood as a “point of origin” (Prelinger, 2010). In other words, archives are not a destination that marks a conclusive series of filmmaking practices related to migration, but a departure point that invites debate and creation in relation to questions of national memory (or memories), heritage, a sense of community and intersectional issues.
2. This notion of the archive as a starting point is precisely what makes it possible to stress the vital importance of “activating the archive” (Carter, 2022; Paalman, Fossati & Masson, 2021). Specifically, the importance of the archive lies not only in its potential “heritage” value, but in how it is used in order to express that potential in different ways and with different meanings. One example of these activations are of course the various films made with archive footage, from both public and private collections, which share stories and meanings related to colonial processes, exile or forced displacement (see the articles

by Berzosa & Cerdán; Íscar, Sánchez and Villanueva Baselga; and Fernández Labayen & Oroz in this issue). In this way, archives become cultural producers (Prelinger, 2010: 173) while also being open to other, different types of intervention.²

3. This potential of archives is intrinsically associated with what has been referred to as their “aspirational” quality (Appadurai, 2003; Anselmo, 2021), a notion that is especially important in the case of records on human mobility. Whether forced or voluntary, human displacement is imbued with an idea of the future, an aspirational impulse towards betterment (professional, social, emotional) that is palpable in all of the traces and marks left behind by the displaced person. Obviously, in the filmic and cinematic forms in which this aspiration is expressed, utopia coexists with disappointment, frustration with wistfulness, the hope of reaching a new land with the longing for friends left behind, even if the memories are hazy and blended with idealisation or invention (as made evident in two articles included in this issue, one authored by Castro de Paz and Héctor Paz and the other by Beatriz Busto Miramontes, dealing with filmed correspondence by Galician emigrants).
4. This aspirational quality makes it possible to posit ways in which archival practice can “contribute to some form of ‘public’ or ‘common’ good” (Paalman, Masson & Fossati, 2021: 5). While a perhaps excessively celebratory reading might lead us to believe that films and archives about migration have the potential to act as mediators in the political sense of the term, exposing and reconciling the interests of the different parties to international conflicts (Cerdán & Fernández Labayen, 2015), the use of archives in projects of reparation,

self-representation and to raise awareness of the imbalances caused by colonialism form part of this impulse.

5. As noted above, the transience associated with migration is reflected in the transnational and global nature of migrant archives, which are fragmented and scattered across a wide variety of repositories. This poses numerous complications for studying what contributors to this issue have described as “wandering archives” (Wood & García López), “unruly objects” (Sundholm) or “artefacts on suspension” (Carter & Kent), whose dispersed nature gives rise to a number of historiographic and methodological challenges. Researchers thus need to work with methods of “multidirectional assemblage” (Carter & Kent, in this issue), but also to forge partnerships and collaborations that can facilitate an exchange of knowledge between the different communities implicated by the migrant archive (Prelinger, 2010; Paalman, Masson & Fossati, 2021).

These five points sum up what we believe to be some of the most interesting and meaningful perspectives for conducting research on the connections between cinema, migration and archives. They view the archive not merely as a site of state power but as a space of opposition and cultural appropriation (Burton, 2006; Stoler, 2009). However, these calls to action should not be understood as naive interpretations resulting from an ignorance of the politics involved in any act of encoding and (re-)writing of these archives. On the contrary, all of these positions are based on an understanding of the archive as a “regulated, connecting, and converging apparatus; a conceptual metaphor that reminds us that we are dealing with social practices and material premises where subjects and objects meet and interact, tearing against each other” (Sundholm, 2021: 93).

NOTEBOOK

This monographic issue draws on our work on the research project “Cinematic Cartographies of Mobility in the Hispanic Atlantic”. For more than four years, we have been working together with colleagues at different universities in Europe and the Americas on research into the ways that migration processes have been inscribed in film, both in economic terms (i.e., the displacement of film industry professionals) and in aesthetic terms (specifically, the ways that migration flows have been represented and the stylistic choices made by filmmakers in their on-screen depictions of those flows). Although our geopolitical focus has prioritised the Atlantic region, with special attention on the ways that Ibero-American filmmakers have participated in making migration visible, the context has necessarily been expanded to include other dynamics of migrant waves that often cross Ibero-American territories on their way to and from other regions.

One aim of this issue is to open migrant archives up to all kinds of transnational connections, critical historiographies and political practices that reflect and act on processes of creation, consolidation, preservation and dissemination of migration cinema. In this sense, in keeping with Giovanna Fossati & Annie van den Oever’s (2016) proposal to understand the film archive as a “research lab”, the different sections of this issue dedicated to the “migrant archive” should be understood as different scientific and creative frameworks and experiences that bring together the practices of academics, creators, archivists, cultural managers and artists in the area of film heritage and migration.

Firstly, the Notebook section offers eight articles that address different phenomena and historical moments involving the intersection of cinema, migration and archives. Thematically, these eight studies explore the activation of amateur film collections in different Spanish public film libraries through the production of documentaries

such as *Diarios del exilio* [Exile Diaries] (Irene Gutiérrez, 2019) and *Memorias de Ultramar* [Overseas Memoirs] (Carmen Bellas & Alberto Berzosa, 2021) in the article by Berzosa and Cerdán that opens the section; “correspondence cinema” as a form of filmmaking used to weave together memories and communication between Galicians who emigrated overseas and those who stayed behind in Galicia (in the articles by José Luis Castro de Paz & Héctor Paz and by Beatriz Busto Miramonte); the transnational archives of the anti-fascist filmmaker Herbert Kline (Woods & García López); the relationship between the (re)production of colonial images and the colonialism of power and its re-readings in contemporary documentary (Íscar, Sánchez & Villanueva Baselga); the haphazard wanderings that shaped the different versions of the Finnish-Swedish-Turkish film *Ulkomaalainen/Utlänningen/Yabancı* [Foreigner] by the Turkish director Muammer Özer, shot in 1981 between Turkey, Finland and Sweden (Sundholm); the “film-archive-in motion” of the Sudanese artist Hussein Shariffe, whose work in exile is scattered across archives in different countries in Africa, the Americas and Europe (in the article by Carter & Kent); and finally, an analysis of the use of family, anthropological and public archives in three recent Spanish documentaries: *África 815* (Pilar Monsell, 2014), *De los nombres de las cabras* [On the Names of Goats] (Silvia Navarro, Miguel G. Morales, 2019) and *Anunciaron tormenta* [A Storm Was Coming] (Javier Fernández Vázquez, 2020) in the article by Fernández Labayen & Oroz.

As the outline above shows, the geographic range and the variety of archives consulted offers a sample of the methodological and material complexities involved in studying migrant cinema. Apart from the analysis of representation, the articles featured in this issue explore and investigate archival materials including but by no means limited to those of Filmoteca Española, Filmoteca Canaria, and Filmoteca Valenciana, private collections like those of Miguel Vives Munné, Antonio

Portabella-Camps and Ana María Amparo García Vázquez, the archives of the NO-DO newsreels, the archives at Centro Galego de Artes da Imaxe (CGAI), the Spanish Refugee Relief Association (SRRA) at Columbia University, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), the John Steinbeck Personal Papers at Stanford University, and the Swedish Film Institute, the archives of the Canarian anthropologist Diego Cuscoy, and the personal collections of Hussein Shariffe. This partial outline of sources consulted by the different researchers who have contributed to this issue also reflects the potential of scholarship on the migrant archive to offer a better understanding of cinema as a social, cultural, aesthetic and political phenomenon, as well as the different stories told by the archival materials (and the places that preserve them) (Sundholm, 2021). At the same time, a more in-depth review of the research processes undertaken by the contributors to this Notebook would almost certainly give rise to a productive debate about the methodologies and the personal and professional relationships developed in this type of research on cinema, archives and migration. In this respect, it is impossible to ignore the richness and variety of techniques and approaches used not only by academics but also by filmmakers and archivists, documentalists and cultural managers to obtain, preserve and exhibit these archives on migration. Although this is not the place to delve into the complexities of metadata, archival organisation, the idiomatic and linguistic issues, the human and material resources available to preserve these materials or other key concerns of what could be described as a material history of the archive, simply acknowledging this heterogeneity is sufficient to underscore the need to develop strategies for collaboration and to broaden our vision of how to work with the migrant archive.

In the interests of exploring the field to get a sense of the specific nature of the methods and processes for working with migrant archives,

IN THE INTERESTS OF EXPLORING THE FIELD TO GET A SENSE OF THE SPECIFIC NATURE OF THE METHODS AND PROCESSES FOR WORKING WITH MIGRANT ARCHIVES, THE “DIALOGUE” SECTION OFFERS A CONVERSATION WITH THE PORTUGUESE FILMMAKER SUSANA DE SOUSA DIAS

the “Dialogue” section offers a conversation with the Portuguese filmmaker Susana de Sousa Dias. With an acclaimed international filmography notable for works such as *Natureza morta* [Still Life] (2005), *48* (2009) and *Fordlândia Malaise* (2019), de Sousa Dias has attracted considerable interest in her use and activation of archive materials such as the photographic records of the Portuguese police force and the colonial archives of the Cinemateca Portuguesa film library. As Iván Villarrea Álvarez and Nieves Limón Serrano indicate in their interview with the filmmaker, de Sousa Dias reactivates the archives she uses to allow the victims of the Salazar regime to speak and to propose an approach to the archive that includes the voices of people who were recorded by the political authorities for the purpose of stigmatising and condemning them. Through a detailed exploration of her entire filmography, right up to her recent film *Journey to the Sun* (*Viagem ao Sol*, 2021), Villarrea and Limón offer a fascinating conversation on the formal features of de Sousa Dias’s films, on the levels of sound, image and editing, as well as her work methods. Questions such as the use of zoom to reframe the photographs filmed, the use of a flicker effect in certain sequences, slowing down and speeding up the shot and other framing and editing strategies lead to some incipient reflections on ways of working with archives. At the same time, the Portuguese documentary maker’s observations about the nature and content of archives—including public and private, state and

corporate, colonial and police collections—construct a clear vision of her epistemological and artistic interventions, which have consolidated her reputation as one of the most consistent, rigorous and committed filmmakers when it comes to opening archives up to contemporary meanings.

The issue closes with the “(Dis)Agreements” section, coordinated by Miguel Fernández Labayen and Elena Oroz. The conversation brings together members of four research projects (Archive/Counter-Archive, Make Film History, Ithaca: Interconnecting Histories and Archives for Migrant Agency and Reel Borders) and one association (Archivio delle memorie migranti), all committed to the preservation, creation and restoration of mostly audiovisual archives associated with migration and subaltern communities made freely available online. The dialogue with the directors of these initiatives, based in Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy and Belgium, explores technical and ethical aspects, relations with their grassroots communities, transfer activities and the difficulties associated with preservation in the digital environment of certain types of film that are inherently unstable. In general terms, these initiatives are based on a critical approach to the archive, considering different ways to “bring archives into communities and communities into archives” (Prelinger, 2010: 172). In a context that in the last twenty years has been marked by the growth and expansion of (digital) collective and community archives independent of government initiatives (Appadurai, 2003; Schaefer, 2007), the projects presented here constitute valuable examples of the productive intersection between the broader understandings of the use of film archives in recent years, both in terms of exhibition and access, and in terms of their inclusion as an audiovisual heritage that transcends national boundaries and the essential educational dimension of cinema of mobility in the context of studies of media literacy and film production training (Fernández Labayen, Gutierrez & Moya Jorge, 2022; Fernández Laba-

yen, Díaz, Dueñas, Lomas, Moya Jorge & Gutierrez, 2021).

Without doubt, as reflected in all of the articles featured in this issue of *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, the most interesting aspect of this new field of research lies in the progress made by researchers to connect and transfer knowledge to the social sphere, along with their traditional commitment to rigorous analysis attentive to the histories of the medium and to the recognition, evaluation and use of archives with the institutions, agencies, individuals and communities that preserve them and give them meaning. Driven by the eminently social focus of research on mobility, film scholars analysing cinema and migration are now advocating a critical intervention in the public space. This intervention is and should be underpinned by the creation of a “living archive” out of sounds and images of mobility (Grossman, O'Brien, 2007), while responding to the need to compile, analyse and render visible the migration practices mediated by cinema. It is therefore our hope that the reflections, investigations and opinions presented in this issue on the dimensions of heritage, ethics, education and politics in relation to archives, cinema and migration may be built on in future research both

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in and outside Spain. Clearly, the explorations of archives on questions of migration and human mobility will be a particularly rewarding topic for a multitude of studies and interventions demonstrating the contemporary importance of research on the connection between film archives and the past and present histories of displaced persons.

NOTES

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- 1 The historiographic analysis of filmmakers' wanderings around the world has fortunately given rise to some of the most productive contributions to Spanish film studies in recent years. Key works in this research have been the studies of archives related to the migration of actresses and directors (Aguilar & Cabrerizo, 2021; Fibla Gutiérrez, 2021; Parés, 2011).
- 2 Other examples include the various initiatives launched by Arsenal-Institut für Film und Videokunst in Berlin on the "Living Archive" (discussed in the article by Erica Carter and Laurence Kent in this issue, and accessible at <<https://www.arsenal-berlin.de/archiv-distribution/archivprojekte/>> and by the Eye Filmmuseum and the University of Amsterdam for the conference "Activating the Archive: Audio-Visual Collections and Civic Engagement, Political Dissent and Societal Change", held in 2018. Projects like Archive/Counter-Archive and the association Archivio delle memorie migranti, both of which are discussed in the "(Dis)Agreements" section, also form part of this turn towards the social activation of archives.

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Abstract

This article considers the relationship between cinema, migration and archives. Based on a historiographical approach, it explores the ways that archives of very different types have become key spaces for research and artistic creation related to human displacement and the consequences of colonialism. In this way, the notion of archive and its traditional relationship with the nation-state is challenged and redefined through the blurring of national and regional boundaries by migration experiences. In line with recent approaches to archival studies and migration studies, the article posits the idea of the migrant archive as a way of examining and activating the social, political, and material issues underlying all archives, arguing for the need to reconsider and question the relationship of the archive with human mobility flows through research and film production, and at the same time calling for public debate (in both academic and cinematic circles) about the mechanisms of control, the rationales of cultural heritage and the processes of past and present writing on migration and its representation in archives.

Key words

Migrant archive; Film archives; Migration; Exile; Colonialism.

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CINE, MIGRACIÓN Y ARCHIVOS

Resumen

Este artículo aborda la relación entre el cine, la migración y los archivos. A partir de una aproximación historiográfica, el texto explora las formas en que archivos de muy distinto tipo se han convertido en espacios fundamentales para la investigación y la creación artística sobre los desplazamientos humanos y las consecuencias del colonialismo. De esta manera, la noción de archivo y su tradicional relación con cuestiones nacionales se ve cuestionada y desbordada a partir del ensanchamiento de los límites estatales y territoriales por parte de las experiencias migrantes. En línea con recientes aproximaciones al estudio de los archivos y las migraciones, el artículo propone la noción del archivo migrante como una forma de afrontar y activar las problemáticas cuestiones sociales, políticas y materiales que subyacen a todo archivo. Así pues, el texto argumenta sobre la necesidad de revisar y cuestionar el archivo, en su relación con los flujos de movilidad humana, a través de la investigación y la producción fílmica. Asimismo, se promueve el debate público (académico y cinematográfico) sobre los mecanismos de control, las lógicas patrimoniales y los procesos de escritura pasada y presente sobre los procesos migratorios y su materialización en los archivos.

Palabras clave

Archivo migrante; archivos fílmicos; migración; exilio; colonialismo.

Autores

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