

Precarious Intimacies

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*The Politics of Touch in Contemporary
Western European Cinema*



Maria Stehle and Beverly Weber



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This book was born in discussions that occurred on multiple digital platforms while we were thousands of miles apart: texting and chatting across the continent and across the Atlantic between Boulder, Knoxville, Freiburg, and Berlin. It took shape as our work and travels took us around North America and Europe. As we wrote, we worked to nurture our own intellectual intimacy and friendship, often digitally, occasionally in face-to-face meetings. And throughout, it has provided us an opportunity to challenge our own thoughts on connection, love, and touch, as well as to consider the politics in which they reside, the need for solidarity and collaboration, and the forces that limit them. As we discussed, presented some of this work, and wrote and edited, we grappled with our own positions as white women in the academy transitioning to tenured positions; as German studies, feminist studies, and media studies scholars; and as coauthors. Though we have collaborated on writing with each other and with others for decades, we began to sense, then articulate, new understandings of the importance of collaboration, as providing potential spaces of resistance and survival within the institution of the neoliberal university. This book has been written, rewritten, and written over; sentences have been changed many times, and passages and analyses have changed chapters. We did not divide the book into sections written by one of us or the other, nor could we identify individual sentences written by one of us or the other; indeed, most sentences have likely been touched by us both. In the process of writing this book, we have also written and published other relevant work—some single-authored or in collaboration with other authors—and as we did so, our thoughts from this project flowed into these other texts as well. Sound academic writing is built on discussion and citation, sometimes as collaboration and sometimes as intellectual connection, whether at conferences, in seminars, or in other spaces—and in this sense, we view everything we do as collaborative.

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Precarious Intimacies

Introduction



Politics of Intimacy in Contemporary European Cinema

Feminist emotions are mediated and opaque; they are sites of struggle, and we must persist in struggling with them.

—Sara Ahmed, “Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects)”

To experience solidarity, we must have a community of interests, shared beliefs and goals around which to unite, to build Sisterhood. Support can be occasional. It can be given and just as easily withdrawn. Solidarity requires sustained, ongoing commitment.

—bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*

Collaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination. Without collaborations, we all die.

—Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*

Precarious Intimacies

In the 2005 film *Unveiled* (*Fremde Haut*, literally “A Stranger’s Skin”; Germany/Austria) directed by Angelina Maccarone, the central female character, Fariba, passes as her male friend Siamak to remain in Germany after she has been denied temporary residence as an asylum seeker. In a central scene that takes place in a produce-processing plant, Fariba/Siamak’s German coworker Anne flirts with Fariba/Siamak in the changing rooms after she/he has had to hide during a check for illegal workers. Still wearing her hairnet, Anne makes stereotypical small talk about head scarves and veils in Iran that is interwoven with Fariba/Siamak’s explanation of why their employer cannot legally



Fig. 0.1. Anne and Fariba/Siamak share an intimate moment. Still from *Unveiled* (2005).

employ Siamak. As Fariba/Siamak lights Anne's cigarette, the camera frames the two tightly for a moment of tense, awkward intimacy that excludes the sights and sounds of the others in the changing room. "We must all look completely naked to you," Anne suggests. "Not completely," Fariba/Siamak drily remarks, pointing to Anne's hairnet. Now in complete silence Fariba/Siamak moves to pass by Anne; a series of over-the-shoulder shots from two rotating cameras are edited together rapidly even as the silence intimates slowness, creating a brief sense of disorienting attraction and closeness as the pair gaze at each other (see fig. 0.1).

This sudden intimacy functions as a visual and aural interruption of the narrative that is proceeding to its seemingly inevitable conclusion of deportation. Fariba/Siamak's remarks undo Islamophobic discourses that often reduce engagement with gender and Islam to assumptions about Muslim violence enacted via veiling and familial violence.¹ The erotics of the scene, which is the first of several that will portray their unfolding relationship as friends and eventually lovers, briefly suspend the narrative tension that relies on the viewer's assumption that Fariba's "hidden" gender will matter in the film. Yet their intimacy is deeply precarious, as indicated by the encounter's context. It follows directly after a raid for undocumented workers, during which Anne helps hide Fariba/Siamak in a bin of shredded cabbage to avoid capture (see fig. 0.2). The fleeting moment of intimacy between Fariba/Siamak and Anne ends with a coworker's "joke" when he grabs Fariba/Siamak's shoulder to shout "Check, for illegal workers!" Intimate touch, in fact, is quickly intruded upon and interrupted by another more violent touch that links personal xenophobia and state exclusion.



Fig. 0.2. Fariba/Siamak (left) and another undocumented worker hide in a bin of shredded cabbage during an immigration check. Still from *Unveiled* (2005).

We are intrigued by the possibilities for intimacy and solidarity that are raised by this scene and many others in the films we examine in this book. They point to a dilemma that forms the central task of this book: how to recognize, affirm, and value intimacies, love, touch, and care while at the same time challenging the racialized and gendered politics in which they are embedded; how to write about intimacy as a politically sustaining force while also acknowledging the fleetingness of intimate touch and the potential for violence in intimate encounters. We propose the idea of *precarious intimacies* to help us navigate this dilemma in two ways: first, by revealing aesthetic strategies that highlight moments of intimacy and the political possibilities they unfold, while also uncovering the structures of violence in which they are embedded; and second, by advocating a politics of interpretation that reads for the potential and possibility of intimacy. In other words, this book is about the politics and aesthetics of intimacy on-screen and about *how* to read intimacy politically. As an aesthetic strategy, precarious intimacies represent forms of connection, care, and solidarity as survival strategies and call attention to the forces that produce precarity: continuous economic, social, and political insecurity. As a reading strategy, precarious intimacies allow us to recognize and articulate how intimacies are always embedded in forms of violence, even as alliances and affinities may also present moments of defiance, resistance, and even sustenance. We argue here for a notion of precarious intimacies as *critical* and *generative*. They reveal regimes of sexual difference, border control, refugee policies, religious belief, and labor (including sexualized labor) that render certain groups differentially vulnerable to

the threat of death and violence, and generate strong affective responses, networks, and even new forms of political engagement and collectivities.²

In the following sections, we explore how the concept of precarious intimacies informs our theoretical positionings and approaches. We begin by locating our intervention within feminist intellectual genealogies, then we draw on postcolonial and critical race scholarship to theorize the precarious intimacies generated within western European contexts, and finally we define our intervention in the frameworks of scholarship on film and on European film specifically. Our aim with this book is to develop new ways of reading for emotional charges, triggered by narratives of intimacy. Such readings are not limited to European film or to the realm of scholarship; instead, reading for desirable intimacies and solidarities, in the face of all that is wrong, is a call for a shift in political perspective and a call for rereading and rewriting our stories for the present and for more just futures.

Feminist Legacies

Our approach to precarious intimacies is informed by feminist theories that have developed in response to activist movements such as *Precarias a la Deriva* and *SansPapiers*, which mobilized new solidarities around precarity and insecurity. These theorizations focused on the impacts of informal, insecure, and feminized labor, including the profound destruction of social bonds and inadequate access to resources.³ As Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez explains, “To be *precaria* thus does not only mean that one has no job or just a panoply of bad, hourly paid, unsafe and temporary jobs without any kind of entitlement to social benefits, but it also means that one needs to create new survival strategies and solidarity networks in order to navigate through life.”⁴ Theorists and activists have expanded notions of precarity in fruitful ways to encompass differential exposure to injury, violence, and death.⁵ While social vulnerability may be shared by all humans, it is experienced unevenly, depending on hierarchies of power that accompany processes of “othering,”⁶ and it cannot be limited to the particular conditions of late capitalism.⁷ We thus understand precarious intimacies as intimacies embedded in the material conditions of precarity, marked as they are by racism, state violence, and economic and social insecurity.

Intimacies have complex relationships to such forms of power. While intimacy often may be thought of as a relationship that is deeply private, feminist and queer studies scholars have employed the concept of intimacy to understand domains of power and to analyze productions of unequal power relations.⁸ Feminist genealogies of intimacy allow us to conceptualize the intertwined manifestations of physical, emotional, and social closeness and proximity and how such proximities might function as analytical frames, as spaces of violence and resistance, and as moments of potential and hope.

Aside from examining power and violence in intimate relationships, feminist theorists and activists have developed political readings of intimacies, of bodies and touch, as ways of knowing *otherwise*. Such theorizing is not merely a philosophical-epistemological exercise but rather an attempt to understand how we can find new and less violent ways of being and acting in this world. Audre Lorde, for example, claims a set of emotions and intimacies as a political feminist force that she defines as “the erotic,” as an “assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.”⁹ Lorde understands the erotic politically as the powerful capacity for feeling and joy, a capacity any oppressive system seeks to control or suppress. The erotic, for Lorde, is an embodied potentiality and knowledge that refuses to exclude sensibility, sensuality, and emotion from ways of knowing. Feminist philosopher Alison Jaggar also challenges Western epistemologies, particularly the various ways in which many Western epistemologies separate emotion from knowledge.¹⁰ Such perceived epistemological divides not only construct false binaries around male and female experience but also create a gendered dichotomy between an ethics of justice and an ethic of care.¹¹

Our approach to intimacy and our conception of precarious intimacies assumes the importance of an ethic of care *in* an ethics of justice. Following the work of Myra Marx Ferree and Fiona Robinson, we consider care as fundamental to human security, and human security as fundamental to justice.¹² As Robinson argues,

The widely recognized aspects of human security—freedom from poverty, food security, health care and protection from disease, protection from environmental pollution and depletion, physical safety from violence and survival of traditional cultures—cannot be realized in the absence of robust, equitable, well-resourced relations and networks of care at the household, community, state, and transnational levels. Moreover, none of these “goods” are achieved or enjoyed by individuals in isolation from others and the networks of care and support they provide.¹³

Our explorations of precarious intimacies press for an acknowledgment of the networks of care that emerge through intimacy. Intimacies neither guarantee nor assume such care; they may be marked by interpersonal acts of violence and are certainly informed by structural violence. Our attentiveness to care and intimacy is a call for ethical care in the service of justice.

Robinson is writing about networks of care and support; Lorde is calling on a “we” and evokes an “us” in her plea to activate the power of “erotics.” When we describe intimacy, we emphasize the dimension of feeling, not as an individual emotion but as a communicative act, as a relationship. Intimacy as

an analytical frame “allows analysts to look at relational life, including the feelings and acts that comprise it, in relation to colonial empire or capitalist modernity.”¹⁴ Intimacy presupposes relations that are never static; they evolve, shift, grow, or end. Intimacy, as Lauren Berlant describes, “builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation,” but “its potential failure to stabilize closeness always haunts its persistent act.”¹⁵ Intimacy is thus a process and an emotion, often a story to be told and a narrative in the making, and at other times a moment that interrupts narration. If it is, as Judith Butler suggests, our relationships to others that render us differentially vulnerable to social violence, the necessity of social relationships is also a source of potential for politics, solidarity, social connection, and shared resources.¹⁶

Our interdependency requires sustaining intimacy, solidarity, and collaboration. As Butler articulated in conversation with Athena Athanasiou, “We are interdependent beings whose pleasure and suffering depend from the start on a sustained social world, a sustaining environment.”¹⁷ And as Anna Tsing starkly argues, “Collaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination. Without collaborations, we all die.”¹⁸ These authors’ two very different books—Tsing’s tracing the resilience of the matsutake mushroom as a model for collaborative survival in the face of environmental precarity, Butler and Athanasiou’s considering the solidarities formed on the street in demonstrations that render protesting bodies even more vulnerable, but as necessarily so in order to challenge precarity—reveal the contours of our challenge: to imagine intimacy as a possibility that unfolds further possibilities toward solidarity and collaboration. Intimacy itself, our connections to other people and communities, our solidarities, and our sharings may (or must!) also be transformations-in-process, working toward justice.

Our readings of intimacy not only focus on sexual, romantic, or familial intimacy but also include notions of “alliance, affinity, and society among variously colonized people beyond the metropolitan national center.”¹⁹ Lisa Lowe emphasizes the processual and unstable nature of intimacy, in particular “in response to material conditions of specific historical forces.”²⁰ These forces, in Lowe’s study, include various colonial formations of violence and power. Lowe reveals the emergence of bourgeois conceptions of intimacy, as they are inextricably linked to a notion of a private sphere and deeply embedded in larger sets of intimacies entangled in contacts between peoples, communities, nations, economies, and continents.

By creating new possibilities of intimacy, by foreclosing others, and by interrupting yet others, intimate relationships function in multiple and multidirectional ways. Our primary goal in this study is to develop reading strategies for film and cultural production that allow us to uncover the precarious politics of touch and intimacy. By reading for precarity, we recognize the complexities of developing ethical readings of intimacy and connection in the face of political realities and narrative currents that work against

imaginings of justice and of transformed futures; however, we insist that work for social transformation relies on new imaginings.

Precarious Intimacies and Europe

We focus on twenty-first-century Europe and the political realities and narrative currents that define the shifting ideas of Europe and Europeanness at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The films we draw on are specifically from Western European cinema (though many are coproductions that involve countries from outside this region), allowing us to make the best use of our training and linguistic competencies. Though such films make up our archive, the Europe represented in the films is much broader. What “Europe” is and means shifts historically; understandings of Europe’s borders change, and individuals and groups experience European inner and outer borders in varying ways. Similar to the “vacillating” borders of Europe that Étienne Balibar describes, Europe as a concept vacillates.²¹ It often works paradoxically, as an ideal to aspire to and as a failed project (whether connected to hopes for Enlightenment traditions, for the potential of the European Union [EU]—or both), but it continues to hold power and potential. The political tensions over the constitution and power of the EU as a political-economic entity also feed into these discussions. When we write about “Europe” in this book, we evoke this concept in all its complexities; our analyses track the shifting meanings of Europe as a geographic, historical, and political concept. We refer to the EU when we specifically address the politics of the EU as a governing entity and political community.

The lauded potential political intimacies created by various European projects are haunted by the pasts and presents of exclusions rooted in racisms, colonialisms, fears of immigrant others, terrorist attacks, intensified economic insecurity, the tightening of Europe’s external borders, and the threat of reconstituting internal borders. Such European intimacies are rooted in hopes for a European future that envision connections between and across internal European borders, stronger communities for shared economic futures, and renewed, even intensified attention to human rights. Yet, the very linkage of universal human rights, progressive knowledge, and democratic futures to the definition of Europe paradoxically produces precarious subjects excluded from the spaces that could grant those rights.²² As Hito Steyerl has written in a film treatment:

Behind all images of Europe is the legend of a woman from Asia Minor. She is abducted, raped, and abandoned. This continent is named after her. . . . “Europe’s dream” remains important in two senses: on the one hand as a democratic, universalistic utopia, on the other as a Eurocentric nightmare of imperial demands with a long

tradition of colonialism and racism. . . . This indissoluble connection between the European ideal of equality and the simultaneous reality of inequality [*sic*] is the dream Europe dreams about itself, and one that can turn into a nightmare at any time.²³

In the Western European films we discuss in this book, Europe functions variously as a field of power, an exclusionary identity, an affective orientation, and even an ongoing project of worldmaking. All of these appearances are of a Europe ever-becoming and transforming, but always a Europe that has material effects on and power over the lives of the characters the films depict.²⁴ Europe produces precarity even as it promises economic and political stability, but only for some; becoming European remains an impossibility for many, and often results in concrete, racialized disparities in access to social mobility, education, or public agency. The colonial foundations of European modernities fundamentally shape the condition of precarity we engage with in this book. As Fatima El-Tayeb describes:

Colonialism did not represent a clash of modern and premodern societies. Rather, the mass mobility that Foucault among others identifies as [the] central prerequisite for the change to modernity within Europe produced mass precarity, i.e., millions of uprooted people whose traditional relationship to the land had been transformed.²⁵

Precarious intimacies in this book might thus be understood as imaginative ways of making legible the ways that racializations in Europe are rooted in the violences of Europe's ongoing creation and definition. Conceptually placing colonialism in the center of any engagement with Europeaness and Europe thus pushes back against the "whitewashing" of Europe.²⁶

Thus, our readings of a selection of European films through the lens of precarious intimacies contribute to critical scholarship about European identifications that emphasizes the centrality of race for the European Enlightenment project. We closely follow scholars such as El-Tayeb and Peggy Piesche in our theorizations of race and whiteness in the contemporary European political landscape. We develop readings that decenter European narratives of progress while revealing the continued centrality of racism in constructing Europe. Our theoretical approach is deeply indebted to critical readings of European border regimes and the legacies of European politics of racial exclusion articulated by scholars such as Gutiérrez Rodríguez, El-Tayeb, Jin Haritaworn, Lowe, and others. Our search for consensual intimacies that challenge gendered and racialized boundaries of touch is deeply fraught and deeply political, especially in a time when we are (again) particularly aware of how state power is enacted through whose lives and bodies are allowed to touch; when, and where; whose bodily integrity is protected; and whose bodies and lives seem to matter. Forming community—which includes

physical proximity or attachment, or both—is a radical measure in isolating times and a small gesture against the perceived impossibility of solidarity under neoliberalism.²⁷

In our chapters, we analyze films that bring the notion of precarious intimacies to a range of topics that have traction in European public discourse, such as migration and asylum politics, religious identification, and sex work and prostitution. Questions of whiteness, femininity, and the colonial gaze are the focus of our final chapter. In each chapter, we analyze a set of films produced and coproduced in Western Europe that take up these questions by focusing on queer protagonists, asylum seekers, religious characters, sex workers, or precarious sexual or economic situations. Questions of legal status, mobility, and economic instability play a central role in all the films we discuss in this study. Each film depicts certain and often specifically national or local facets of these questions; but the range of films taken together illustrates that the idea of European stability and wealth stands in tension with experiences of violence, exclusion, and precarity.

The films often contrast characters who are perceived as belonging to Europe with Europe's precarious others. By and large set in a specific region, city, and nation-state, tenuous relationships are established with Europe through, in part, multiple local forms of (not) belonging. Thus, Europe as a political entity or as a place, or being European as a form of identification, is not a concept beyond the nation but rather one that is constituted of and by European nation-states.²⁸ National belonging as well as accompanying nationalisms are always entangled with ideas of Europe, either as a form of European nationalism or in opposition to what Europe stands for as a transnational model “of border crossings, cross-cultural exchanges, hybrid identities, exilic sensibilities, [and] cosmopolitan attitudes.”²⁹ Our readings emphasize *how* and *where* intimacies are located and how they defy, question, or transcend certain local, national, or European contexts.

The films we discuss in this study also describe a certain historical moment in the development of the political-economic entity of the EU and the mechanisms of government in Western nation-states more generally. As Wendy Brown argues:

Contemporary neoliberal governance operates through isolating and entrepreneurializing responsible units and individuals, through devolving authority, decision making, and the implementation of policies and norms of conduct. These are the processes that make individuals and other small units in workplaces responsible for themselves while binding them to the powers and project of the whole.³⁰

We use the term *neoliberalism* throughout this book to describe this particular aspect of capitalism, in which our lives are thoroughly saturated by market logic, which leads to an emphasis on individualism, hyperindividualism,

self-maximization, potential, direction, goals, and increasing capacity.³¹ Indeed, the logic of the market has come to be seen as an ethic, as Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff have suggested.³² Neoliberal governance emphasizes processes of inclusion, partnership and teamwork while excluding collective struggles for justice, ultimately promoting “cooperation without collectivization.”³³

Many of the feminist theorists whose work we draw upon think of precarity as the defining characteristic of neoliberalism. Precarity is not new—processes of racialization have long targeted specific groups of people who live particularly precarious lives—but what may be shifting is the role of states and of market logics in producing precarity. Both Aihwa Ong and Isabel Lorey have described the transformed relationship between the state and the market under neoliberalism not as “antagonistic” but rather as a relationship in which neoliberalism is functioning as a “technology of government”; individuals are urged to self-optimize in the face of decreasing state security nets, and economically disadvantaged countries are forced into “austerity measures” to participate in the global economy.³⁴ Lorey argues that the relationship between freedom and security undergoes a foundational shift in the early twenty-first century: “When (primarily) internal security discourses correlate with normalized social insecurity, then freedom and insecurity form the new couple of neoliberal governmentality: freedom is not principally limited by the state, the state does not principally fight against insecurity, but rather both become the ideological precondition for governmental precarization.”³⁵ This “process of normalizing precarization” does not lead to an increase in equality. The neoliberal logic does not strive for an end to inequality; rather, Lorey explains, “it plays with hierarchized differences and governs on this basis.”³⁶

The process Lorey outlines describes developments in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, when the future of the EU is uncertain and the European project is undergoing processes of redefinition in the face of nationalism and right-wing populism. European right-wing populism mainly organizes around anti-immigration and anti-Muslim sentiments, but it also targets the EU as the entity that fosters migration and that is (and possibly paradoxically so) responsible for both neoliberalism and out-of-control regulations and bureaucracy. The Brexit vote in Britain in the summer of 2016 might be a culmination point of the success of the populist agenda, but fears of right-wing populists driving political agendas existed before this vote and continued to exist after. Beyond that, the consequences of the “Trump effect” for European politics remain unclear, as fears of US president Donald Trump and Trumpism as well as awe for his “style” of politics continued to drive transnational discourse in the wake of the 2016 US elections. Global political developments, such as the US elections but also wars and crises in the Middle East and North Africa and terrorist attacks in Europe and around the world, shape political discourse in and about the meaning of the concept of Europe and of the political and economic formation of the EU.

Responses to terrorist violence highlight these complex negotiations, as Butler wrote in the wake of the terror attacks in Paris in November 2015, when the state feels it should “restrict liberties in order to defend liberty”—and, we might add, often the liberties of European residents already at the margins of society.³⁷ Responses to terrorist violence are intensely gendered, embedded in the ongoing racialization of masculinity by which men of color, Muslim men, and refugee men are marked as particularly dangerous and violent and as threatening from both within and without. Internally, in urban spaces perceived as diverse and multicultural, minoritized groups are often viewed as threatening and dangerous.³⁸ At its margins the EU excludes its others through both the tightening of external borders and the creation of internal spaces of exception, most notably refugee camps or detention centers, precarious spaces in which access to prosperity, freedoms, and human rights is hindered.³⁹ Europe’s others remain particularly vulnerable to forms of violence such as war, detention, and deportation but also sexual violence, racist violence, physical and economic exploitation, and displacement.

To bring the concept of precarious intimacies to Europe and Europeaness is thus a project that follows the lead of postcolonial and critical race studies scholars and seeks to create both “conjoined and disjunctive genealogies” that always emphasize the “fragmentary histories of human belonging.”⁴⁰ In the films we analyze throughout *Precarious Intimacies*, we read for intimacies that generate radical, caring touch that are able to mitigate the violence of spaces that are created to isolate people, such as any kind of perceived “ghetto,” borders, walls, deportation camps, or, as the example of *Unveiled* illustrates, the hidden spaces of “illegality.” These intimacies transgress rigid categories of belonging and of gender, familial, national, or ethnic norms. Given the ongoing entanglements of racism, Islamophobia, and intimacy in much popular culture, it is possible that we can only gesture to the readings to which we aspire. The boundaries of accepted and acceptable intimacies maintain structures of power, oppression, and discrimination on the most intimate and personal levels. Any story of unwanted and violent touch is always a political story, infused with hierarchies and power, and with gendered inequality, sexism, racism, and classism. Thus, we cannot read these moments of touch without attending to the important critiques of the racialized politics of love (and hate). Haritaworn, for example, notes the importance of the “drama of queer lovers and hateful others” in contemporary imaginations.⁴¹ Narratives of the loving, queer figure threatened by the racialized, hateful (often Muslim) other correspond with tropes of the dangerous Muslim or Black man who threatens white women, a colonial narrative at the heart of modern constructions of race that extends to the antisemitism of the twentieth century and antirefugee sentiment of the twenty-first century. Similarly, Sara Ahmed discusses how love is mobilized by hate groups in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, when “acting in the name of love can work to enforce a particular ideal onto others by requiring that they live up to an ideal to enter

the community.”⁴² These political complexities of gestures and acts of love are precisely what interest us in the narratives we analyze in this book.

Paradoxical workings of Europe inflect the kinds of affective *connections* and intimacies that Europe as a space of encounter produces and precludes on interpersonal levels. If, as Lowe points out, the emergence of political liberalism was accompanied by violent intimacies between continents,⁴³ these films track how neoliberal economies move such intimacies into European space and literalize them in the touch between figures marked as European and as not (or not quite) European. Cinematic narratives of intimacy, together with visual depictions of skin contact, highlight the contradictory fantasies of transnational intimacies and the structures of exclusion in Europe even as they offer glimpses into how intimacies are made (if momentarily) possible in the face of conditions that work against them. These moments of intimate touch work as defiant gestures against the forms of violence structuring the relationship of Europe to its others: to queer others, to migrants and refugees, and to religious others; these moments offer up fleeting intimate potentialities marked by connection, affection, solidarity, and even love.

European Cinemas: Visual Politics, Genre Expectations, and Intimacies

In the twenty-first century, many European films have portrayed forms of contact produced by various movements of peoples, whether due to displacement as refugees, work migration, or other forms of migration and immigration.⁴⁴ Experiences of violence and precarity emerge in representations of interpersonal intimacy, often between European citizens and people with insecure residency status. These intimacies are visualized on film through skin contact and touch, acts of care for the body such as cooking and haircare, love-making, laughter, and storytelling. These are moments of sustenance and of constructing human networks and relationships in the face of the precarity produced in today's world. Yet, intimacy is always deeply embedded in (if sometimes resistant to) a kind of racialized politics of the skin that would mark the skin of the other as the site of the abject or as providing access to easy knowledge of the racialized other by the white subject.⁴⁵

The embedding of representations of (and fantasies about) Europe's others in cinematic narratives of intimacy is not new.⁴⁶ What has changed, perhaps, are the kinds of gestures that the films we analyze make toward the future. They suggest a new engagement with lives made precarious by their exclusion from legal residency status, even as the films represent characters who are imagined as participating in the here and now of Europe, an imagination embedded in the conflicted hopes and desires for the EU and for Europe. As Sandra Ponzanesi points out about much of contemporary European “migrant” cinema, the films we discuss “illustrate the symptomatic, and

therefore significant, processes of recognition and differentiation, of inclusion and exclusion, of ideological constitution and deconstruction in the new Europe from a gendered postcolonial perspective.”⁴⁷

Precarious intimacies generate what Laura Marks has called “haptic visualities” in film, ways in which skin and touch on-screen create a sensual image for and an affective relationship with viewers.⁴⁸ Skin becomes a crucial interface, a boundary-object, and a site of exposure or connectedness that invites the viewer to consider the unstable boundaries between bodies crossed by difference in a way that often transgresses social norms.⁴⁹ Touching skin can signify a moment of genuine connection, albeit often tentative and short-lived, and always at risk of serving as a mere interface to knowledge about the other. Many, but not all, of these intimacies are sexual in nature. However, rather than constructing identities or defining sexual acts, some of these intimacies manifest themselves as “multidimensional . . . assemblages” of “sensations, affects, and forces” in queer spaces and times and as nonreproductive intimacies.⁵⁰ At the same time, such on-screen touch points to the very precarities that neoliberalism and border regimes produce by making “visible . . . colonial and racist power relations.”⁵¹ Film as a medium, thus, allows the production of proximities deemed impossible by actualizing them visually and narratively both on-screen and between the spectator and the characters.

With the emergence of European film funding structures, scholars have attempted to characterize European (rather than national) cinemas in scholarship that explores the many themes and genres that comprise European cinema or in studies that trace developments and trends of European film industries. Randall Halle’s attention to the transnationalization of the European film industry as well as his notion of the interzone are foundational to thinking about how Europe exists as ideational space in film. Halle shows that the transnationalization of European film industries has often worked to preserve rather than undo national cinema. While European funding structures transcend national borders, the films produced often affirm and further reinscribe nation.⁵² European film thus functions within a nexus of forces that both transcend nation and constitute clearly delineated structures of belonging and identification.

Films that address questions of belonging or narrate stories of migration speak especially to these complex intersections of notions of belonging. Public policy, political discourse, and minority representations must be understood as existing in uneven relationships with one another, that also shape strategies of identification and disidentification in European cinema.⁵³ Scholars in the fields of German, European, and cinema studies have provided various mappings of European cinema and migration (e.g., Guido Rings, Alex Lykidis, Sandra Ponzanesi, Isolina Ballesteros, and Rosalind Galt). In particular, we note Ipek Çelik Rappas’s work on the commodification of ethnicity in European film and Hester Baer’s studies on the new possibilities and challenges for

oppositional film in a neoliberal mediascape where “the question of whether films can create images of the present moment has as much to do with modes of production as with representational choices.”⁵⁴ Baer argues that by “disorganizing conventional modes of representation,” contemporary German art films, mostly those of the so-called Berlin school, “create a critical space for reception.”⁵⁵ Barbara Mennel’s discussions of labor in contemporary European film provide important contexts for understanding representations of precarious labor in contemporary Europe. Mennel points out, for example, that the loss of a fantasy of feminist solidarity has been accompanied by feminist cinema focused on the precarious working conditions facing women under neoliberal regimes of labor.⁵⁶ Women, she shows, “embody work on-screen” under what she calls “the neoliberal labor regime.”⁵⁷ Over the course of the first two decades of the twenty-first century, new cinematic narratives have emerged that advocate for new forms of depictions and resistances of women vis-à-vis capitalist labor and exploitation. Mennel also points out “the difficulty of advocating for an ethics of care without reproducing essentialist notions of femininity.”⁵⁸ This difficult negotiation is at the center of our book as we specifically focus on questions of intimacy and care in the context of precarity and questions of social justice.

We selected and grouped the films thematically, based on their narrative arcs and according to the intimacies that interrupt their narratives. We focus on films released from the very end of the 1990s into the twenty-first century, a time of intense geopolitical transformation in European governance, economic structures, and the notions of the boundaries of Europe. Europe has undergone significant changes in the first two decades of the twenty-first century as discussions about economic disparities, racial tensions, and global political conflict shape questions about Europe’s futures. Groups across the political spectrum call into question the validity of the European project and of the EU as a stabilizing political or economic structure. Our chapters focus on films that respond to these changes and challenges. Theorizing precarious intimacies as a political interpretive strategy applied to European film means paying close attention to what kind of narrative promises the films make and break. Some conflicts may arise, for example, as a result of a particular setting in a rural community while other conflicts might stem from a film’s setting in a European capital; the characters’ ethnic or religious background might evoke a set of expectations of the problems they might encounter as they travel to or through Europe; a character’s economically precarious situation has implications for their presumed agency. Such evocations, expectations, and implications, however loosely, define genres.

Genre expectations evoked by touch and intimacy on-screen play an important role in our analysis. We understand genre as what Lauren Berlant calls “a loose affectively-invested zone of expectations about the narrative shape a situation will take.”⁵⁹ Touch on-screen is embedded in these expectations while it can also become a rather different kind of action; touch can

be out of character and out of genre; it can become a form of interaction or interruption. In such moments of generic discomfort, viewers may be forced to question how what they see relates to what they expect and how they understand themselves as relating to the worlds they see. We start with the “affectively invested expectations” in relation to both precarity and intimacy to get to the political-cultural work cinematic representations can do. Genre expectations enter along a range of topics, for example, sexual and gender politics, migration and race, terrorism, or religious orientation. While an increasing number of European films take up these questions, we are interested in how a focus on precarious intimacies breaks with a (however loose) “affectively-invested zone of expectations” for the narrative, political, and visual shape these “problem films” take.

Critical and deconstructive readings have a strong tradition in German studies and are our points of departure, but we do not remain there. While it continues to be important to critique how emotions, as Ahmed describes, become “good emotions,” and how “violence and power . . . are concealed under the languages of civility and love,” it is equally important, in the face of everything that is wrong, to try to search for moments where emotions, stories, and images, might create joy in a gesture toward solidarity.⁶⁰ Emotions attach to different bodies in different ways. Narrative moments that try to shift those emotional charges, then, are forms of political intervention, and even though these moments are often fleeting, emotional engagement creates forms of relatability. The political surfaces in its most visceral form when emotional relatability becomes precarious. We start to care, we are forced to struggle, and in the best cases, we are forced to confront how solidarity must occur across positions that cause us to care differently. Reading for such emotional-political charge in the film as well as in the possible viewings of the film is always contentious, but it is necessary if we want to push back against inevitability and insist on the possibility of different outcomes.

We turn to feminist affect theory at various points in this book, as we grapple with how to make the affects produced by intimacies on-screen a productive concept for political readings. Theorists offer us numerous ways of engaging with skin (Jasbir Puar and Ahmed), colonial contact (Lowe), intimacy (Berlant), and notions of happiness and connection (Ahmed). Further, queerness (Haritaworn), willfulness (Ahmed), and defiance are concepts that weave through our discussions. In film, such concepts are developed narratively and visually into aesthetic form. We understand aesthetics as social, as defining our relationships with worlds in narrative forms and images that guide how we shape conceptual understandings of realities, boundaries, and identifications. Social aesthetics describe the ways in which we form communities and claim memberships and alliances.⁶¹ Understanding aesthetics as social in this broad way demands new “means of analyzing aesthetic experiences themselves.”⁶² Film as a medium confronts us with writings and rewritings of such social-aesthetic realities and gives us access to otherwise impossible,

affective intimacies. Cinematic *representations* of precarious intimacy do not simply represent but also bring something we would otherwise not be privy to intimately into the present, a process that Steyerl (following Walter Benjamin) describes as a process of actualization, a form of making present or *representing*.⁶³ Such representing through representation shapes the ways in which we understand our relationships to the people around us and our positions within social-political realities, and it can shape our solidarities.⁶⁴

The awkward but thrilling closeness between Fariba/Siamak and Anne in the scene from *Unveiled* we describe at the beginning of this introduction, for example, plays with expectations and narrative tensions on a range of levels. Anne, a single mother in a low-income job in rural Germany, is intrigued by Fariba/Siamak. She projects her own desire for getting out of her close-knit community onto Fariba/Siamak. Fariba/Siamak, in turn, is attracted to Anne but fears the homophobia of their coworkers and Anne's friends, as well as a discovery of both their illegal employment and their true identity. As viewers, expectations of intimacy between the two bring Fariba/Siamak's precarious situation to the foreground while Anne's presence reminds us of her desires and projections. As they engage in small talk and as the camera depicts Fariba/Siamak and Anne moving past each other awkwardly and closely, men dressed only in towels move across the screen in the background, exiting the shower after a day of work in the agricultural and food processing facility. Anne's ex-lover, who becomes increasingly jealous of the closeness he senses between Anne and Fariba/Siamak, interrupts their moment of intimacy in the dressing room. His presence continues to drive the narrative trajectory of the film and leads to the exposure and, in the end, deportation of Fariba. What becomes present here is a possibility for connection that is thwarted and threatened almost at the moment it emerges. The momentary awkwardness highlights the political tensions in this intimate conversation.⁶⁵ The possibility for intimacy is haunted by the assumption and the expectation of its impossibility.

Chapters and Trajectories

In this book, we develop readings of cinema located in a politics of touch and connection that can theorize the notions of care, connection, and love—even when such readings may at times work against the filmic representations themselves. We selected films that allow us to discuss such sites of contention in contemporary Europe: queer desire, migration, religious identity, sex work and prostitution, and finally, constructions of race, femininity, and whiteness. Historical connotations underpin the ways in which contemporary neoliberalism, globalization, and post-Cold War political transformation produce newly precarious forms of contact that, yet again, change forms of racialization, citizenship regimes, and economic exploitation.

In chapter 1, we set the stage by discussing films that depict migration to Europe from or via the Middle East, focusing on four films that span roughly a ten-year period: *In This World* (dir. Michael Winterbottom, United Kingdom, 2002), *For a Moment, Freedom* (*Ein Augenblick Freiheit* [dir. Arash T. Riahi, Austria/France/Turkey, 2008]), *Welcome* (dir. Philippe Lioret, France, 2009), and *Can't Be Silent* (dir. Julia Oelkers, Germany, 2013). The desire for Europe as a “happy object”—that is, as an object toward which good feelings are directed—and as an object that provides a (perhaps unattained) shared experience drives the journeys.⁶⁶ Yet, the films narrate stories of nonarrival that focus on revealing the unhappy effects of European border regimes. In spite of the fact that the desire for Europe is revealed to contribute to precarity, the films show moments of joy and human connection that happen in the face of violent exclusion. Precarious intimacies uncover how racializations in Europe are rooted in the violence of Europe’s ongoing creation and definition, but they also refract such violence through interpersonal intimacies. Thus, the films we discuss depict affects of intimate, proximal cohabitation in ways that pose questions about the possibilities and ethics of futures.⁶⁷

In chapter 2, we analyze precarious intimacies on-screen as moments of defiant—and queer—touch in Fatih Akin’s *The Edge of Heaven* (*Auf der anderen Seite*; Germany/Turkey/Italy, 2007), Angelina Maccarone’s *Unveiled* (*Fremde Haut*; Germany/Austria, 2005), Andrea Štaka’s *Fraulein* (*Das Fräulein*; Switzerland/Germany/Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2006), and Yüksel Yavuz’s *A Little Bit of Freedom* (*Kleine Freiheit*; Germany, 2003). Defiant touch does not undo the violence of exclusion and racism in these films, but it constructs moments, images, and gestures of refusal to cooperate in their perpetuation that also confront the viewer with their existence. These gestures disrupt narratives about difference and about who or what belongs to the space of Europe or has access to “Europeanness,” about whose bodies touch and how. Their futurity is not “restricted to generational narratives and reproduction,” as Berlant and Michael Warner have observed, but imagines queer, defiant intimacies as gestures toward not-yet-possible futures—futures, as Gayatri Spivak has called them, in the future anterior; futures of shared solidarity that we must call into being despite their current impossibility.⁶⁸ This defiance gestures toward futures anchored in unconventional intimacies, futures that challenge their appropriation for exclusionary fantasies of Europeanness.

In chapter 3, we first broadly sketch the general context of representation of religion, faith, and intimate relationships in Western European cinema, in drama, comedy, and in the films of Akin. We then focus on two films by Karin Albou, *Little Jerusalem* (*La petite Jérusalem*; France, 2005) and *The Wedding Song* (*Le chant des mariées*; France/Tunisia, 2008). In a context in which faith and religion are mobilized as forms of racialization, Albou’s films are unusually complex representations of religion and faith. The films embed loving friendships in religious contexts and work against the multiple forces that

enact racialized difference through representations of religion. “Tradition” and “religion” are often seen as inscribing sexualities onto bodies and regulating sexual intimacy, touch, and familial affection. Albou’s films complicate this story by showing how intimacy and touch sometimes move in unexpected ways, contrary to the script, as disruptive or unexpected forces—in this case, via the relationships between sisters and friends that are actually inextricable from their religious contexts. Precarious intimacies in Albou’s films further serve to emphasize connections between religions perceived as incommensurate and to imagine alliances between different racialized groups.

Chapter 4 discusses three films that depict contrasting forms of commodified intimacy that, when put in conversation with one another, address a range of sex and care work: *Flowers from Another World* (*Flores de otro mundo*; dir. Icíar Bollaín, Spain, 1999), *Princesses* (*Princesas*; dir. Fernando León de Aranoa, Spain, 2005), and *Lorna’s Silence* (*Le silence de Lorna*; dir. Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, Belgium/France/Italy/Germany, 2008). These three films tell distinct stories of money and touch, and of gender, race, and location. They evoke a complex relationship with the viewer that is founded on emotional engagement with the precarious intimacies of sex work. The complicated political terrain of sexualized and racialized commodification and representation in Europe drives the narrative tension in all three films. Each film offers alternative forms of intimacies that disrupt the narratives through depictions of friendship, community, or imaginations of friendship and “family” in spaces that exist elsewhere or in spite of these structures of sexualized power and exclusion. In contrast to the European spaces that produce violent intimacies based on commodified bodies and sex, the films stage diverging forms of intimacy and love that exist outside the script of women’s bodies made available for male consumption, and thus they create ways to think of alternatives, however momentary or imaginary.

Chapter 5 highlights the limits of our concept of precarious intimacy through an investigation of the politics of whiteness, neoliberalism, and intimacy. The films we analyze here revolve around white women who fetishize brown male bodies in an attempt to escape their (however privileged) neoliberal and white spaces of and in central Europe. We start with a discussion of the Austrian film *Paradise: Love* (*Paradies Liebe*; dir. Ulrich Seidl, Austria/Germany/France, 2012), a film about white European women who travel to Kenya as sex tourists. This film makes white femininity uncomfortable, but yet, in the end, it affirms white women’s dominant position. This form of representation relates to films that depict white European women who help Black male refugees as they struggle for entry into or legal status in Europe. Two main examples of these depictions are offered in the French film *Samba* (dir. Olivier Nakache and Éric Toledano, France, 2014) and the German film *Color of the Ocean* (*Die Farbe des Ozeans*; dir. Maggie Peren, Germany, 2011). While trying to counter depictions of male sexual predators and white women as victims, these films continue colonial modes of representation by

fetishizing Black male bodies and by victimizing white women, not as sexual prey but as the ultimate victims of neoliberalism.

In the conclusion of our book, we highlight how whiteness and white femininity remain central to persisting forms of colonial violence and to neoliberal regimes of exclusion, and we acknowledge the political and personal limitations of our analyses. We also insist that research toward more just futures requires that we continue to push back against representations that are often made to appear inevitable. In our conclusion, we think through some of the political implications of these discussions: for thinking Europe, for thinking *just* futures, and for developing communities of solidarity, responsibility, and care. The arc of the stories about precarious intimacy that we trace in this book illustrates the way in which we can read human contact and cohabitation as avenues to develop an ethics of living together. Yet, this set of narratives also illustrates important limits; in the face of contemporary political realities, reading for love, care, and connection will and cannot become too positive a story. The barriers we encounter, however, cannot result in stasis. While it continues to be important to read for the ways in which racism, colonial thought, and neoliberal capitalism circumscribe the possibilities for intimacy, it is equally important, in the face of everything that is wrong, to try to search for moments where emotions, stories, and images might lead to productive ways of creating alternative, nonviolent futures.

Chapter 1



Touching Journeys

Precarious Intimacies and Narratives of Nonarrival

European fiction and nonfiction films of the twenty-first century abound with stories of precarious journeys to and through (European) nonspaces—journeys triggered by fear, journeys precipitated by violence and war, journeys that are interrupted, journeys that fail, journeys without destinations, and imagined arrivals that are never achieved.¹ Journeys of migrants and refugees in Western European film often represent containment and incarceration, as well as stasis and immobility within Europe. Such stories of nonarrival take many forms, but they nearly always depict a Europe that has erected fences and spaces of exception outside of and within its borders.²

In this chapter, we read for precarious intimacies as they occur in disrupted and halted journeys, in what we designate as *spaces of nonarrival*. Such spaces include those that are used to visually characterize the waiting and insecurity of refugee experience: makeshift hotels, container homes, camps, asylum offices (and their accompanying lines), transport vehicles, boats, and beaches. They are spaces of interruption, barriers, and stasis. Even those spaces which on the surface signal movement (containers, trucks) often prove to be either the place where the journey meets its fatal end or just another step toward yet another space of stasis and stagnation. Spaces of nonarrival leave their inhabitants devoid of a connection to space and time, instead excluding them from community and from a future. Europe itself becomes a space of nonarrival for people who receive only temporary residency, enduring long waits to hear whether their applications have been approved, extended, or rejected. These spaces of nonarrival are populated by stories that intersect and people who touch each other's lives despite the isolation and uncertainty produced in them.

We analyze Michael Winterbottom's docudrama *In This World* (United Kingdom, 2002) as well as two fiction films, Arash T. Riahi's *For a Moment, Freedom* (*Ein Augenblick Freiheit*; Austria/France/Turkey, 2008) and Philippe Lioret's *Welcome* (France, 2009), and Julia Oelkers's documentary film *Can't Be Silent* (Germany, 2013). The films' varied formal approaches and settings

explore common themes around movement and stasis, loss and connection. Historically, the films span a period from about 2000 until 2013, a period during which the European Union (EU) underwent significant political and geographic changes that also shifted imaginations of European identity. In our analyses, we develop strategies of reading and representation that locate the refugee experience of intimacy in relation to changing European regimes of migration, racism, and exclusion. Precarious intimacies function as a reading strategy, as an aesthetic approach, and as a narrative interruption; they call attention to the realities of racialized exclusion, gesture toward possibilities for connection and compassion, and caution that those moments of connection can in turn become violent.

In these films, the narrative expectation of arrival in a safe space (Europe) is thwarted; simultaneously, however, the films tell stories of intimate connection and encounters that are possible in spite of—and even in the face of—Europe’s “vacillating” border regimes.³ Along the way, connections form, people’s lives touch as people’s journeys intersect, and new “families” are created as refugees hope and search for connection and compassion. It is notable how crucial the notion of family becomes in all the films we discuss here. These families can be best understood not as biological entities but as groups of people, often of diverse generations, who share living spaces and offer one another emotional and logistical support. These chosen families are central to the survival of the characters but are often shattered by the violence the migrants encounter. Reading for precarious intimacies demonstrates how agency, in the words of Judith Butler, functions as performativity in vulnerability. *Performativity* refers to “the processes of being acted on and the conditions and possibilities for acting, in the presence of our vulnerability to certain norms.”⁴ The violence of national and EU border regimes becomes visible through ephemeral moments of care, touch, and affection that highlight existing violence and enable potential alliance and resistance to such violence.

Jutta Bacas and William Kavanagh describe the tensions that manifest themselves within European border regimes as the “interrelation between physical proximity and social asymmetry.”⁵ The specific circumstances surrounding “processes of opening and redefining borders of the European Union” that exist between EU countries and non-EU countries, and between the Schengen Area (which under the international convention known as the Schengen Agreement includes most, but not all, EU member states as well as a few associated non-EU countries, most notably Switzerland) and non-Schengen countries, continue to change.⁶ The policing of these borders illustrates the complicated interplay between nation-states and transnational bodies, since nation-states are responsible for controlling the borders of the Schengen zone while the European Commission is entitled to address “failures” of nation-states to enforce external borders.⁷ Thus, the way in which these border regimes are policed and maintained constantly shifts. For

example, in the wake of the Arab Spring in 2012, a Schengen treaty reform allowed states to carry out passport checks on internal borders and, as a response to the increased number of Syrian refugees in Europe, Hungary decided to temporarily close its Schengen border to Serbia and Croatia with a border fence in 2014. These “dynamics of the shifting politics of border control and border regimes” can be understood as a range of uneven processes carried out through physical and legal barriers, enacted by multiple national and transnational institutions, that open and close points along European borders to specific groups at particular moments.⁸

In the face of such shifting border regimes, precarious intimacies represent forms of connection and solidarity as survival strategies and make legible the forces that produce precarity. Moments of defiant courage and connection, and in some cases even joy, often offer the clearest critiques of the forms of exclusion produced by border regimes in these films. Eurocentric notions of who is allowed to enter and who deserves to stay continue to produce and reproduce forms of colonial, racialized violence.

All four films discussed here start with the premise that the idea of Europe draws migrants toward it. This desire for Europe becomes a “happy object”: an object toward which good feelings are directed and which sustains fantasies of happiness that will be achieved when the object is attained.⁹ Several of the films also less explicitly expose the idea of a welcoming Europe as a happy object for Europeans—that is, sustained by white savior fantasies. The films reveal the unhappy effects of the realities of European forms of exclusion as well as imagined savior positions. Happiness *in* Europe is rather impossible in these films; however, they show precarious moments of human connection that happen in spite of, or even in resistance to, violent exclusion.

Refugees, Migrants, and European Cinemas

In the wake of the large numbers of people fleeing the civil war in Syria beginning in 2011, politicians and media again posed the question of how larger numbers of refugees would change the face of Europe. Such speculations have ranged from expressions of fear about how an influx of mainly Muslim refugees, traumatized by violent conflict, could threaten European safety and security, to hopes that the arrival of a younger population would help ease the economic burden of an aging European population.¹⁰ In the face of such reactions, which serve a range of national political agendas, it is important to emphasize the complexities of Europe’s migration histories, including colonial history, racist and violent pasts, and lived multiethnic realities.

The number of asylum applications in the EU had fallen sharply by 2006, after peaks in 1992 following the collapse of the Soviet Union and in 2001 as a result of the Yugoslav wars. Increasing restrictions in asylum policy contributed to this decline. As EU member countries progressively “securitized

migration” with new border controls, the lives of migrants, particularly asylum seekers, became more and more insecure.¹¹ The intensification of detention and deportation in EU countries disproportionately impacts women, who are often given less information, discriminated against more on the basis of language skills, suffer higher levels of abuse at the hands of staff and residents in detention centers, and report increased feelings of isolation.¹²

Germany, in many ways, stands at the heart of these developments: as a country whose liberal asylum policy was increasingly restricted in a series of changes from the 1990s onward; as a beneficiary of the Dublin agreement, in the sense that it reduced the number of refugees entering Germany; and as a country that has wielded a great deal of influence in EU policy around immigration throughout the twenty-first century thus far. In the first decades of the Federal Republic of Germany (the 1950s through the 1970s), the asylum policy codified in Article 16 of the West German constitution was largely uncontroversial, particularly as the vast majority of “refugees” entered West Germany not as asylum seekers but as ethnic Germans from East Germany or Eastern Europe who had an automatic right to German citizenship. German asylum law came under scrutiny, however, when the number of asylum applicants rose. After the 1980 military coup in Turkey, for example, and after the introduction of martial law in Poland at the same time, a brief spike in asylum applications drew new administrative restrictions that made the process more difficult, including a requirement for travel visas for Turkish citizens.¹³ In the early 1990s, after the unification of East and West Germany, German asylum law was further revised in response to a new spike in asylum seekers. Media coverage at this period was particularly sensationalist, focusing on refugees from the Balkans (who largely received temporary refugee status rather than asylum) and constructing spectacles out of a few incidents of violence between Turks and Kurds in Germany.¹⁴

Asylum applications in Germany and in other EU countries reached a new peak in 2015–16, when most asylum seekers entering Europe came from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan and took routes similar to the ones described or narrated in most of the films we will discuss here. An estimated 4.7 million people immigrated to one of the twenty-eight EU member states in 2015, a number that also includes people who migrated within the EU. The largest number of people migrated to Germany, followed by the United Kingdom, France, and Spain. In 2015 an estimated total of 2.7 million people migrated to the EU member states from nonmember countries.¹⁵

Scholars of European cinema and migration have often understood what is vaguely termed “migrant cinema” as addressing Europe’s pressing political and social questions. Guido Rings, for example, argues that such “films provide answers that might help to improve integration and community cohesion in Europe.”¹⁶ He reads “the fluid and transgressive character of migrant protagonists” as “particularly fruitful for the elaboration of mindsets” that address the challenges of globalization, migration, and right-wing populism.¹⁷

We do not dispute the importance of film for rethinking Europe nor the (potential) value of some revisionings of Europe for countering right-wing populist nationalism, but the political functionalization of these films for a presumed privileged and liberal audience needs to be problematized. Indeed, it is important to recognize that representations of migration and intimacy in European film often produce a hierarchy in which a white Europe(an) functions as a savior figure. In her analysis of the commodification of ethnicity in European cinema, Ipek Çelik Rappas critiques the way in which films “present images of innocent and victimized refugees in order to raise compassion for the liberal spectator” while filmmakers are praised “for saving refugees and their suffering from anonymity.”¹⁸ We argue that alternative models of intimacy that do not rely on the compassion of the (white) European may question and decenter Europe itself by highlighting the violence it produces. Further, most journey films, as genre, depend on what Lauren Berlant calls the “affectively-invested zone of expectations” that invests desire in a particular narrative of arrival, in this case in Europe, as a safe space and a space of potential prosperity.¹⁹ Yet, the representations of nonarrival that we discuss here thwart expectations of arrival in a European space that offers safety or an end to economic or political precarity, suggesting alternative imaginations of intimacy that gesture toward decolonial futures.

Disruption and Permanent Displacement: *In This World* (2002)

In This World, a docudrama by the British filmmaker Michael Winterbottom filmed on digital video, won the Golden Bear award at the 2003 Berlin International Film Festival and is considered one of the first European films featuring refugee main characters.²⁰ The film reconstructs the journey of a teenage boy, Jamal, and his cousin Enayat (both played by nonprofessional actors) from an Afghan refugee camp in Pakistan toward Europe. The film relies on extensive documentary footage gathered as the filmmakers traveled along this route in advance of the filming of the story. By the time the film was being edited, the actor who played Jamal had returned to the United Kingdom to apply for asylum; the fictional story of the film, in some ways, has thus become his story.²¹

Although *In This World* focuses on the cousins’ shared journey, only Jamal arrives in Europe. At the end of the film Jamal enters Europe illegally, hidden in a container ship. He tries to make money in Italy to pay for his journey to England by attempting to sell goods to tourists and by picking pockets. Once he has arrived in England, the camera offers a close-up of his face as he talks to his family to convey the bad news: his cousin died during their journey in the shipping container.

At the time the film was made, Afghans who had fled the political violence that ensued after the Soviet invasion, including shifting political tensions

between the mujahideen and the Taliban, populated refugee camps across the Afghan border in Pakistan, where the film begins; new camps were created within this already existing camp structure after the US invasion.²² Winterbottom makes this history explicit in the opening voiceover narration of the film. Although the film has been described by Alex Lykidis as “documentary realism,” *In This World* also questions what David Farrier calls the “generic conformity” and expectations of migrant cinema by not focusing on arrival but on the “condition of perpetual displacement.”²³ Further, *In This World* is a fictional reenactment but plays with documentary authenticity by using amateur actors and original locations and by tracing a very common route. The “didactic, highly politicized voiceover,” which recites statistics and facts, stands in tension with the personal and fictionalized story of the journey of two cousins.²⁴ The British-English narrator establishes the male voice of the European as the authority that calls attention to the plight of refugees. These facts put the personal and intimate story of the two refugees, Jamal and Enayat, in a global context but shift the sense of agency from the refugees to the European observer. The final minutes of the film use a text overlay while we hear the voice of Jamal praying. The text explains what happened to the actor who plays Jamal, named Jamal Udin Torabi, and establishes that the film relies on actual events that have been reconstructed. Torabi experienced a similarly difficult journey and was not granted asylum in England, but he was permitted to stay as an unaccompanied minor until he came of age. The concluding scenes emphasize the actual historical situation but reaffirm the framing voice and agency of the European film team.

The journey depicted in the film, however, focuses almost entirely on the refugees and the people they encounter on their journey. European characters are largely absent in *In This World* even though the dream of arriving in Europe, the dangers of the journey to Europe, and the violence of fortress Europe define Jamal and Enayat’s journey.²⁵ The absence of Europeans in any human interaction has contradictory effects. On the one hand, Europe could remain the happy object since it is never actually unveiled as anything but a desired final destination for the main characters: Jamal encounters neither Europeans who help him nor Europeans who stop him from entering. On the other hand, European spaces remain impersonal and abstract, void of personal connection or interaction. Jamal later enters Europe by himself; his and his cousin’s dangerous attempt to enter fortress Europe, hidden in a shipping container, comes to a deadly end for Enayat, whose forbidden border crossing into Europe disrupts the pair’s familial relationships, connections, and intimacies.

As Jamal and Enayat are pushed onward toward Europe by a network of human traffickers, their close personal relationship sustains them. The camera tracks Jamal and Enayat’s movement and lingers on intimate moments with an observer’s gaze. *In This World* uses close-ups to evoke intimate moments of human interaction that take place in spite of a journey that is



Fig. 1.1. Jamal and Enayat sleep in close quarters. Still from *In This World* (2002).

marked by exploitative business transactions. Toward the beginning of the film, for example, Jamal and Enayat fall asleep in the same bed in a makeshift house before they board the ship, sharing stories about the invention of music as well as familial conflict and drama (see fig. 1.1). The tight framing conveys an unusual sense of intimacy and family connection, safety and security. The handheld camera, used throughout the film, is particularly shaky at this moment. It serves as witness of and intruder into this scene, calling attention to its existence with exaggerated movements. This technique highlights the sense that viewers are witnessing something almost too personal to see: moments of connection and care that take place in spite of the insecurity and violence that drive—and disrupt—the journey.

At the boundary between Europe and elsewhere during their time in Turkey, a sequence of close-ups of Jamal illustrates his connections with people who assist the two teenagers. As various characters, who remain largely without names or stories in the film, help Jamal and Enayat cross the border into Turkey from a Kurdish village, an older woman pats Jamal on the head and expresses sympathy for him. She “caresses his head gently, then feeds and nurtures him” in what Yosefa Loshitzky describes as gestures of “maternal care.”²⁶ Jamal’s head, again, comes into focus when his hair is washed and cut upon their arrival in Istanbul—but at this moment, the touch seems painful, and Jamal grimaces (see fig. 1.2). During their time in Istanbul, moments of play and care are highlighted, although accompanied by ominous extradiegetic music. The moment the smugglers arrive to pick up Jamal and Enayat when it is time to move on to Italy appears almost as a kidnapping. They are wrenched away from new alliances that have formed in the brief filmic moments depicting their time in Istanbul: in a sweatshop, in streets, and in an apartment building. On the way to Trieste, Jamal’s comrades on his journey are taken from him as well: one by one, they die in the unventilated container; only Jamal and a constantly crying baby survive.



Fig. 1.2. Jamal flinches from rough hair care. Still from *In This World* (2002).

In the final scene, when Jamal makes the phone call to his family to convey the news that he arrived in England without Enayat, the camera again focuses closely on his head and hair. This tight framing highlights Jamal's vulnerability throughout these brief contacts between the teenager and others. While the film might imply that Jamal's "vulnerable body . . . that faces closed borders and comes face to face with death is the one deserving to be in Europe," it is also clear that his arrival and temporary status do not mean a less precarious life for him.²⁷ He arrives alone and without any familial support. Representations of physical closeness in dangerous spaces belie the closeness and security produced in moments of intimate connection: trips in the confining space of vans and the journey on the container ship. Thus "close" and intimate spaces, either in Europe or on the journey to Europe, move between safety, security, and connection as well as pain and violence, and the intimacies created insist on attention to the precarious conditions under which Jamal and Enayat move. These intimacies are limited: although the camp from which they come, Shamshatoo, is predominantly occupied by women, the significant relationships depicted in the film are entirely between men, with the exception of the maternal gesture mentioned in the hair care scene.²⁸

The story of Jamal and Enayat thwarts incorporation into the kind of liberal fantasy of arrival and development that often sets the parameters of filmic representations of refugee migration. Lisa Lowe describes the complex function of "global intimacies" as making possible particular knowledges in the service of imperialism and colonialism while other knowledges have remained obscured. Modern humanism and an accompanying racialized division of labor emerged from such forms of epistemic global intimacies. Centuries later, generic expectations that might be associated with the dominant genres of liberalism, as Lowe describes—particularly the development into the liberal subject that takes place in autobiography—remain prominent

in film.²⁹ *In This World*, however, shows moments of intimacies as embedded in colonial genealogies of violence that deprive certain subjects access to reason (in the form of education, for example), citizenship, or legal economies. The two protagonists have been multiply displaced, and both remain tightly focused on bare survival. Human community or connection is limited to fleeting interactions between precarious subjects perpetually excluded from Europe. Europe does not offer these characters any sense of safety, neither as a happy object nor as an actual location of “arrival,” nor does the film evoke humanitarian compassion on the part of the viewer that would easily resolve the tensions between Europe as object of desire and source of violence. By reading for brief moments of solidarity and community outside of Europe and in the face of precarity, however, precarious intimacies allow us to insist on the possibility of models for intimacy that work against rather than reify violence. The short-lived intimacies provide only fleeting solidarities but call attention to the precarious conditions under which Jamal and Enayat live and, in Enayat’s case, die.

Detours, Diversions, and Returns: *For a Moment, Freedom* (2008)

Released five years after *In This World*, the Austrian-French coproduction *For a Moment, Freedom* focuses on a route from Iran through Ankara, Turkey, with Austria, Switzerland, and other locations in Western Europe imagined as the ultimate destinations. The film is set in a complex historical moment: in the wake of the 2004 and 2007 eastward expansion of the EU, as well as in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion, and at a time when Turkey had begun to fulfill the terms of its preaccession agreement by implementing EU migration policies. These developments reduced and disrupted refugee migration to both Turkey and the EU, producing new “precarious transit zones” and the new figure of the transit migrant.³⁰ In this film, individual—and in this case fictional, though with roots in the director’s own experience—stories of survival and death on refugees’ journeys connect to global political questions about the ethical treatment of refugees. The United Nations (UN) building in Ankara, where the fates of many refugees’ lives are decided most prominently, implies this global connection.

For a Moment, Freedom traces the fictional, dramatic fates of three groups of people who meet one another in Ankara because they live in the same apartment building; by the end of the film, none of these groups leaves Ankara intact. The color scheme of the film is gray, dark, and often gloomy with the exception of a few colorful pieces of clothing. The first quarter of the film shows the dangerous journey of the Iranian migrants to Ankara; however, the majority of the film is set and filmed in Ankara. As the capital of Turkey, Ankara functions as a decidedly national space transformed into a transnational space, where people of many ethnicities and origins live in

what one can clearly identify as legal and material nonspaces such as shabby hotels and small rooms where they try to set up what might resemble a make-shift home for themselves and their families and friends.

A scene that portrays a public execution carried out by an Iranian firing squad frames the film. First looking down from above, the camera then cuts to zoom in on one of the faces of the condemned, a terrified-looking woman. At the end of the film, we see the bloodstained face of a man named Abbas, who is executed when he is deported to Iran after the denial of his asylum application. An asylum decision, the film suggests with this framing, is often a decision over life and death.

The first of the groups consists of Manu and Abbas, a younger Iraqi Kurd and an older Iranian Kurd who end up, rather coincidentally, living together in one small room as they await a decision regarding their asylum applications. They live as a family unit of sorts, illustrated by a scene wherein Manu tries to cook a meal of poultry for Abbas and himself. Manu catches (steals) a swan in the local park and kills and cooks the bird in a giant pot as white feathers cover their apartment. In general, Manu appears to take care of Abbas, who often seems discouraged and tired. Manu, in contrast, has an eternally optimistic attitude, sends fake Polaroid photographs to his Kurdish village showing him with expensive cars and blond women, and is not afraid to use unconventional means to secure the resources they need, be it food or documentation.

Manu's naive exuberance, however, is dramatically challenged in a scene on a city bus. As Abbas jokingly tries to tamp down Manu's conviction that he will meet the woman of his dreams at a club, he also admonishes Manu, telling him to be proud that he is "from Kurdistan." Although Manu and Abbas can only communicate with one another in English, they discover a Kurdish song that they both know. In a rare moment of joy, Abbas sings the song together with Manu on a city bus while in Turkey. This act suggests a kind of transnational diasporic connection that is not tied to a shared, lost space, but rather that is formed in their current moment. Midsong, Turkish riders on the bus attack them for speaking Kurdish, yelling "speak Turkish, speak Turkish," as they beat the two. For decades, anti-Kurdish sentiment was generated in Turkey to propel the country toward establishing a nation-state that could be understood as homogenous in the image of the perceived homogeneity of Western European nation-states. Anti-Kurdish Turkish nationalism, a legacy at the heart of the founding of Turkey in the image of Europe, interrupts Abbas and Manu's performance of a sort of familial, diasporic intimacy in song.

After learning that Abbas's asylum status has been denied, Manu organizes a fake visa for Abbas without telling Abbas that it is fake. They commence the journey west by train. When their papers are reviewed in the train by Romanian-Hungarian border agents and then returned to them, they dance and sing in their small train compartment (see fig. 1.3), assuming they had



Fig. 1.3. Abbas and Manu celebrate in the train at the border crossing, just before Abbas is arrested. Still from *For a Moment, Freedom* (2008).

safely entered the Schengen zone. In a close-up, the camera shows Abbas laughing, a rare moment in the film, and the two men share a joyful hug. Their celebratory dance is interrupted, however, as the border agents reappear and arrest Abbas. We do not see any of the intervening moments that will end in Abbas's death as one of the three people executed by firing squad in the frame scenes; his fate also seemingly remains unknown to Manu. Manu's almost carefree, and most certainly naive, desire to care for Abbas thus nurtures an important intimacy that sustains Abbas but that is also partially responsible for Abbas's deportation to Iran. Abbas's death is revealed by the film to be a de facto collusion between the violence of European border regimes and the Iranian government. When Manu arrives in Germany, he is shown roaming around Berlin's Alexanderplatz. The camera moves in fast panoramic shots, circling first the square and then Manu's face, illustrating excitement and disorientation, relief and sadness, as we witness brief imagined scenes from his future, all of which show moments of touch with characters who have not appeared in the film before this point. His radical openness to a positive future relies on his ability to imagine future intimacy. His hope after the loss of Abbas is a continuation of his illusory optimism throughout the film, a survival strategy, and the potential for arrival in Europe.

The second grouping consists of the Iranian couple Lale and Hassan and their young son Kian. The UN building in Ankara, a place to which Hassan frequently returns and where he repeatedly expresses his desire to provide his family with a better life, visually overshadows the depictions of their relationship. Hassan hides the denial of his asylum claim from his family as

they fantasize about a future in which the current regime is overthrown and democracy is established. Shortly thereafter, Lale and Kian follow Hassan to the UN building and witness from afar as he first tries to steal somebody's papers and then stabs himself to appear "tortured." This effort also fails to elicit an entry visa to a European country. Hassan finds himself trapped between the violence of the European border regime and the threats that face him should he return to Iran. Seeing no other choice to protect his family, he burns himself to death in front of the UN building, an act misread by the Turkish media as terrorism rather than protest. Although Lale and Kian are then granted their visas, they return to Iran via the same dangerous route by which they came. Hassan's actions enact a series of failures to "protect" his family, a protection he imagines as only possible upon entry to Europe. His very investment in Europe as space of arrival (and, perhaps, his investment in the role of the family's "protector") ultimately underpins the destruction of the intimacies that motivate his actions.

The third group again is comprised of chosen family. Two young men, Ali and Merdad, take on parental roles as they care for two young children, Merdad's niece and nephew. After a dangerous journey, they too arrive in Ankara and live in the same makeshift hotel, and they too wait in line in front of the UN building. In Ankara, Ali is captured and tortured by men who appear to be agents of the Iranian secret service and who seem primarily interested in capturing the children's parents, who already live in Austria. Together with the two children, Ali is detained until his discovery and rescue. Merdad, after finding out his friend and the kids were taken, can do nothing but wait in line in front of the UN building. Ironically, the fact that this abduction happened and was reported to the UN helps the children and their companions speed up their visa process. After Ali and the kids are released, Ali accuses Merdad of neglecting the children because he has been paying too much attention to his Turkish girlfriend, Jasmin. In this scene, Ali and Merdad argue like jealous parents until Ali learns that Merdad has secured the children's release and cries in Merdad's arms (see fig. 1.4). The two children and Ali arrive in Austria and are reunited with the children's parents, while Merdad decides to remain in Ankara with Jasmin. This familial grouping falls apart as visa entries into Europe prompt reformulations into more traditional families that ultimately leave Ali isolated.

For a Moment, Freedom oscillates between depicting overwhelming hope, and even love and joy, and a sense of hopelessness, fear, and endless exclusion. The director, Arash T. Riahi, also sees the film as "a reaction to and commentary on the political and social situation in Europe today, where racism and hatred of foreigners has become acceptable to a frightening degree."³¹ Against the exclusions of contemporary Europe, Riahi proposes a strategy of depicting "universal desires" and dreams.³² However, the film undercuts Riahi's rhetoric of universal desires and dreams through its portrayal of the ways in which state violence partially marks out the limits of intimacy and



Fig 1.4. Ali and Merdad reconcile after the kidnapping of Ali and the children. Still from *For a Moment, Freedom* (2008).

safety. In the face of narrative trajectories that constantly challenge its characters' beliefs in finding a better life, whatever that might mean, touch and care open up moments of intimacy that ground and sustain the characters. The depictions of Merdad's love for Jasmin, of powerful familial bonds that are nonbiological, and of the (in some cases) unbearable burden of love in the face of danger are moments that matter because they call into question regimes of exclusion that have little space for the intimacies that sustain human lives. These moments, whether we consider them as moments of joy, happiness, or hope, are intimacies rendered precarious by European violence even as they make such violence legible.

The film's portrayals of intimacy, however, stand in tension with viewers' expectations. Journey films, as genre, may depend on what Berlant calls the "affectively-invested zone of expectations" that invests desire in a particular narrative of arrival accompanied by growth and development.³³ Yet, *For a Moment, Freedom* relies heavily on thwarting expectations of arrival and self-discovery. The stories of nonarrival that this film tells are marked by moments of interruption and diversion, as well as moments of personal, intimate connection and friendship. They rely on the temporal interruption of the journey, during which these moments of intimacy appear as brief strategies of locatedness and connectedness against the precarity of the characters' lives. Ultimately, these moments are not of *use*, at least insofar as they are not useful in reaching a specific destination; on the contrary, they might hinder the journeys, further endanger the migrants, and undermine the goals the travelers have. Again, it is important to emphasize that we describe *moments*,

since the frame images of execution bring the viewer back to the narration of violence and isolation. But it is precisely the momentary nature of love and caring touch that reveal the violence of Europe at work in the film.

For a Moment, Freedom depicts a variety of detours, diversions, and returns. Some of the refugees are sent away, some get stuck and turn back, some decide to take other routes. *For a Moment, Freedom* not only shows suffering and vulnerability but emphasizes moments when the characters defiantly act in solidarity, even though neither their destination nor the spaces of nonarrival they pass through or land in during their journeys in any way guarantee their bodily integrity. The film contrasts forms of state violence with these moments of defiant strength and connection, relief and even joy. Similar to *In This World*, such moments are not enabled by the happy object Europe, but rather by chosen community and familial solidarity outside of Europe and in defiance of violent exclusion. Intimacies depicted in these films rework family structures in creative ways rather than merely ending with their rupture.³⁴

European Border Camps as Spaces of Nonarrival: *Welcome* (2009)

The critically acclaimed French film *Welcome* also forms a narrative based on the desire for arrival and for family, a desire that is never fulfilled. The main protagonist in the film, the Kurdish Iraqi Bilal, has entered the EU, in this case France, but seeks to cross the channel to England. He hopes for reunification with his girlfriend Mina and a successful career as a soccer player for Manchester United; he counts on the journey across the English Channel to help him achieve both these goals. The romance narrative serves as an invitation to the audience to hope for these seemingly impossible fantasies. Yet the intimate connection more prominent in this film is the friendship between Bilal and Simon, a French swimming coach whose marriage to his wife Marion has just failed.

Director Philippe Lioret postulates that while the theme of his film is immigration, its subject is the drama between two couples.³⁵ The filmmaker's statement hints at the complexities with which this film interweaves precarity, in this case of the situation of refugees stranded in the French harbor town of Calais, and the desire for intimacy. Close to the narrowest point of the English Channel, Calais is a spatial center for negotiations over immigrations between France and the United Kingdom. The Le Touquet Treaty, in effect from 2003 to 2018, mandated "that all travelers between the two countries would have to clear immigration in the country of departure rather than arrival."³⁶ This stipulation was meant to ensure that migrants would be kept out of the United Kingdom. The closure of refugee camps along the French coast was further meant to deter migrants from coming. Tighter

security measures and controls were implemented in 2003 and effected the eviction of about two thousand people from the camp called the “jungle” in 2009. None of the measures decreased the number of people arriving at the border; on the contrary, the numbers have been rising, which has created an ongoing housing crisis.³⁷ In 2015, French authorities evicted yet another large camp, but in acknowledgement of their failure to end the existence of such camps offered another space, on the outskirts of Calais, for people to live.³⁸ According to Calais Migrant Solidarity, the so-called compromise did not solve the housing problems for the migrants but further ghettoized them.³⁹

Welcome is set in this contested border space and fraught political context. Critics praised the film specifically for showing the hypocrisy of the European migration systems in a place where asylum seekers, stranded in horrific makeshift camps, wait while countries try to negotiate who will have to process their asylum claims and offer them temporary housing, food, and support.⁴⁰ The film also sparked a controversy when Lioret drew parallels between the conditions in refugee camps and the treatment of Jews during the Holocaust.⁴¹ *Welcome* has been read as a cinematic representation of a “nonplace” of “nonbeing” created by the protagonists’ complex, even antagonistic relationship to the space in which they reside.⁴² Our reading points to “nonarrival” to emphasize the way in which the film offers glimpses into how intimate encounters, which in this case happen within chosen family, offer up possibilities for contact in the face of border regimes.

The film begins with a focus on Bilal’s attempts to enter the United Kingdom. Bilal first tries to cross the channel by paying a smuggler to hide him in a truck to cross via the tunnel. Thwarted when he is unable to keep a plastic bag over his head long enough to avoid detection, as it reminds him of being hooded during torture in Iraq, Bilal seeks to swim across. He approaches Simon for swimming lessons. Their initial contact is awkward and strange: Bilal climbs out of the water and speaks to Simon in English at the pool where Simon works. Simon matter-of-factly accepts payment for lessons and adds him to the calendar. However, when Bilal arrives for his first lesson, he is accompanied by dozens of refugees waving bills at the entrance, hoping to use the showers at the pool. Visually, the image juxtaposes a single, chosen refugee with a mass of people clamoring for entrance, all turned away. At this moment, the film runs the risk of painting this intimacy as exceptional, while the “masses” are undeserving. However, Bilal and Simon’s friendship must be understood against the backdrop of two threats of violence at the hands of the French state: the threat of deportation to Iraq for Bilal and the threat of imprisonment for Simon, who, under a French law, could be punished for harboring undocumented residents with up to five years in prison.⁴³

Water makes up the space of transit and the barrier to Bilal’s arrival but also the point of intimacy between Simon and Bilal. As such it creates a complicated space of nonarrival that enables a new intimacy and then destroys it. Bilal is caught by French authorities on his first attempt to cross the channel



Fig. 1.5. Bilal attempts to swim across the English Channel. Still from *Welcome* (2009).

by swimming and returned to Calais. On the second attempt, Bilal dies in the English Channel, swimming away from a ship attempting to pull him from the water. The film prominently features both of these water spaces: the contained and turquoise water of the pool and the endless, gray horizon and the foamy waves of the channel between France and the United Kingdom. *Welcome* further creates an association between these bodies of water and the rainy, dark streets of Calais at night, the only spaces available for the refugees who live in the camp to socialize and move about. Furthermore, the streets become the setting where refugees often roam and where Simon, driving in his car, searches for Bilal.

The sequence toward the end of the film when Bilal drowns in the ocean directly contrasts the vast space of the English Channel with the safety of the pool. Bilal is shown swimming out into the ocean, with the clear intent to cross the channel. The camera angles cut between just hovering over the surface of the water as Bilal fights against the choppy water, made worse by the wake of a large ship crossing close to him, and wide-angle shots from above that portray the channel as vast and emphasize the danger large ships pose for any swimmer. As the camera hovers above, the viewer sees a small speck in the water, barely identifiable as Bilal, as he struggles against the waves behind the large ship in a sea of gray, turbulent, ocean water (see fig. 1.5).

The film then cuts directly to another swimmer practicing in the safety of the pool. These pool scenes are familiar to the viewer as the film frequently shows Bilal in the pool with Simon watching. Their training sessions are what brings them together, but they also define the power dynamics between the two as Simon keeps a fatherly watch over Bilal swimming. The fact that Simon gives Bilal access to the pool and his help with training ultimately make it feasible for Bilal to risk his life by crossing the channel as a swimmer. In the pool scene with the new trainee, the camera again hovers at eye level with the swimmer, just above the water. Simon walks along the side



Fig. 1.6. Simon offers Bilal his ring to give to Bilal’s girlfriend. Still from *Welcome* (2009).

of the pool, coaching and watching the swimmer. The film thus contrasts and connects the intimate space of the pool and the dangerous space of the open ocean. In the next scene, the camera shows an officer of the UK Coast Guard as he spots Bilal in the water. Trying to escape the boat and avoid capture, Bilal exhausts himself and drowns. The camera hovers again, searching, over the surface of the greenish-gray ocean and the foggy sky, but Bilal has drowned. The watchful eyes of Simon and the searching eyes of the Coast Guard are clearly not only aligned and contrasted but also compared with the white European gaze assessing the precarious bodies of the refugees. The narrative of “salvation” is also a narrative of destruction embedded in a gaze of surveillance, leaving Simon—and perhaps even the viewer—implicated in the structures of power that lead to Bilal’s death.

Simon and Bilal’s brief friendship functions as an imagination of cohabitation against the more common notions of hospitality, which are embodied in the figure of Marion, Simon’s wife. We are thinking here of cohabitation as what Butler calls the “conception of ethical obligation that is grounded in precarity,” a challenge to how we imagine living with others, those whom we have not chosen, but to whom we have obligation nevertheless.⁴⁴ Marion’s actions rely on a notion of hospitality aligned with a sort of liberal humanitarianism: she volunteers handing out water bottles and food at the refugee camps and accuses Simon of a lack of capacity to empathize with the plights of others. When Simon proves Marion wrong by inviting Bilal into their home, Marion rejects his more radical gesture—offering up shared home space and friendship, considering sustenance beyond water and food—as going too far. Indeed, his interactions with Bilal cement her conviction that they must not see each other anymore. The power of Simon’s care for Bilal is represented in a series of gifts: Simon gives Marion’s returned ring to Bilal so that Bilal can offer it to his girlfriend Mina when he reaches the United Kingdom (see fig. 1.6); Simon offers his coat to Bilal after Bilal has been captured and returned

to a detention center; and Bilal uses Simon's wet suit in his two attempts to swim across the channel.

The space of the heterosexual, if nonreproductive, family becomes the territory on which global cohabitation is contested. Yet the proffered intimacy itself is also the "gift" that kills Bilal, when he takes his swimming training to the channel. Indeed, this gift is embedded in a series of rejected gifts: Bilal rejects the life ring thrown to him; and, when Simon gets Marion's ring back after Bilal's death, he offers it to Bilal's girlfriend Mina, who rejects it. The rejected gifts align with the failed intimacies: none succeed from the perspective of the narrative. The affective force offered up by the friendship between Bilal and Simon lies in the space of nonarrival, in a connection formed without hope of "productivity," reproductivity, or arrival. Their bond, which mirrors the loving care of a good father-son relationship, can not only potentially cause legal issues for Simon but also leads to neighbors and friends appearing to question Simon's motivations for helping and housing Bilal. Their suspicion that Simon might sexually exploit refugees in vulnerable positions further casts doubt on their relationship. The precarious intimacies of *Welcome*—by constructing a space of nonarrival in the water that is also a deadly gift offered up by Simon, echoed by the deadly life ring offered by the UK Coast Guard—reveal how the gesture of welcome has not gone far enough, doubling back on itself to become part of the violence of both national and EU refugee policy, rather than a counter to them.

European Spaces of Exclusion and Diasporic Community: *Can't Be Silent* (2013)

The German documentary film *Can't Be Silent* focuses on people who have arrived in Europe; however, they are stuck in refugee centers and camps as they await decisions in their respective asylum cases. The film, thus, reveals the ways in which refugee lives are *also* made precarious by the restriction of movement and forms of exclusion refugees encounter *within* Europe. *Can't Be Silent* reflects a post-Iraq War reality of asylum seekers in Europe, a time when asylum claims made by people from the Middle East were increasingly rejected. The film revolves around a music-activism project initiated by the German band Strom & Wasser. Documentary filmmaker Julia Oelkers filmed the band's attempt to bring musicians who lived in refugee camps across Germany together to tour as a musical group (as Strom & Wasser featuring "The Refugees"). Throughout the successful tour, almost all the artists faced threats of deportation. While the filming of *Can't Be Silent* (2013) predated the arrival of a larger number of refugees fleeing the war in Syria, its release and reception coincided with discussions in the EU about closing the Schengen Area borders toward the South and East to dissuade refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war from entering Europe. German chancellor Angela Merkel's

lifting of the Dublin restrictions for refugees from Syria in 2015 and her refusal, until late 2017, to cap the number of refugees Germany accepts triggered controversies in Germany and Europe.⁴⁵

Can't Be Silent contains what could be considered cliché images used in documentary films critical of European refugee policies and politics. Some of the interviews with the protagonists are held in their living spaces: in crowded refugee homes and behind fences, but also in the small shared apartments occupied by some as their residence status stabilizes. These spaces are juxtaposed with interviews in public spaces as refugees explore their limited freedom of movement within the often rural towns in a gray and unwelcoming Germany. The main focus of the film is the music project, including the band's practice sessions and the musicians' tour across Germany. This tour allowed many of the refugees, who at that time were legally confined to their assigned local areas, to gain special permission to travel within Germany, meet and connect with one another, and make new friends.

In contrast to the other films we have discussed in this chapter, *Can't Be Silent* focuses on refugee characters who have already arrived at their European destinations. This Europe, however, is a space of exclusion and uncertainty as well as a space in which refugees build a diasporic community. This situation adds yet another meaning of precarious intimacies to our discussion, where we have seen that *In This World* shows how intimate spaces and connections can swiftly change from safe to violent, *For a Moment*, *Freedom* focuses on Ankara as a space of precarious intimacy, and *Welcome* emphasizes the precarity of gestures of welcome. In these films, precarious intimacies specifically reveal the perpetual spaces of exclusion within Europe and the moments of connection that nevertheless form within and against structures of violence and exclusion. Even while physically located within Europe, refugees remain in spaces of non-arrival; their recognition by the state remains token and minimal; and, most important, they remain excluded from opportunities for personal, financial, and physical security because of the ongoing threat of deportation. The close personal relationships they form in their diasporic communities are directly tied to the precarity of their legal and economic status in Europe.

In spite of its focus on music performed in Germany, Germany is not a space of arrival in this film. This is particularly visible when the initiator of the music project, Heinz Ratz, is awarded a medal for integration by the German government. The film records the journey of one of the Refugees, Revelino, to the award ceremony, beginning with his nervous presence in the train station, explaining, "The train station is always a problem for us, because you might be controlled any time, especially if you are the odd man out, someone of a different skin color." During the award ceremony, Hosain and Revelino, the only two of the Refugees in attendance, are nearly completely silent. Maria Böhmer, at the time the commissioner for Integration in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, gives the award to Ratz with only a generic nod to the two musicians present as "your musicians," asking the audience to



Fig. 1.7. Revelino and Hosain eat apart from others at the medal award ceremony. Still from *Can't Be Silent* (2013).

participate in an exoticizing gaze by inviting the audience to “look at them.” Later, she stages photos shaking their hands without learning their names.

In the scenes depicting the award ceremony, *Can't Be Silent* thus stages a failure to meet the expectations of the title. Ratz uses his acceptance speech to draw attention to the precarious circumstances produced by German asylum law, which at the time greatly limited mobility, made it difficult to acquire paid work, and rendered many of the musicians in his band vulnerable to uncertainty or deportation. Yet, the urgent suggestion of the title, to speak up, “not be silent,” proves impossible for the two refugees in attendance. The camera lingers on Hosain and Revelino, who listen and smile awkwardly; after the award Ratz and Hosain, but not Revelino, shake Böhmer’s hand for a photo. The word inscribed on the award, *integration*, is juxtaposed with a series of images in which the media and the mic follow Ratz, while Hosain and Revelino eat alone at a table, physically and visually separated from the rest of those in attendance (see fig. 1.7).

The meaningless handshake and the refugees’ visible separation from other attendees highlights ongoing experiences of exclusion. The refugees’ music becomes an unreciprocated gesture of shared cultural experience as intimacy. Hosain and Revelino remain unrecognized by representatives of the state, who render the refugees exoticized, nameless, and voiceless others while bestowing recognition on the German musician who organized the project. The award ceremony, then, seems to be a replication of a white savior trope. The refugees are doubly silenced at the award ceremony: their music is replaced by a string quartet playing classical music while they silently bear



Fig. 1.8. Meisam and Hosain share their journey stories on the shore of the Elbe River in Hamburg. Still from *Can't Be Silent* (2013).

witness as Ratz is granted his award; they remain appropriated for a discourse of “integration” even as their presence highlights the impossibility of creating new forms of belonging in the overtly symbolic national space of the German chancellery. The defiant intimacy of diasporic subjects is confronted with the impossible, potentially violent intimacy of “integration.”

Precarious intimacies in the film complexly reveal the insecure conditions under which refugees live, but they also highlight the shared connections that form through music. Music becomes a form of sonic touch through which people connect. Their shared music illustrates their shared lives that take place in a perpetual state of nonarrival. This intimate togetherness between musicians from The Gambia, Ivory Coast, Afghanistan/Iran, and Dagestan is translocal. As the musical connection between the Afghan rapper Hosain, who arrived in Germany from an Iranian refugee camp, and the Dagestani rapper MC Nuri, who grew up in a refugee camp in Germany, shows, this music project yields some unexpected transnational convergences. Despite the project’s success, however, the musicians continue to face likely deportation.

The close friendship between Hosain and his friend Meisam further illustrates the way in which this film depicts intimacies embedded in stories and spaces of nonarrival. The two men met on their dangerous journey to Europe and remain in touch while moving around to various camps and detention centers within Germany. When they meet again in Hamburg as part of the musicians’ tour, Hosain and Meisam recount their journey to Germany and recall the dangerous and overcrowded boats and people drowning in the Mediterranean (see fig. 1.8). The background of the Hamburg harbor signals

their location in Germany but also hints at their precarious status as asylum seekers, the perpetual threat of being deported, and the dangers that face them should they attempt to return after deportation. Throughout the film, the friends meet in various locations, but they continuously face separation as they are moved to other camps in disparate locations.

Hosain's discussions after a rap performance at an outdoor festival illustrate the way in which music creates a sense of connection and intimacy for a diasporic community in Germany. A celebratory mood accompanies conversations among Afghans in attendance as they discuss an emerging Afghan contemporary music scene—with music that is also distributed widely through YouTube—in which Hosain plays a major role. As he stands with his arm around Hassan, who appears to be of middle-school age, Hassan explains in German that he has been in Germany only for three months. Hosain follows with an admonition to youth “that we don't say, he is Pashtun, he is Uzbek, we don't care about such divisions. Only when we are united, we can rebuild our country.” The camera then cuts to Hassan rapping one of Hosain's songs, then back to the crowd jumping and dancing to Hosain's performance. Hosain's music has become a galvanizing force for the formation of an Afghan diaspora. The precarious intimacies in *Can't Be Silent* reveal the emergence of transnational diasporic spaces of connection within Europe, in the face of the continuous uncertainty refugees experience there.

These intimacies enable two possible meanings of diaspora. The Afghan diaspora might function as an attachment to a space that is elsewhere or as a diaspora that functions in solidarity and works toward transformation in Europe and Afghanistan. The other friendships also reveal another kind of “queered” diaspora similar to what Fatima El-Tayeb has investigated: a “situational community of racialized European subjects engaged in the process of queering ethnicity using similarly nonlinear and nonbinary forms of artistic expression” that can reveal “cross-ethnic exploration of processes of racialization.”⁴⁶ In this sense, transnational intimacies between musicians from a variety of national and ethnic backgrounds forge a diasporic community in *Can't Be Silent* rooted in experiences of racialization and exclusion.

Touching Journeys and Intimate Spaces of Nonarrival

In these four films, global intimacies inflect the kinds of affective connections and intimacies that Europe as a space of encounter produces and precludes on interpersonal levels. If, as Lowe points out, the emergence of political liberalism was accompanied by violent intimacies between continents, these films track how such intimacies move toward and into European space and literalize them in the touch and connection between figures marked as not European. Cinematic narratives of precarious intimacy highlight the

structures of exclusion in Europe and the destruction of social bonds that occur as part of the insecurity faced by refugees. Intimacy thus forms fleeting potentialities marked by connection, affection, even love, against the forms of violence structuring the relationship of Europe to its migrants and refugees. The forms of intimate familial bond that the films show illustrate this dynamic: chosen families offer spaces of refuge and temporary safety for the characters in the film only to be broken apart by exclusive legal regimes.

Most characters in these films do not arrive in the Europe they sought out as their original destination; the characters arriving in Europe arrive under different circumstances than planned and remain in spaces of nonarrival. Thus, these narratives of spaces of nonarrival do not offer new ways of thinking about—or imagining—a better Europe. They defy appropriations of the migrant as a “tool” for making Europe “better” but insist on claiming spaces of care, love, and connection, in spite of and against the regimes of racist exclusion that continue to define Europe. If many European films about migration “present European identity as always already complex, transnational, and decentered,” as Nilgün Bayraktar asserts, these films contain moments of community and attachment that locate contemporary refugee migration, which is currently so important for European politics and politicking, as outside the purview of the European identity project altogether—but deeply connected to how Europe functions as a field of power.⁴⁷ The films write white helpers out of the stories, have them fail, or marginalize them. The precarious intimacies of these films are certainly marked by the exclusions produced by the idea of Europe, but the affective community identifications at work in spaces of nonarrival function outside of, or at least at a slant to, identifications with Europe.

The work of Ahmed and Berlant, respectively, critiques the construction of “happy objects” or “cruel optimisms.”⁴⁸ Thus, what does it mean, analytically and politically, to highlight longing, connection, and fleeting moments of skins touching in the face of tremendous political, physical, and representational violence that accompanies exclusions from European space and from the protection offered to EU citizens? What does it mean to highlight these moments in narratives that ultimately result in the physical exclusion of the refugee or migrant subject from the European space represented in the film? Our particular practice of reading insists on ongoing attention to those exclusions and violences while also holding up moments of possibility that dismantle such structures. As Claudia Breger suggests, we can read for the ways in which narratives “also insistently embed . . . good feelings in critical takes on the regimes of difference, which block the articulation of human commonality in the contemporary world.”⁴⁹ We would not, however, limit the space of “good feelings” to the potential to articulate human commonality. The four films we have analyzed depict human connection across difference in the face of regimes of difference and open up, however temporary, spaces for connection. This is a cohabitation that relies on an ethical relationship

to the other, even across tremendous distance or difference, rather than on a sense of commonality.

Berlant warns of the potential of “cruel optimisms,” attachments produced in the face of the intense precarities formed by neoliberalism as our hopes or expectations for “good lives” are increasingly revealed to be untenable. These attachments, she suggests, become cruel optimisms when they are sustaining structures that continue to promise the “good life,” which can never be attained or may even be prohibited by the very optimisms themselves.⁵⁰ Indeed, these rearrangings reveal the hope for Europe itself to be a kind of cruel optimism, in which Europe becomes what Ahmed calls a “happy object”: an object toward which good feelings are directed, which sustain fantasies of happiness that can be achieved when these objects are attained.⁵¹ Europe as ambivalent “happy object” always already contains the potential for “unhappy effects.” In that sense, Ahmed’s political call to uncover the “unhappy effects” of happy objects might be answered by the defiant gestures we see at work in these films. The sustaining fantasy, then, as a utopian vision of a “space of free movement,” a space of gender equality, fair wages, and social welfare, and a space that is “postracial,” as Alana Lentin calls it, has not *yet* been achieved but remains on the horizon.⁵²

While the violent histories and present structures of racialized and gendered exclusions render these sustaining fantasies impossible, they at the same time characterize Europe at its core. As El-Tayeb has argued, racism defined and defines the European project:

All people of color . . . are cast as products of a culture that is fundamentally inferior to the secular West, making them necessarily “un-European.” This trope can be quickly reinforced because it references well-known clichés perceived as truth, since they align with the overarching binary discourse affirming Europe’s status as the center of progress and humanism.⁵³

El-Tayeb further argues, though, for queering as a strategy to expose these forms of European racism. The occupation of queer times by European queers of color requires unique strategies that deliberately cross ethnic and national borders, which is necessary given that queers of color are produced as *already* outside of European space and time. Feature films are rarely decidedly activist or political, but they offer glimpses of what *queer* as a verb might mean: aesthetic strategies create moments of queering, and interpretive readings allow us to push these moments toward political meanings that open possibilities.

In the films we analyzed in this chapter, moments of intimate connection do not take place in Europe but are suspended in spaces of nonarrival. This means that such affinities and connections cannot be easily appropriated for a narrative of a newly emerging and morally improved Europe. Europe

remains a space marked by exclusion based on colonialist histories and structures. Thus, the migrants' precarity always also points to their racial othering and their differential exposure to violence and death, even as their intimate connections offer moments that suggest global forms of solidarity and cohabitation. It is in these solidarities and cohabitations that we locate potentials for an ethics of care that is informed by an ethic of justice.

Chapter 2



Touch as Narrative Disruption

Race, Gender, and Queering Intimacy

Images from two films discussed in this chapter illustrate touch and connection in the face of the constant threat of deportation: in the case of *A Little Bit of Freedom* (*Kleine Freiheit*; dir. Yüksel Yavuz, Germany, 2003; see fig. 2.1), for both Chernor and Baran, and in *The Edge of Heaven* (*Auf der anderen Seite*; dir. Fatih Akin, Germany/Turkey/Italy, 2007; see fig. 2.2), for Ayten. Baran and Ayten are Kurdish characters and Turkish nationals in Germany without legal residency status. The films are set against the backdrop of the past and ongoing societal, political, cultural, and economic discrimination of Kurds in Turkey; Turkey's attempt to enter into negotiations to join the European Union; and debates about refugees claiming asylum on the basis of discrimination against groups within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) community. The moments of touch in the films defy the narrative move toward a seemingly inevitable expulsion of the refugee characters from Europe. Touch anchors the characters in the here and now of Europe and of shifting debates about what Europe means in the face of the rising displacement of people worldwide, suggesting a political potentiality that inheres in their intimacies. Yet their intimacies are also marked by tremendous violence at the hands of European Union (EU) and national border regimes, generating the keenly felt pain of separation and loss. The queer, precarious intimacies of this chapter thus reveal the particular intersections of racialized and sexualized norms, constructing potential for their transformation and revealing the limits of such potential.

Writing about queer intimacy and touch in European cinema evokes seemingly contradictory political discourses. One such discourse assumes that queer intimacies enable possible challenges to dominant sexual, familial, and reproductive norms and conventions; indeed, some of the films we discuss in this chapter have been productively read in this way.¹ Another discourse evoked draws on Jasbir Puar's, Jin Haritaworn's, and Fatima El-Tayeb's analyses of the ways in which LGBTQ-friendly policies are appropriated by the state to claim a position of progressiveness, particularly over and against



Fig. 2.1. Chernor makes a gentle advance on Baran. Still from *A Little Bit of Freedom* (2003).



Fig. 2.2. Lotte connects with Ayten through touch. Still from *The Edge of Heaven* (2007).

non-Western states and peoples, often in the name of promoting depoliticized, homonormative, neoliberal models of queer positionalities.² A notion of “gay-friendliness,” as Puar describes in her work on homonationalism, becomes a measure of access to national sovereignty and locates progressive positions on sexuality in Europe while ascribing homophobia to immigrants and Muslims.³ As the films we discuss imply, certain kinds of queer intimacy and love are not easily incorporated into desirable forms of “European” intimacy. In particular, when figures occupy a precarious position, especially one

that includes an insecure residency status, resulting in economic insecurities, queer intimacies are complexly located as transformative, sustaining, but also dangerously unassimilable into the nation-state or, for that matter, into Europe. Racism, Islamophobia, and persistent homophobia in Europe work against possibilities for queer love, friendship, or family. The precarious intimacies we discuss in this chapter exist in the tension between fantasies of multicultural incorporation and moments of defiance.

It is in this context that we offer readings of the films as doubly defiant: they defy the expectation that Europe in the twenty-first century produces inclusive spaces for both queer intimacy and refugee rights, but they insist on the possibility of love and intimacy as a politically disruptive and personally sustaining force. We focus on four films from 2003 through 2007: *The Edge of Heaven, Unveiled* (*Fremde Haut*; dir. Angelina Maccarone, Germany, 2005), *Fraulein* (*Das Fräulein*; dir. Andrea Štaka, Switzerland, 2006), and *A Little Bit of Freedom*. All four films, released within just five years of one another, reveal the conflicts inherent in struggles for European belonging in their depictions of romantic relationships or close friendships between legal residents of European countries and undocumented migrants or between two or more undocumented migrants. Our analysis centers on moments of intimacy that include undocumented immigrants, mostly refugees. These moments that defy the narrative movement of the film, which would render their intimacies impossible, are doomed to failure: in all cases, the films' undocumented characters, most of whom seek asylum, either are deported or voluntarily leave. Our use of the notion of precarious intimacy, including but not limited to sexual intimacies, emphasizes that we are interested in moments of and with political and affective force that challenge the narratives of inevitable exclusion and of relegation to another time and place. While the outcome of the relationships depicted is rarely a "happy ending," stubborn and defiant depictions of intimacy and love on-screen work against what might appear as inevitable outcomes. By claiming spaces in the here and now of Europe, these characters construct precarious intimacies as queer spaces that cannot easily be appropriated for national or Eurocentric agendas.

The decade during which these films were made (2000–2009) was a time of uncertainty for the EU. The attempts to pass an EU constitution failed in 2005. At the same time, the EU continued to expand; many Eastern European countries joined the EU in 2004, and discussions of a unified border policy continued even after the rejection of the EU constitution. Enabled by the guidelines set out by the Treaty on the Functioning of Europe (2007) and the Lisbon Treaty (2009), a series of directives and policy statements developed the framework for a common border policy and institutionalized EU-wide police cooperation through the establishment of Europol. Politically heated discussions about the place of Islam in Europe that had already polarized the public in the 1990s intensified in post-9/11 Europe and have led to the strengthening of far-right parties across the continent. Within this context,

the films present precarious intimacies as deeply desirable intimacies that are only fleetingly possible. They uncover the complex workings of Europe as a space of violence and exclusion but also as a space of encounter that potentially enables other kinds of belonging. Touch breaches gendered expectations, racialized boundaries, and political divisions. Moments of intimate touch are defiant gestures against forms of violence structuring the relationship of Europe to its migrants and refugees, struggling to offer up fleeting intimate potentialities marked by connection, affection, and even love.

The precarious intimacies of this chapter queer intimacy not only because they narrate eroticized same-sex friendships but because they build what El-Tayeb calls “a community based on the shared experience of multiple, contradictory positionalities,” positionalities that are racialized in complex ways.⁴ *Queering* acquires an important valence as a verb, El-Tayeb points out—as an active challenge to heteronormative and homonormative understandings of citizenship and European belonging, which often construct a spatial and temporal longing linked to whiteness and reliant on essentialized notions of nation.⁵ Precarious intimacies in these films queer Europe in their challenge to the racialization of Europe as white, a racialization that occurs by locating liberal democracy and human rights as the sole provenance of Europe.

We must, however, also address the limitations of engaging El-Tayeb’s concept of queering here. El-Tayeb develops her ideas in relationship to activists who queer ethnicity, mostly acting deliberately against racism and xenophobia in contemporary Europe. The filmmakers whose work we analyze occupy a much more ambiguous and potentially ambivalent position vis-à-vis the films they create and rarely understand their films as explicit, political interventions. Their fictional characters only tentatively gesture toward the more radical community building of the activist-artists whose work El-Tayeb explores in her research. Partly in order to press for political potential where it is less explicit, we mobilize precarious intimacies as both aesthetic strategy and practice of interpretation.

The defiant connections we examine as queer precarious intimacies are deeply uneven. The representation of Baran and Chernor in *A Little Bit of Freedom*, for example, problematically reduces Chernor’s story to that of an “African refugee” with virtually no backstory. As a Turkish Kurd, Ayten of *The Edge of Heaven* occupies an especially ambiguous relationship to Europe and to Turkey as a European border space. The intimacies of *Fraulein* occur between two characters who occupy a different kind of ambiguity vis-à-vis Europe, as refugee migrants from Europe’s southeastern margins. The failure of interracial relationships involving white characters runs a risk of replicating existing racist discourses that mark bodies of color as contagion or threat.⁶ Interpretive strategies that examine such intimacies must explicitly address this unevenness, even as we read for moments that undermine, challenge, and defy narratives of failed connection.

**Defying Narrative through Visual Touch:
The Edge of Heaven (2007)**

Fatih Akin's film *The Edge of Heaven* is the second in a trilogy that thematizes love, death, and the devil, respectively. Akin was born in Hamburg, where his parents had arrived as so-called guest workers from Turkey in the early 1970s. After his fourth feature film, *Head-On* (*Gegen die Wand*; Germany/Turkey, 2004), received international critical acclaim, Akin emerged as one of the most internationally successful German filmmakers of his generation. His film *The Edge of Heaven* confronts questions of intimacy and precarity rather directly. In line with several of Akin's other films, the three interwoven narratives in the film connect Turkey and Germany by showing various travels back and forth between the two countries.

The Edge of Heaven, as Barbara Mennel argues, depicts the spatial and temporal disorientations of globalization, but it also addresses a specific historic moment in the relationship between Turkey, Germany, and the EU.⁷ Accession negotiations between Turkey and the EU began in 2005 after Turkey implemented a number of EU harmonization laws intended to align Turkey with EU democratic norms.⁸ The ongoing conflict between the Turkish government and the Kurdish population is one important reason why negotiations between the EU and Turkey stalled after 2005. This conflict and its connection to EU negotiations form the political backdrop for one of the three narrative strands of Akin's 2007 film, in which defiant gestures inhere in brief visual moments that confront the narrative failure of the EU.

At the center of our analysis stands the relationship between Ayten and Lotte. Ayten is a political refugee from Istanbul who is staying in Germany illegally to escape persecution as a Kurdish activist and member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party in Turkey, but also to find her mother, Yeter, a sex worker. Lotte, a university student, invites Ayten into her home and her life. Their touching skins (seen earlier in fig. 2.2) demonstrate rare connections in a film in which, as David Gramling argues, relationships seem to be constantly interrupted by moments of mutual incomprehensibility.⁹ A rapid sequence of their first day and night together reveals sexual, spatial, cultural, and political intimacies as entwined. The easy intimacy offered up by Lotte includes lending Ayten her clothing; shortly after, they dance, kiss, and ultimately become increasingly more physically and emotionally intimate. In a following scene in which they wake together, the camera focuses on their skin, their touch, and the sheets as they fold over the bed. As Ayten and Lotte lie next to each other in bed, Ayten reveals her real name and her status as an undocumented migrant in Germany. Their physical touch becomes the beginning of a solidarity that will inspire both Lotte and her mother to work as advocates for Ayten.

This easy intimacy and almost immediate trust contrasts with Ayten's initially tense interactions with Lotte's mother, Susanne. Their conflict comes to

a head in a strange convergence of dissenting views of appropriate domestic behavior and the potential and possibility of the EU. In this scene, Ayten and Susanne argue in the kitchen when Lotte is absent. Ayten bustles about making espresso while Susanne prepares cherries for a pie against the backdrop of a bright, spotless kitchen as they argue about cleanliness and the European Union. Ayten refuses to acquiesce to Susanne's requests for neatness and order and also rejects Susanne's faith in the German asylum system and insistence that the EU will "make everything better" for Turkey. Ayten's angry responses to Susanne link European colonialism and globalization, declaring in English: "Who is leading the EU? . . . All colonial countries! This is globalization . . . fuck the European Union!" When Susanne responds that "I don't want you to talk like that in my house," she also rejects the possibility of a shared space between the two even as she insists on an ongoing optimism that the EU will bring about a more just Europe. Her rejection of Ayten's presence in her house is juxtaposed with the broken relationships between both mothers and daughters in the film, relationships cut off precisely by the European institutions in which Susanne places so much faith; indeed, the sequence anticipates the permanent end of their relationships, as the viewers already know that Ayten's mother has died and Susanne will shortly be confronted with Lotte's death. Cut in throughout this sequence, however, are several moments of touch that defy the narrative motion toward the film's unhappy endings.

These moments include the shots of the pair in bed and when Ayten wears Lotte's clothes, as well as a short moment when Ayten and Lotte reach for each other's hands across a starkly bare room where Ayten has been interned while waiting for her asylum hearing. In this brief image, Ayten and Lotte must stretch to touch each other (see fig. 2.3).

This brief touch is followed immediately by the scene in which a German judge denies Ayten's claim for asylum in Germany. The viewers hear the judgment read aloud while the camera cuts repeatedly between Lotte, Ayten, and Susanne's stunned faces. In her ruling, the judge declares that although the threat of Ayten's imprisonment is real, Turkey's desire to enter the EU must be seen as reason enough to assure Ayten's physical safety and therefore to deny her asylum.

This double exclusion of Turkey from Europe—the deportation of Ayten as a Turkish citizen, and Turkey's status as never quite allowed into the EU—is defied by Ayten and Lotte's touch across the empty room immediately prior to the judge's decision. The desire and connection embodied in this touch offer up a hope not entirely crushed by Ayten's deportation, nor even Lotte's death. Instead, their touch establishes the pattern by which first Lotte, then Susanne will travel to Turkey in the hopes of reestablishing a relationship with Ayten. Connections, networks, and new intimate personal and political spaces re-form despite national and EU borders and outside social norms or biological family ties. Such spaces form outside the borders of the EU and



Fig. 2.3. Ayten and Lotte reach out to join hands in the home for asylum seekers. Still from *The Edge of Heaven* (2007).

on the edge of Europe, in tension with a fantasy of Europe as an inclusive, multicultural space. As Daniela Berghahn has argued, the diasporic families in the film (as various family members construct new families in relationships that extend across national borders) contest notions of otherness, while “queer diasporic identities” further challenge “the hegemony of white heteronormativity and, by implication, the foundations of the family and the nation.”¹⁰ The precarious intimacy between Ayten and Lotte, however, does something further. The German state interrupts their connection in the name of the EU in a way that reveals how those deemed other to Europe are made doubly vulnerable: by ideas of the nation *and* of Europe that intersect to exclude them. Ayten and Lotte’s defiant touch thus functions to work against heteronormative, white forms of Europeanness by contesting the assumptions about Europe’s progressive values and their supposed embodiment in the form of the EU. The touch is brief, replicated only in a similarly fleeting touch across a table in the Turkish prison where Ayten is interned when she returns to Turkey.

In this film, many intimate, familial, connections form outside the EU, taking place instead in Turkey, which serves as a European border space. Indeed, all the major characters in the film will end up in Turkey by the end of the film. While still in Germany, Nejat, the son of the man who marries and then accidentally kills Yeter, connects with Ayten; against all odds they appear to form a friendship. Yeter’s death prompts Nejat’s journey to Istanbul in search of Ayten. After Ayten’s deportation from Germany, Lotte lives with Nejat in Istanbul while she tries to help Ayten get out of prison; both Ayten and Nejat find a mother figure in Susanne, who in turn finds new “children” to care for

after Lotte's death. In its conclusion, the film returns to the very first scenes, when Nejat leaves Istanbul, presumably to reconnect with his father, who has been deported to his hometown on the Black Sea after serving time in prison in Germany for killing Yeter. Yet sustained connections are always interrupted: even though Nejat is looking for Ayten, and Lotte lives in Nejat's flat, they appear never to realize that Lotte is visiting the woman he is looking for. In the final scene, Ayten and Susanne reconnect in Nejat's shop, while Nejat stands on the beach, his back turned to the viewers and his eyes scanning the ocean horizon for his father, emphasizing again that ultimately, this is a film about loss and longing. This emotionally intense narrative about missed connections and political exclusion, on the one hand, and trust, intimacy, and newfound connection, on the other hand—the latter mainly outside the boundaries of the EU—mirrors a debate about Europe as offering a desired yet ultimately impossible connection.

Ayten and Lotte's intimacy is a unique one in the film, one between a woman whose position is particularly precarious and a woman whose life, at least while in Germany, is particularly secure. The touching of their skin and the exchange of their clothing construct an intimacy that functions outside the narrative movement of the film. Through the stories of their mothers, they gesture to the contemporary political conditions of their intimacy: Susanne's success as a professional single woman and confidence in both contemporary Germany and a progressive EU relies much on the labor performed by the immigrants who rebuilt Germany after World War II. Through Hanna Schygulla, who plays Susanne, *The Edge of Heaven* also becomes an intertextual corrective to R. W. Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (West Germany, 1978), whose title character was also played by Schygulla. In *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, although Schygulla's character is an active and successful businesswoman during the time of the economic miracle, immigrant labor is virtually absent from the film. Schygulla's iconic role in the critique of the reinvention of the German nation after World War II in *The Marriage of Maria Braun* thus becomes a critique of the reinvention of Europe in the guise of the EU in *The Edge of Heaven*.

In contrast, Yeter's career first as a sex worker and then as a paid wife in *The Edge of Heaven* calls the viewer's attention to the limitations of upward mobility for many of her generation. Yeter's and Lotte's stories do not exist separately from each other; they produce each other in ways that Susanne cannot recognize. Nejat's status is exceptional: as a second-generation immigrant, he has achieved a position as a professor of German literature in a country where professors of Turkish heritage are rare, particularly in the field of German literature. Other immigrants in the film, including Yeter and Ayten, remain outside the narrative of the successful immigrant for whom life in Germany provides access to better rights and economic conditions. They are further unable to fulfill the expectation of the "good" immigrant who enriches German society with cultural diversity and makes productive

contributions to a neoliberal global economy. Contemporary liberal democracy and successful immigrant stories exist simultaneously with powerful forms of exclusion, particularly for women of Turkish heritage in the film. Ayten and Lotte's touch, which exists outside their mothers' stories, both evokes such exclusions and works outside and against them. Through their touch they also form a new family that continues through the relationship between Susanne and Ayten after Lotte's death. This new family, located in the space of Turkey, faces ongoing state violence—Ayten must renounce her relationship to Kurdish groups to get out of prison. As Nejat searches for his father, Susanne asks Ayten to join her while she stays at Nejat's apartment, implying the possibility of a future family that queers precarious intimacies and serves as a space for multinational, multiethnic solidarities. This suggestion of the possibility for a multinational, chosen family cohabiting in an apartment in Istanbul twists the fantasy of an inclusive, multiethnic Europe in various ways: Europe's politics of exclusion as well as Turkey's national politics have marginalized these characters and bring them together in mourning.

Strange Skins and Defiant Desires: *Unveiled* (2005)

We now return to *Unveiled*, the film that contains the scene we presented to introduce our book. Unlike *The Edge of Heaven*, in which defiant gestures relentlessly insist on the entanglements of various intimacies, in *Unveiled*, desire is queered in such a way as to render the distinctions between physical, emotional, cultural, and political intimacies nonexistent. Since the mid-1990s, Angelina Maccarone has directed, written, and cowritten a range of feature and TV films, TV series, and TV episodes. The main actress Jasmin Tabatabai was nominated for best actress for the Deutscher Filmpreis (German Film Award), and *Unveiled* won awards for best actress in feature, best director, and best film at the Cyprus International Film Festival.

The film must be understood in the context of an increase in the number of Iranian migrants—primarily in the form of asylum seekers—in Germany following the 1979 revolution. In addition, for the first time in history, a significant percentage of women were immigrating from Iran.¹¹ The German government did not recognize persecution based on sexual orientation as a reason for asylum until a law passed in 2004, the year during which the film is set; however, the law did not go into effect until 2005.¹² Even then, claiming persecution as a lesbian required conforming to Eurocentric and essentialist understandings of lesbian identity that are thwarted by the character of Fariba.¹³ Until the European Court of Justice overturned such practices in 2014, in some countries, including Germany and Austria, for example, a person had to demonstrate the “irreversibility” of their same-sex desire, while in most EU states, a person would have to prove that they would be persecuted even if closeted.¹⁴

Unveiled's protagonist, Fariba, has come to Germany to seek asylum after imprisonment in Iran for having a sexual relationship with another woman. However, perhaps because she is suspicious of the presumably Iranian interpreter, she refuses to name the precise reason for her asylum claim in her intake interview, leading to the denial of her claim. When her friend Siamak, another Iranian held in the airport processing center, takes his own life, Fariba dons his clothing and takes his passport, assuming Siamak's identity to take advantage of his temporary residency permit. In his clothes, she literally and figuratively wears the skin of the other, requiring constant vigilance (applying daily masculinizing makeup and avoiding shared shower rooms, for example) to fit the frame of binary gender identities. With this step, Fariba is able to avoid speaking out loud her real reasons for fleeing Iran but is also forced metaphorically to cover her own skin in Germany. Her "disguise" is successful until she falls in love and becomes physically intimate with Anne.

The title of the film in German denotes strange, or a stranger's skin, but it does so by using a word that serves as the root for "foreigner," or stranger (*Fremde*). The multivalent title points to the complex intimacies present in the film: it refers to the skin of the foreign other, who must take on the identity of another—a "strange skin" that estranges clearly bounded gender identities. The veil of the English title *Unveiled*—a title presumably chosen for its marketing draw—refers to the head scarf that Fariba discards on the flight to Germany and then dons again when deported to Iran at the end of the film; this "veil" also suggests a foreign skin. At the last moment, she again "unveils," choosing instead to reenter Iran as Siamak.¹⁵

A key scene in the development of the relationship between Anne and Fariba/Siamak involves Anne inviting Fariba/Siamak into her domestic space, where she asks her guest, "Will you tell me now?" As an audience, we expect that "telling" to involve Fariba's "coming out" as a woman. Instead, Fariba reveals the potential treatment she could receive in an Iranian prison and the fact that she cannot prove her asylum claim and thus needs false papers. Their touch at this moment remains mediated by their layers of clothing, Fariba still wearing Siamak's clothes. Later, in the scene that leads to Fariba's arrest for asylum fraud, Anne and Fariba undress each other. As Anne undoes the cloth binding Fariba's breasts, she expresses little surprise at what she sees (see fig. 2.4). In this remarkable scene, this "strange skin" and its removal, Fariba's unveiling, reveal nothing. Instead, this act remains one in a series of defiant gestures enacted through touch in the film, a series defined less by any relationship to discovering gender, as the narrative might lead us to suspect, and more by an insistence on constructing sustaining human connections in spite of forms of exclusion that work against such connection. A space is created for desire outside the normalized and violent space in which the characters in the film are ascribed either as the "foreign other" or as a particular gender. In this way, a defiant desire also emerges.



Fig. 2.4. Anne unbinds Fariba's breasts. Still from *Unveiled* (2005).

The sex scene between Fariba and Anne is much anticipated in the film, but rather than displaying Anne's surprise or Fariba's anxiety, the scene simply depicts intimate touch and tender love. Fear and violence enter this relationship from the outside, eerily paralleling Fariba's experience in Iran. Anne's male friends, including her ex-lover, reject Siamak as Fariba and as Anne's lover. When they attack both Fariba and Anne, Anne's son calls the police to protect them. Intimate touch between Anne and Fariba is defiant and determined, yet fragile and impossible; as intimate partners, they are not safe in Germany, which provides an uneven parallel to the persecution of Fariba for the queer desire that led her to flee Iran. Petty jealousy and heteronormative forces intersect to activate the state's desires to protect its borders. As Faye Stewart describes, Iran as a space is not the main focus of this film; *Unveiled* "may implicitly reflect on Iran's failure to guarantee the civil and human rights of marginalized and persecuted individuals, but it places heavier emphasis on Germany's shortcomings, underscoring anti-gay and anti-foreigner sentiments."¹⁶

Intimacy is marked by neither nation, Europeanness, nor gender—or rather, gender, national, and racialized ascriptions are constantly undone. The cloth and skin contact do not perform as the viewer is led to believe they will, nor does the "unveiling" of the English title. There are at least three unveilings in the film—the removal of the head scarf upon leaving Iranian airspace, the removal of clothing in the lovemaking scene with Fariba and Anne, and Fariba's removal of her head scarf again as she decides to enter Iran as Siamak. None of these "unveilings" performs the associated path to freedom common in European filmic tropes of unveiling, which often use unveiling to signal freedom from Muslim violence and gender roles. Thus,

the film in fact—maybe ironically—subverts the suggested “unveiling” of its English title. Instead, the unveilings function to signal the precarity of Fariba’s situation in Europe and the failure of Europe to live up to the promise of rights in two of the cases, while the middle “unveiling” simply proves not to be an unveiling at all, allowing this moment of skin contact to come into focus. This defiant gesture works against the expectations of the veil as a purported marker of Muslim backwardness and questions the assumption of Europe as a progressive space of free and open sexual expression. Indeed, as Stewart shows, symbols of Islam in the film, including the palm-shaped *hamsa*, a hand-shaped amulet associated predominantly (though not only) with Muslim and Jewish communities and traditionally seen as a symbol of protection against the evil eye, open up possibilities for intimacy.¹⁷ The scene reveals the ways in which Europe participates in exposing Fariba to ongoing political and homophobic violence: as a target of homophobic violence at the hands of Anne’s ex, as an asylum seeker deported from Europe, and as a woman returning to a country in which queer intimacy is policed and criminalized.

Chosen Family and Disrupted Intimacy: *Fraulein* (2006)

In the film *Fraulein* by Swiss director Andrea Štaka, the scenes of touch are notable in their rarity. The women who make up the milieu of the film are always physically slightly apart; they touch for only the briefest of moments, a touch often mediated by clothing. Clothing is also exchanged in a brief scene that is key for our discussion. Ruza, a Yugoslav woman legally present in Switzerland for several decades, gives a blouse as a gift to Ana, a homeless woman from Sarajevo, after fixing its buttons (see fig. 2.5). It is a traditional blouse that Ruza took with her when she left the former Yugoslavia more than twenty years earlier. This gesture seals the gentle and almost motherly relationship that Ruza has formed with Ana, a relationship that grows slowly and tentatively but that carries the narrative arc of the film. Rather than depicting moments of touching skins between the two women, the visuals of the film create a sense of their intimacy with close-ups that often focus on the back of the neck as if looking over the characters’ shoulders as they learn about each other’s lives, thoughts, and struggles.

Fraulein is Štaka’s most critically acclaimed film to date.¹⁸ Her more recent feature film, *Cure: The Life of Another One* (*Das Leben einer Anderen*, Switzerland/Croatia/Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2014), also focuses on the effects of the Yugoslav wars by depicting the story of two teenage girls who struggle with questions of exile, identity, and belonging. By addressing the history of the wars in the Balkans, *Fraulein* anchors its story in some of the darkest, most recent history of Europe; in *Fraulein*, details of the characters’ pasts and of their legal status in Switzerland, however, remain vague. People from



Fig. 2.5. Ruza gives a blouse to Ana. Still from *Fraulein* (2006).

the Balkans appear as a community-in-exile that is both always outside and at the same time of Europe. The “neutral” status of Switzerland—in Europe and as European, but not as a part of the EU—is implied in the way in which the film avoids reference to Swiss state power or authority. In fact, Switzerland as a space appears strangely undefined. The two main characters in *Fraulein* exemplify two people who have made radically different life choices, explained in the film not as resulting from their legal statuses but from their contrasting personalities. Ruza is a regularized immigrant who has internalized and lived out a narrative of a “good” immigrant, one who is hardworking and productive, prioritizing work over fun or social relationships, with a carefully ordered and controlled life. Ana, in contrast, appears spontaneous and without any clear goals for her future; her legal status in Switzerland remains unclear. She goes to dance clubs, seeks out sex for pleasure, and playfully and openly approaches the people she meets.

The tension between their emotional closeness and their distance, their desire and inability to care for each other, also embodies the connection and disconnection to another space in other times. Both come from a nation that no longer exists, Yugoslavia; they come from different generations and sides of the wars in the former Yugoslavia: Ruza is a Serb from Sarajevo and Ana is scarred from her experience of the war in Bosnia as a child. Ana’s defiant

joie de vivre first irritates Ruza. She is particularly critical of Ana's refusal to adhere to disciplined conventions around earning and saving money, prioritizing work, finding regular accommodation, and desiring upward mobility. In stark contrast to Ruza's structured life, Ana seems to exist in a "queer time and place," to use the title of J. Halberstam's 2005 book. Indeed, both defy reproductive time, which "connects the family to the historical past of the nation, and glances ahead to connect the family to the future of both familial and national stability."¹⁹ Ruza in particular seems to inhabit queer time, by living "outside of reproductive and familial time as well as on the edges of logics of labor and production."²⁰

The exchange of the blouse is a key scene for their connection, the acknowledgement of a shared past space and their willingness to give and receive. In this case, the gift is not rejected, nor does it pose any threat or danger to their relationship; rather, the gift of the shirt solidifies their intimacy not just as motherly touch but also as close connection to another past space: Yugoslavia. The intimacy of the gift of clothing, a hand-me-down shirt worn more or less directly on the skin, is a symbolic gesture that recalls the iconic gift of a shirt in the Weimar classic *Girls in Uniform* (*Mädchen in Uniform*, Germany, 1931), directed by Leontine Sagan.²¹ In this film, the student Manuela interprets the fact that her teacher, Fräulein von Bernburg, gives her one of her old blouses—a *Hemd*, which was a type of undergarment—as a sign that they share erotic affection. While the exchange in *Fraulein* does not contain erotic undertones, it suggests their close familial and cultural connection, a gift of intimacy, care, and trust. Their exchange of this traditional item of clothing, however, is located in a queer time and place, as a result of the fact that their shared reference point, their "nation," is gone but not mourned. The diffuse contours of the nation in which they live, Switzerland, also remain unimportant and undefined.

Two other exchanges, in which Ana attempts to offer a gift in return—joy, through touch—mirror the exchange of clothing. First, Ana stages a birthday party for a reluctant Ruza, and only Ana is able to get Ruza onto the dance floor by pulling her to her feet and into the crowd. It is on that night that Ruza finally takes physical affection into her life via Ana, and into her bed by responding to the romantic advances by one of her customers in the cafeteria, Frank. The touch between Ruza and Ana proliferates touch and intimacy in Ruza's life.

This extended touch is initially deeply awkward. In a scene mirroring the initial scene of the film, Ruza wakes up next to Frank the morning after the party, then hastily prepares for work. She rejects his suggestion that he give her a ride to work and leaves him, covering his naked body awkwardly after she has pushed back the covers, and instructing him to properly close the apartment door. The camera does not follow her but focuses on the sheets and the half-naked man left behind in the bed they shared. Yet, as the film continues and Ruza is able to open her life beyond being a productive worker, Ruza

and Frank appear to develop a loving, sexual relationship, though Ruza's relationship with Ana remains the focus of the film.

In a further scene of exchange, immediately after the gift of the blouse, Ana takes Ruza to a casino. Ana guides Ruza's resistant hand at the betting table, leading Ruza to express frustration with the way Ana "wastes" money. As Ruza flees from the casino, confused by her feeling of disgust with Ana's financial promiscuity and, presumably, her enjoyment of the frivolity, Ana follows her into the parking garage. It is in this anonymous space, lit in blue neon light, that Ruza tells Ana how difficult it was for her to build a life in Switzerland and critiques her careless way of life; Ana, in turn, finally tells Ruza that she is scared and sick with leukemia. It is notable that when the two women speak of intimate experiences and fears or when they reveal their pasts to each other, they converse in their native language. Their relationship takes shape as they share their experiences of joy, fear, and loneliness and their stories of past hardship and pain. Ana's often joyful embrace of life triggers Ruza's ability to accept physical affection, enjoy friendships with her coworkers, enter a sexual relationship, and become less rigid and structured in her approach to life and work in general. By the end of the film Ruza takes time off work for the first time to accompany Ana to the doctor. The willingness to move away from a life defined by order and productivity is echoed when Ana rearranges her room in the concluding scene, disturbing the bare walls with pleasure by pinning up a chaotic collage of photos that reestablish a network of relationships that had been banished.

Ana thus floats into Ruza's life, disturbs her, invites her to enter a queerer space and time, and, as fast as she appears, she disappears, presumably with the blouse that Ruza gave her in her luggage. Ana is uprooted and she uproots. Similar to the two films we discussed before this one, the process of becoming familiar is a process of unveiling evolving capacities for love, joy, friendship, and intimacy in the face of experiences of war, fear, pain, and violence. In this sense the difference between the two—one a regularized resident, the other undocumented—recedes. And like the other films, these moments of touch must be read against the narrative drive of the film, which, because of Ana's departure, could be interpreted as ending with the restoration of a heteronormative space.

Ana's body becomes a site of disrupted intimacy, even for herself. Her recurring nosebleeds and nausea cross the boundary of her skin in disruptive, unpleasant ways. Bosnia, for her, is associated with tremendously destructive psychic trauma, yet better physical health: her disease was under control with relatively minor interventions (pills). In Switzerland, her health deteriorates, and it is in confiding in Ruza about her illness that their closeness shifts from a sense of friendship to something like a mother-daughter relationship; Ruza begins to take care of Ana in much the same way as a mother might care for a sick child, often without Ruza realizing what is happening to her. While their relationship begins in mistrust and even slight resentment, it moves toward

a tentative form of friendship as an almost familiar bond between the two women begins to form. As soon as there are ways in which Ana could not only enter the space of legality in Switzerland but also possibly stay and find a form of family (possibly a mother figure) in Ruza, Ana decides to leave. Her departure is a defiant gesture; the sticking out of her hitchhiker's thumb is a refusal to accept reality "as is," to accept any of her lovers as permanent, or to allow Ruza to take care of her. Her departure implies Ana's rejection of a diasporic community of ex-Yugoslavians, and beyond that, it offers a critical perspective on the possibilities of Europe's inclusivity. European spaces here are ambivalently European: Switzerland is outside the EU; Ana and Ruza both hail from the margins of Europe. The multiethnic community that would connect them has violently broken apart and the new space of a Yugoslav diaspora, a space located in Europe, proves undesirable for Ana.

Ambiguous Touch and Narrative Disruption: *A Little Bit of Freedom* (2003)

The film *A Little Bit of Freedom* tells the story of two young men, both residing in Germany without legal papers, who form a friendship and, in the second half of the film, share a flat and a bed. The film is a low-budget production by the Kurdish-German director Yüksel Yavuz. *A Little Bit of Freedom* is Yavuz's second feature film after his 1998 *April Children* (*Aprilkinder*; Germany). *A Little Bit of Freedom* was praised by critics in Germany and Turkey, especially for its depiction of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict and the performances of its lay actors. Deniz Göktürk suggests, "Films such as *A Little Bit of Freedom*, which are produced on the platform of European media networks, provide an important forum for articulating the complexities of minority identities and for imagining new alliances and new modes of resolving conflicts in a new land."²²

Racist European discourses about threatening nonwhite and male masculinity, however, limit the range of possibilities for depictions of defiance in intimacies between male protagonists.²³ *A Little Bit of Freedom* exists in the context of films that depict male intimacies or friendships almost exclusively in the face of racist exclusion, such as *Lola and Billy the Kid* (*Lola und Bilidikid*, Kutluğ Ataman, Germany, 1999) or *Hate* (*La Haine*, Mathieu Kassovitz, France, 1995), just to give two examples. Similar to *Hate*, *A Little Bit of Freedom* navigates cliché depictions of criminal male migrant youth. In its portrayal of the two main characters, however, the film replicates some of these clichés as well as the conditions under which precarity functions. Chernor is a Black man, vaguely described as being "from Africa." His country of origin is unspecified, and he has almost no story within the film other than the narrative that emerges through his encounter with Baran. In what might appear as another cliché depiction, Chernor lives in close quarters with

other African men and works for them as a drug dealer, selling drugs on the streets of Hamburg-Altona. At the end of the film he is caught by the police. This differential experience of the conditions of precarity is hinted at but also somewhat obscured in the film.

A Little Bit of Freedom is set in and around Hamburg's famous red-light district. In the title, "little freedom" offers a play on words that references the famous side street in Hamburg "Große Freiheit" (big freedom).²⁴ Both protagonists entered Germany as unaccompanied minors, Baran after the violent death of his parents. By the time they reach sixteen, however, they have to apply for asylum. The film depicts their lives after their claims for asylum have been rejected and they are living without legal papers on the margins of society.²⁵

The plotline in the film is not driven by Baran's coming to terms with the violence his Kurdish family suffered in Turkey. Baran works without papers as a bike deliveryman for a relative's kebab restaurant and encounters a man he believes he recognizes as the person who betrayed his family. He plans to kill him, but the moment he has a chance to shoot him, he spares his life instead. At the end of the film, the police arrest and, presumably, deport both Baran and Chernor. The film visually centers Baran's character rather than the men's friendship, expressed, for example, when Baran stands, stares, and contemplates while the camera either observes him statically or slowly and closely circles him, mainly in dark or poorly lit urban spaces.

A Little Bit of Freedom's depiction of intimacy, an intimacy that is never explicitly thematized in the film nor developed narratively, offers a striking moment of disruption of the overall narrative movement toward arrest and deportation. As the image at the beginning of this chapter in figure 2.1 shows, Baran and Chernor contrast like a picture and its negative: Chernor's bleached hair and brown skin are the opposite image of Baran's dark hair and pale skin. Their friendship is, from the beginning, driven by erotic tension expressed through looks stolen at each other while speaking to a third person. From the beginning, the threat of arrest influences their friendship. After they are first introduced by their mutual friend, a poetic homeless man and former ship captain they call "Käptn'," a police car driving by immediately triggers fearful flight away from the police. The constant threat of deportation, combined with Baran's pursuit of revenge for the death of his parents in Turkey, constitute the primary narrative tensions in the film.

The space of Hamburg St. Pauli, the famously seedy red-light district, as well as their mutual friendship with Käptn', enables their encounter and their (however brief) loving and intimate friendship. Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez describes their encounter as "minor intimacies," as a transcultural encounter against the backdrop and in the face of the violence of the nation-state. Here she implicitly plays with the title of the film, which in English could actually mean "little freedom" or "minor freedom," as well as the fact that the two young men are minors. She suggests that this film shows, "on

the one hand, that friendship can develop between members of disenfranchised groups” but “on the other hand, that these friendships are impossible to maintain due to migration policies, which open up an unbridgeable gap between the protagonists.”²⁶ “Contact zones” that “transgress . . . national and ethnic boundaries” are enabled by this very space of the global, neoliberal city, where “cross-cultural encounters are an ordinary feature of social life but are restricted or denied by legislation and policing, producing an ambivalence that is also articulated in the film.”²⁷ Intimacy between Chernor and Baran is “sporadic” and “precarious,” Gutiérrez Rodríguez observes, and the film’s emotional emphasis on their moments of intimacy and touch cannot change the narrative trajectory; however, their friendship and connection points to the potentiality of disruption, although this is a potentiality denied by the narrative.²⁸ This denied potential also refuses the fantasy of a postracial European multiculturalism; the film evokes the fantasy only to thwart its realization.

Gutiérrez Rodríguez’s work unpacks the potential transformative force of “transculturation” in the form of a minor intimacy. We read with her, but from another angle, so to speak. Let us return briefly to an ambiguous scene of sexual intimacy, in which Chernor makes an advance, and Baran’s reaction is unclear. This series of key scenes occurs in the last third of the film. Chernor knows of Baran’s plan to kill the man Baran suspects is his family’s murderer and tries to stop him, demanding that Baran get rid of the gun he has just procured at a shooting in the restaurant in which he works. In Chernor’s absence, Baran indeed threatens the man but then walks away and disposes of the gun. At the same time, Chernor discovers Käptn’ dead on a bench. Chernor arrives at Baran’s apartment as Baran emerges from the shower. After a brief and cryptic conversation about the gun and Käptn’s death as they get into bed, Chernor gently touches Baran and his hands glide under the covers. Baran turns away from Chernor, seemingly lost in thought, as the light fades to black. The next scene shows Baran on his delivery bike and for a brief moment, as a shaky camera follows his ride through the streets of their neighborhood, his face lights up with a rare and bright smile. Yet this seemingly happy moment dissolves immediately in the face of the threat of police and deportation. Baran observes a police raid on the brothel next to the kebab shop where he works; his boss immediately tells him that he no longer has a job because his employment has become too much of a liability.

The friendship, and then gentle passion, between the two men offer rare moments of emotional connection for Baran, who otherwise remains haunted by his past, dependent on his cousin Haydar for housing and employment, and hunted by police. The film does not end with Baran murdering his family’s traitor, nor does it show Baran and Chernor happily in love in a multiethnic and sexually tolerant Hamburg. Instead, the film closes with Baran and Chernor’s arrest and presumed deportation, thus adding a further twist to the narrative expectations built throughout the film. Baran’s relationship

with Chernor is not allowed to develop into a sustaining form of emotional connection, and his plan for revenge does not give him a sense of closure. The men's intimate connection is a moment of disruption of the narrative flow that proves powerless in changing the story's trajectory.

A Little Bit of Freedom's emotional depth relies on the relationship between Chernor and Baran. First their unlikely friendship and then their brief physical intimacy defies racial and ethnic boundaries, but they also foreclose other, heteronormative, forms of belonging and security offered up to Baran. At the beginning of the film, Baran seems to have ambivalently ended a relationship with his boss's daughter, whom he still sees and who continues to pursue him. His boss, however, wants Baran to date his niece instead; she also appears interested. Either possibility might have offered him a way toward more permanent employment and even residency, as Baran's boss points out. Having met Chernor, Baran remains relatively disengaged from both women. Instead, he spends more time with Chernor, and their friendship grows. The heteronormative relationships that might have offered a claim to stability in Hamburg are rejected, but the relationship between Chernor and Baran, as two young men who live in Hamburg without secure residency and who come from different countries, remains impossible. Hamburg, thus, does not emerge as a space for refuge or multinational, potentially queer solidarity. Rather, it is the very space that is shown to first enable and then threaten these forms of solidarity.

In the last scenes of the film, Baran will be haunted by the more acceptable intimacies offered up to him. As he and Chernor sit comfortably and companionably side by side on a bench, joking around with Baran's video camera, two police officers suddenly come up behind them and ask for their IDs. The friends run in opposite directions, but Baran observes from his hiding place as Chernor is taken into custody. Unsure what to do, Baran returns to his apartment, where he encounters his boss's niece. As he frantically spins around the apartment, she attempts to calm him by trying to kiss him. He desperately runs away and out to the street, where he retrieves the gun from a garbage container. As he runs on, both the niece and the daughter of his boss call him to stop. Instead, he runs to Chernor, who is emerging from the police station, and demands that Chernor be released. The film then ends with his arrest.

Similar to depictions in many coming-of-age narratives, intimacy in *A Little Bit of Freedom* sustains and threatens. In the film, this tension becomes decidedly political. As racialized ideologies, enforced through the limiting of asylum claims, produce precarity, the intimacy between Baran and Chernor serves to sustain the men but is also the moment of threat. Their touch queers their relationship to both time and place by removing Baran from the entangled intimacies of the service economy and heteronormative reproduction, bound up in the relationships with his boss's niece and daughter and aligned with a path to legal German residency.

Queer European Intimacies and Defiant Gestures

The migrant figures in these films are what Sara Ahmed has termed “melancholy migrants,” whose unhappiness reveals the effects of racism and xenophobia that cannot be “wished away by happiness”; they also embody another one of Ahmed’s figures: the “unhappy queer.”²⁹ The visual representations of touch between these melancholy migrants and their partners enable moments of mutual friendship, passion, or joyfulness, and in some cases a sense of recklessness and defiance, expressions that do not appear to conflict with but rather coexist with their melancholy. Generic expectations may lead the audience to expect that these transnational intimacies should resolve toward happy (or happier) ends and create a sense of belonging and connection. To read the ending as “unhappy,” however, as Ahmed suggests, runs the risk of setting up norms of “good” and “bad” lives that relegate queer figures, or unhappy queers, to the bad life.³⁰ While fostering connection and moments of joy, the migrant characters in these films remain melancholic and defiant; and then they leave or are forced to leave. This tension between the lost connections of the narrative and defiant gestures illustrates their conflicted fit within Europe. At the end of each film, none of these intimacies last and none of the characters stay; as the narratives develop, however, they leave their impressions, literally—in touching skins—and emotionally.

Narratives of intimacy lead us to expect that intimacy will stabilize our human connections, but they are also always haunted by the failure of that stabilization.³¹ In the films we examined in this chapter, intimacies between undocumented migrants and European citizens have contributed to narratives in which conventional patterns and norms are evoked but also thwarted and defied. *The Edge of Heaven* shows a range of interactions that result in loss and missed connections; Fariba and Anne’s and Baran and Chernor’s intimacies are interrupted violently; and the sustaining familial connection between Ruza and Ana ends shortly after it emerges. Lauren Berlant, speaking of interpersonal intimacies, argues that intimate attachments raise expectations of shared narratives that will have particular endings. Yet, intimacy’s “potential failure to stabilize closeness always haunts its persistent activity.” She argues: “The point is double: to seek to open up understanding the relation between conventional patterns of desire and the way they are managed by norms, and to focus on patterns of attachment we hadn’t even yet known to notice, patterns in which sexuality and intimacy are enacted in a broad field of social relations that anchor us to life.”³² Touch and fabric mediating touch link a queering of gender, ethnicity, and Europe itself to enable fleeting but defiant gestures that challenge and reveal unjust political and economic structures. They further question the very ways by which economic and political success is defined: as arrival into Europe, as successful productivity, and as the attainment of savings or improved socioeconomic status. The crossing of normative expectations for

intimate relationships is also a crossing of normative expectations for so-called better lives.

These films further illustrate the struggle to find a terrain on which to represent intimacies against homonormative discourses that arose at this time in Europe and that produced decidedly “Western” gay and lesbian subjects in the service of the neoliberal consumer as well as in the service of excluding racialized others.³³ This production of the queer “Western” against the homophobic “Eastern” other focused almost exclusively on gay men. In the early twenty-first century, a number of prominent conservative male public figures in Europe such as Pim Fortuyn, Theo Van Gogh, and Peter Tatchell asserted their gayness as part of a Western, democratic identity defined against Muslim men, who were seen as homophobic, violent, and dangerous.³⁴ Puar describes how these notions of sexuality are used to construct categories of belonging and exclusion: “Lesbian and gay liberal rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to cultural and legal forms of citizenship at the expense of the partial and full expulsion from those rights of other populations.”³⁵ The films we discuss evade such narratives that privilege a certain kind of “modern” queer subject by focusing on relationships of citizens with migrant, transitory protagonists whose legal residency status is insecure. None of the intimacies depicted lasts; cultural or legal citizenship in Europe is inaccessible.

Sexuality and intimacy are complex assemblages of multidirectional forces, forces that are sometimes tentative, always precarious, and never stable. This tentative and fleeting touch defies appropriation into Western narratives of belonging and citizenship and rejects appropriation as the threatening, non-Western subject; however, the intimate connection to the other in these films does not and cannot last. It is through this very precarity that the films express something inherently political: a longing for a “Europe” that does not and maybe cannot ever exist since structures of exclusion define the project of Europe at its core.

Our hope for defiant gestures aligns with Claudia Breger’s call for imaginative reading practices (following Eve Sedgwick) that do not set interpretation of narrative in opposition to those of emotions, affect, or desire, and that do not rely exclusively on a negative stance.³⁶ The intimacies we examine are defiant gestures that, rather than following the patterns of “cruel optimisms,” uncover the mechanisms of such attachments. They create spaces in which feeling, sensing subjects temporarily escape the isolating conditions of neoliberal precarity by forming attachments in spite of the fact that these attachments do not and cannot promise “the good life.”

If skin itself can be conceptualized as the fluid boundary by which an uncontained self opens up to other bodies, if difference might be conceptualized as uncontained by the skin, then these moments of touch we’ve examined—of shared skin and shared fabric that allow touch to continue beyond physical proximity—become themselves moments of defiance that

reconfigure norms and narratives. Defiant gestures in these films thus rearrange the meanings of intimacies produced by skin contacts and, to speak with Breger, rearrange “established meanings and thus contribute to ongoing affective orientations in the (larger) world.”³⁷ They often offer such moments of reorientation in their visual depictions that counter overarching narrative movements of the films, narratives that offer cliché understandings of the struggle of the other who cannot or will not ever truly belong, of cultural differences that cannot be overcome in Europe, and of well-known stories of economic hardships and racialized exclusion.

The defiant gestures we identify in these cinematic examples illustrate how this mechanism of constructing (white) Europe works and dismantle it by rearranging affective connections and signposts. In this process of rearranging—or in such attempts to rearrange—unhappy effects become visible, but glimpses of other kinds of connections also surface. The precarity in these moments of touch, and the narrative destruction of the intimacies they create, do not renounce optimistic perspectives on this future. Rather, following Ahmed, “it is the very exposure of these unhappy effects that is affirmative, that gives us an alternative set of imaginings of what might count as a good or better life.”³⁸ Such defiance does not undo the violence of exclusion and racism but constructs moments, images, and gestures of refusal to cooperate in its perpetuation. These gestures defy narratives about difference and about who or what belongs to a certain national space or who has access to these spaces, about whose bodies touch and how. This defiance gestures to futures inspired by nonnormative intimacies, futures that challenge their appropriation for exclusionary fantasies of Europeanness. Queer, defiant intimacies gesture toward futures that are not yet possible—futures, as Gayatri Spivak has called them, in the “future anterior.”³⁹ We must call these futures of shared solidarity into being despite their current impossibility.

Chapter 3



Religion, Sexuality, and Precarious Intimacy

In the final scene of Karin Albou's *The Wedding Song* (*Le chant des mariées*; France/Tunisia, 2008), the two protagonists, young Jewish and Muslim women, clasp each other in a bomb shelter and recite key prayers from their respective faiths while bombs cause dust to fall around them (see fig. 3.1). In many ways, this moment is indicative of their entire friendship: their touch is a source of comfort, strength, connection, even hope. It is embedded in the context of their religious difference—but not entirely determined by it—while the women themselves remain under the constant threat of violence. In Albou's films *The Wedding Song* (2008) and *Little Jerusalem* (*La petite Jérusalem*; France, 2005), the experience of faith is a deeply intimate one, framing the connections between friends and sisters and inflecting the discussions of sex and sexuality in complex ways. Religion marks intimacy, but not merely as a set of restrictions. Instead, religion also opens up points of contact between the two protagonists in each film, connections that enable them not only to explore their desire and their sexuality but also to draw attention to the forms of racism and violence that exacerbate the characters' vulnerable positions in their respective communities. Their precarious intimacies are threatened by religion only insofar as they become the targets of violence as members of racialized religious groups.

These are two unusual films in the context of European cinema, which so often relegates representations of Islam to a societal problem signaled by visual symbols such as forms of Islamic covering or mosques, or deploys Islam as a framing for (domestic) violence.¹ While Christian motifs are ever-present in Western European cinema, explicit representations of Christianity, alternatively, often slide into conflation with secularism or locate religious Christianity primarily on Europe's margins in the east or south.² Both representations of Jewish religious belonging and any serious, complex engagement with any faith in feature films are rare. We might think of *Unveiled* (discussed in chap. 2) in which Fariba performs Islamic rituals upon her friend's death, as an exception, but this demonstration of faith in honor of Siamak is but a moment in the film.³ Similarly, some of Turkish German director Fatih Akın's films include religious gestures that never go beyond brief moments.



Fig. 3.1. Myriam and Nour recite prayers during a bombing. Still from *The Wedding Song* (2008).

Albou's films are unusual: they center religious affiliation in the plot, and they inscribe intimate relationships in an intimate relationship to religion. Although readings of religion in these films have examined their relationship to religious text and textual interpretations or to notions of Frenchness and difference, in this chapter we look to the embedding of personal intimacies in religious intimacies and consider their linkages to the ongoing structures of colonialism and racism that inform contemporary Europe.⁴

Before we turn to Albou's films in the second half of this chapter, we sketch some broader discussions of intimacy, religion, and race in Europe and give a brief overview of representations of intimacy and religion in contemporary Western European film, rare as they may be. Religion and film are often read as intertwined differently in Central/Eastern Europe than in Western Europe due to the context of forced secularization during Communism and the return of religion in the post-Communist era. This focus can contribute to a move that distracts from the fact that Western European countries also have strong religious traditions and customs, including various forms of state involvement with religious institutions. Camil Ungureanu, for example, argues that "Western societies have never become secular, just as Western states have never become neutral with respect to religion."⁵

Religion in Western European films must be understood within a context of a particular religious triangulation of Christianity-Judaism-Islam, in which Christianity is often displaced by Enlightenment secularism, while Judaism is collapsed into a Judeo-Christian-Enlightenment world *or* rendered "traditional," and Islam is almost exclusively linked to "tradition" and orthodoxy.

Although many cinematic representations of religion rely on heteronormative (and occasionally homonormative) constructions of nuclear families, Albou's films complicate this story by presenting multiple, contradictory intimacies. They show how intimacy and touch sometimes move in unexpected ways, contrary to the script, as disruptive or unexpected forces. Disruption in touch enables an imagination of new possibilities, of solidarities that reach across difference, of care and love that enable that same reach across difference.

Faith, Race, and Europe

The entanglement of religion in the production of precarity in contemporary Europe is embedded in a long history of the racialization of religion and secularisms. During the European Enlightenment, notions of secular tolerance and emancipation emerged in tandem with modern conceptions of race and civilization that variously conceptualized Jews, Muslims, and other religious others (also racialized as "Black," "Oriental," etc.) as less "civilized" and less capable of the abstract thought necessary for self-emancipation and political subjecthood.⁶ Edward Said's articulation of Orientalism as a form of racism also demonstrates how Islam as religion is a constituent part of understandings of the "Orient."⁷ As the Jewish body was racialized in increasingly physiological ways throughout the nineteenth century, biological difference came to dominate a sense of religious difference; as Wendy Brown states, "belief itself was now separable from yet also derivable from the ontics of race, a separability and derivability critical in formulating subjects of tolerance today."⁸ Orientalism and Islamophobia were not transformed by notions of biological race in the same way, but they manifest today in notions of an intolerant, uncivilized Islam.

These histories and representations morph and transform in different times and places, variously deploying figures of the romanticized or demonized other that have also included understandings of indigenous African and North American religions as less-than-religions. Furthermore, they ignore the wide diversity of relationships to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism inhabited by communities or individuals of faith. Understanding the racialization of religion thus requires context-specific examination of the inflections of race and religion by other categories, such as nation, gender, and sexuality.⁹

Relevant in contemporary film is a particular Jewish-Christian-Muslim triangulation that depends on much more than their mere connection as "Abrahamic" religions. In a time when increasing numbers of white, Western Europeans understand themselves as areligious or atheist, religion is complexly situated among personal identifications, communal identifications, and perceived identifications with a community. A position as variously secular or religious often becomes the marker of who can and cannot achieve political subjecthood, as is evident in the varied debates around forms of

Muslim covering that all share underpinnings of ideas that prohibit visibly or recognizably religious minorities from access to full citizenship.¹⁰ Although relationships to Christianity certainly vary across Europe—and even across Western Europe—Christianity still serves as a marker of whiteness. In some cases, it may be through constructions that mark Christianity as inherently more capable of secularism, as culture rather than religion.¹¹ In others, the emergence of new religiosities after 1989 are at play. Religion, but particularly Islam, has played a key role since 1990 in the production of “cultural difference” as the new face of European racism, which reifies an understanding of Europe as white and Christian.¹² The “global intimacies” from which modern humanism emerged cannot be separated from histories of racism and violence, as Lowe has pointed out, nor can the “religious intimacies,” rooted in the violence of the Crusades, colonialism, the Holocaust, and contemporary Islamophobic exclusions.¹³

To offer analyses of representations of performances of faith and depictions of religious community is difficult for a number of reasons. To some extent, faith affiliations have often been considered as markers of something else (e.g., gender, race, or even class). Alternatively, a performance of faith is also considered a stand-in for something else: resisting racism; claiming agency, for example, as a European citizen, or as a woman in a patriarchal context; or, from a less sympathetic position, missionizing or supporting a violent orthodoxy. If we consider public expressions of faith another way—as embodied performances that occur not *in opposition to* but *as part of* democratic action or public intervention—what might that mean for how visual representations perform in public? How do we consider the politics of such performances? How do we imagine visibility in public space, including in popular culture, and participation in the public sphere as related?

In this chapter we emphasize the importance of “taking faith seriously” by examining precarious intimacies embedded in experiences of faith. We use *faith* here to refer to inner attitudes and convictions, often expressed in embodied performances, while we consider *religion* as a unified or institutionalized set of beliefs and practices and see a sense of religious belonging as a feeling of belonging to a community. This is an awkward distinction at best, and the notion of religion is itself a Western concept deployed in the service of colonial thought.¹⁴ Our definitions here might be perceived as distinguishing attitudes and actions experienced as an individual relationship with spiritual or religious practice from organized group beliefs and practices. Both exist in a social and political context and as part of social and political processes. Furthermore, overt expression of faith often leads to the individual’s association with a community and a politics. Taking faith seriously in our analysis of film requires suspending the categories that would render performances of faith (particularly of non-Christian faiths) as necessarily antiprogressive. It also means recognizing that cultural studies scholarship has had difficulty articulating faith or religion as a category or as categories separate from

(though obviously imbricated with) race, class, ethnicity, or nationality, even as the notions of faith and religion have been racialized. Adequate analyses addressing faith would include the ways in which texts and textual figures exist in relationship to the gendered histories of Orientalism and racialization of Islam in Europe, and in connection with religious institutions, but would also attend to myriad ways of imagining relationships to faith (including atheist or agnostic positionings).¹⁵

Our discussion of negotiations of religious intimacies as sites for grappling with precarious intimacies, then, is a discussion at the very core of this project: it sheds light on how Europe is a racialized space, but it also allows us to search for moments, stories, and images that pose a challenge to this construction. These intimacies are, again, multiple and overlapping: the intimacies of religion that have resulted from colonial violence, the interpersonal intimacies that nevertheless are always marked by the history of race and racism in some way, and precarious intimacies—the representations of intimate relationships that call attention to the histories of race and racism that render them precarious.

Intimacy, also as a result of a political climate that highlights religious difference, then, is highly politicized. Films often depict religion, at times mixed or used interchangeably with cultural tradition, as the terrain where private and intimate relationships are regulated, sometimes violently so. At the same time, ideas about religious difference have been key tropes that have contributed to racist representations in Europe since 1990. After drawing a brief sketch of representations of religious intimacies in twenty-first century European film, we chose to focus on Albou's films because they allow us to highlight moments wherein cinema lays bare the workings of these tropes in order to challenge them. Touch, love, and sensuality work in these films as forces that participate in such challenges.

European Film, Religion, and Intimacy

The Drama of the Other

In contemporary European film, many dramas deploy “religion” not as a way to engage with faith or religious belonging but as a framing for a certain kind of provincialism or conservatism considered to be in contradiction to European values and located as belonging outside or at the margins of Europe. Religion, in these contexts, can be marked as producing violence, particularly violence against women or terrorist violence, or religious cultures may be depicted as superstitious or exotic. The othering of such religious communities often becomes a way to condemn them or to display them as the object of ethnological curiosity. In either case, such expressions of traditional culture or faith are depicted as outside of social or political processes that

are marked as European: a “European” approach to religion is, in contrast, defined as Western European secularism.

Dramas that depict marriage and intimacy in a multiethnic Europe, such as *The Wedding Chest* (*Sunduk predkov*; dir. Nurbek Egen, Kyrgyzstan/Germany/France/Russia, 2005) or *The Albanian* (*Der Albaner*; dir. Johannes Naber, Germany/Albania, 2010) show couples who desire to get married and seek the blessing of their families; however, the cultural-religious traditions of the societies on the margins or just outside of Europe that they belong to, more than religion or faith, work against their unions. In these rather predictable romantic dramas, lovers want their relationships to be recognized, but family, tradition, and implied or explicit religious belonging work to keep them apart. Such films often avoid specific references to faith but depict forms of exclusion that are derived from traditional or religious customs. Europe’s others are exoticized and romanticized, but also associated with backward, exclusive, and oppressive mind-sets.

The tendencies of films from the 1980s, 1990s, and even early 2000s to embed religious identity, especially Muslim religious identity, in narratives of domestic or familial violence in the German and Dutch context, or in narratives of criminality or gang rape in the French context, also have occasional counterparts after 2000.¹⁶ In particular, the German film *When We Leave* (*Die Fremde*, literally, “The Stranger”; dir. Feo Aladağ, Germany, 2010) gained some measure of international attention, including distribution on major platforms such as Netflix, when it became Germany’s submission to the Academy Awards, lauded for its portrayal of a Muslim woman who is murdered when she tries to leave an abusive relationship. This film relies on tropes of domestic violence that associate it with Turkish and Muslim traditions, utterly removed from the European history of familial and domestic violence.¹⁷ Exceptions to this trend, such as *Free Men* (*Les hommes libres*; dir. Ismaël Ferroukhi, France, 2011), explicitly reference communities of faith without engaging faith itself, which is understandable given the intensely and explicitly racialized World War II context in which the film is set.

Comedy and Faith

Nevertheless, visual representations of Muslims and other religious others in European film and TV have diversified significantly since the turn of the twenty-first century. While the stereotypical participants in gendered familial violence remain omnipresent in insistently heteronormative films such as those mentioned previously, they coexist with representations of (fairly) functional families or relationships in films that comically parody religious difference. Comedies revolving around some kind of conflict between families of different faiths, generally centering a heterosexual relationship as the source (and a wedding as the resolution) of conflict, have been fairly successful in many Western European countries—for example, the German films

Kebab Connection (dir. Anno Saul, 2004), *Go for Zucker* (*Alles auf Zucker*; dir. Dani Levy, 2004), *Evet, I Do!* (*Evet, Ich will!*; dir. Sinan Akkus, 2008), and *Salami Aleikum* (dir. Ali Samadi Ahadi, 2009); the British films *Bend It Like Beckham* (dir. Gurinder Chadha, United Kingdom/Germany/United States, 2002), and *East Is East* (dir. Damien O'Donnell, 1999); and French-Maghrebi comedies such as *Bacon on the Side* (*Il reste du jambon?*; dir. Anne Depétrini, France, 2010) and *Mohamed Dubois* (dir. Ernesto Oña, France, 2013).¹⁸ In these comedies, the deliberate engagement with and partial challenge to dominant stereotypes about religious families primarily occurs through parodies of faith or through representations of faith as an exceptional reaction to traumatic events. Daniela Berghahn points out that such films tend to “promote integration rather than segregation by emphasizing cultural affinities rather than alterity.”¹⁹ Many of these comedies seem to make an interesting, rather deliberate effort to normalize Muslim citizens in Europe and to counter assumptions that Muslims are potential terrorists or perpetrators of familial violence. They attempt to present Muslim protagonists as important participants in everyday life and a globalized economy. Yet, the strategy to do so is often to present acts of faith as a parody of faith or to eliminate references to faith altogether. The challenge to stereotypes inheres in representations in which faith simply does not—or should not—matter. Such films are also generally insistently heteronormative—or occasionally homonormative—with nonhetero relationships existing primarily at the margins of a narrative (a tendency, we will show, that is in no way challenged by Albou’s films).

While such lighthearted film comedies challenge assumptions about violence, gender, and faith, they remain unable to imagine faith and public life outside of parody that even verges on caricature. The obvious response might be that they are, after all, comedies. Yet, it is noteworthy that performances of faith (when present) seem largely to serve as the comic element in the films, while more serious moments are focused almost entirely on the various, often romantic and intimate, relationships. At times, they serve to validate “inter-cultural” contact as a way of reestablishing traditional masculinities deemed “lost.”²⁰ Popular visual culture thus seems to leave very little possibility for visual production of a public subject whose faith is also enacted publicly. While these possibilities are certainly not absent, they seem to remain confined to more marginal forms of visual culture.

Hybrid Forms: Rewriting Scripts

In the context of these discussions, Fatih Akin’s films seem to deliberately downplay religious identity when representing conflicts within multiethnic urban communities or between German and Turkish-German and Turkish people. Intimacy, in these films, is central for the dramatic conflict, and sex and love are tied to politics; however, Islam, while present, is not the fuel of intimate conflict. In that way, Akin’s films resist a discourse that politicizes,

racializes, and genders Islam in Europe. Some of Akin's films contain comedic moments that are, in some cases, also moments of cultural misunderstanding. However, in his films, laughter or parody is never simply a mockery of tradition or faith. On the contrary, it is often the characters who do not understand the complexities of cultural-religious interactions who are the target of mockery. Wedding scenes, which are common in Akin's films and often include depictions of religious ceremonies, offer the backdrop for playfully dissecting expectations, conventions, and misunderstandings. The wedding scenes are not necessarily central to the films' narrative; often, they do not offer conclusions, and the narrative does not dwell on their meaning. In these wedding scenes, however, traditional validation of heterosexual intimacy, in this case coded as part of a traditional or religious ceremony, serves as the backdrop for a critical intervention into scripting European intimacies.

Akin's films thus play with conventions of depicting "other" cultures and culture clashes along religious and ethnic lines. The films navigate the expectations of offering a window into other cultures for white Christian audiences and evoke ideas of nostalgia and family tradition that often seem out of sync with a contemporary reality. Akin's first feature film, *Short Sharp Shock* (*Kurz und Schmerzlos*; Germany, 1998) includes a Turkish wedding scene at the beginning. This scene serves as a way to introduce the characters and, narratively, reintroduce Gabriel, who was just released from prison, to his family. Just after the stylized introductions of the three main male characters ("a Greek, a Serb, and a Turk"), *Short Sharp Shock* cuts to a traditional Turkish wedding celebration for Gabriel's brother. Ceyda introduces her brother Gabriel to her friend Alice as traditional Turkish wedding music plays in the background. The two women who run a jewelry shop together give Gabriel a necklace of a Buddhist dagger as a gift—a symbol, they claim, that will protect him. This (supposedly) Buddhist gift given at a Turkish wedding already signifies the way in which this film plays with and through cultural and multicultural clichés. Set in the urban environment of Hamburg, Akin depicts a multiethnic society where cultural-religious traditions mix and clash. When Gabriel's Greek friend Costa arrives, Gabriel quickly grabs him and pushes him into a back room to scold him for not dressing appropriately for a formal, Turkish wedding. Costa has to exchange his jeans and bomber jacket for a suit he borrows from Gabriel. During this Turkish wedding celebration, the film sets up multiple complex relationships and potential conflicts, and contrasts them with the expectations of traditional, gendered, and ethnically coded behavior.²¹

In Akin's next and first internationally successful feature film, *Head-On* (*Gegen die Wand*; Germany/Turkey 2004), marriage is central to the film's narrative development. Similar to *Short Sharp Shock*, the wedding scene in the film is a performance of tradition and Turkishness but serves as a way of setting up a complex set of relationships between family, tradition, religion, and belonging. As Mine Eren argues, the film questions "social forms and

conventions based on kinship.”²² The central tension in the film builds on the main female character, Sibel, who enters a scam marriage with Cahit to escape the pressures of her father and brother to marry a Turkish man and settle down. However, Akın carefully avoids explicit symbolic or narrative references to Islam; for example, there are no scenes showing people in or going to mosques, engaging in prayer, or discussing religion or religious custom. The conflict is framed as cultural and as rooted in a patriarchal Turkish-German context that stifles Sibel’s longing for personal freedom and exploration of sexuality. In its negative depiction of Sibel’s Turkish-German family and their patriarchal values, the film appears to fall into the tradition of what Deniz Göktürk has described as fantasies of the Turkish woman who “need[s] to be rescued from her patriarchal community.”²³ Polona Petek argues, however, that this film references these discourses but rewrites the script of the victimized Turkish woman by giving Sibel agency and by letting her choose her “rescuer.”²⁴

In *Head-On*, every intimate situation already contains its challenge. Intimacy, first introduced as Sibel’s desire to freely explore her sexuality, challenges Sibel’s belonging to her traditional family; she then constructs a form of fake intimacy, in the marriage with Cahit (a Turkish man), to keep up the appearance of conformism and to continue to be included within her family. Ironically, it is this very intimacy with Cahit, then, that leads to her expulsion from her traditional family in Germany and her escape to Turkey, where she can live with her single cousin, a professional businesswoman. Similarly, Cahit, who denies his own cultural heritage to a point where he no longer can speak Turkish fluently, appears to return to his roots not by reconnecting with his biological Turkish-German family members but by traveling to the town in Turkey from which his family came. The escape from Europe and Germany and the return to Turkey offers the two main characters in the film the space to explore other forms of identity, intimacy, and belonging.

Akın’s approach to representations of cultural-religious conflict allow him to navigate the politicized and racialized landscapes of representations of religion—specifically Islam—within the landscape of European cinema; his films simultaneously evade and complicate these discussions. In his films—and in his responses to interview questions—Akın tries to carefully counter appropriations and attempts to avoid certain traps of racialized representation by, on the one hand, not explicitly confronting questions of faith and religion in his films and, on the other hand, claiming that his stories are not told from the margin but from the center of society.²⁵ Akın’s films evade and intervene in certain representational traps by referencing and then rewriting them and by scripting complex, multilayered, and culturally hybrid characters who do not fit into easy categorizations. Neither of these films—*Short Sharp Shock* nor *Head-On*—depicts characters with deep religious ties or convictions. Albu, in contrast, works on rescripting representations of Europe and its others by depicting religious faith with emotional and intimate depth.

Albou's Films: Precarious Intimacies and Religion

Director and screenwriter Karin Albou was born to Algerian immigrants in a Paris suburb; she was raised in a secular Jewish family.²⁶ Critics and scholars often place Albou in a new group of French female filmmakers, sometimes characterized as what Marzia Caporale calls a “new generation of culturally hybrid female directors”; other times, as noted by Catherine Portuges, as calling “into question the validity of both national cinema and cultural identity as assumed or fixed representational concepts”; and still other times, Portuges observes, as practicing “a form of filmmaking that resists authoritarian hegemonic discourses.”²⁷ Albou's representations of faith are unique in the landscape of European cinema; she explicitly addresses religious Jewish characters and further portrays a relationship to Muslim faith that goes beyond the strictures and perpetuation of violence often associated with Islam in other films.²⁸ Intimacies are haunted by the presence of violence, but the films also show intimate solidarities that are rooted in the characters' deeply personal relationships with faith and with each other.

Jewish Intimacy and Transgression in La petite Jérusalem (2005)

On the surface, Albou's first feature film, *Little Jerusalem*, centers on a conflict between Orthodox Judaism and secular Europe as embodied by the relationship between two sisters, Laura and Mathilde. *La petite Jérusalem* was released in the wake of several events that fueled ongoing discussions about the nature of French republicanism and diversity in France. France had undergone several waves of “debates” about whether students would be permitted to wear head scarves in French schools. In addition, ongoing police violence against immigrants was to culminate in the 2005 protests in the Paris banlieues the same year the film was released. And at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new wave of antisemitic violence occurred that peaked first in 2002 and again in 2004 as the film was being made.²⁹ For the first time, responsibility for the violence was attributed not only to the Far Right but also to “Arab Muslims” living in France. This violence quickly came to be associated with Muslim religiosity, even though there was no evidence to suggest a significant link between religiosity and antisemitic acts.³⁰ This moment was part of a larger process through which a powerful narrative of conflict was constructed, in which “‘Jew’ and ‘Muslim’ became political symbols, even as actual Jews and Muslims rarely clashed,” Maud Mandel observes, and even as Jews and Muslims became increasingly subject to racialized hatred.³¹

The primary relationship in the film is that of sisters Mathilde and Laura, daughters of Jewish Tunisian immigrants who were raised as Orthodox Jews in the Paris banlieue of Sarcelles. Both women struggle with their need to tightly regulate their emotions as well as their desires and bodies—however,



Fig. 3.2. Laura and Mathilde discuss “truths” in Enlightenment texts and the Torah. Still from *Little Jerusalem* (2005).

for contrasting reasons (see fig. 3.2). Mathilde, a religiously devout mother of four, asserts that her Jewish faith does not allow for women to express their sexual desires or take pleasure in sex, even with their own husbands. Laura, a philosophy student obsessed with the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, tries to suppress her sexual desires because she fears they will distract her from her intellectual endeavors and her insistence on rational thought. In line with the meanings Laura attaches to being a Kantian, she tries to adhere to a strict life of the mind and a highly regulated schedule that does not allow for spontaneity, emotion, or erotic passion. As the film progresses, a strict dichotomy introduced at the beginning between secularism and religiosity later becomes a point of contention. The sisters suffer similarly as a result of their strict regulation of desire—regulations that set up, in turn, oppositions between intellect/morality and sense/body.

The two sisters thus find themselves entrapped in lives devoid of pleasure due to their adherence to law. Mathilde seeks a strict interpretation of Hala-chic law, which in the film, however, is often based on vague references to what unspecified people “have said.” Mathilde values modesty above all else, seeking a strict identity as mother and wife. For Mathilde, “female sexuality cannot exist outside the patriarchal framework of [her] belief system. The female body can never experience sexual arousal, for pleasure is inappropriate for women and therefore prohibited by God.”³² Her beliefs are challenged, however, when she discovers that her husband, Ariel, is cheating on her.

Laura, alternatively, refers to Kant’s regulation of his own everyday life as “his laws” in the tutorials she gives at the university. In a way, Laura has constructed her own religion out of Kant—her version of rational humanism

or secularism is strictly tied to Kant, with no references to other thinkers. Laura juxtaposes Kantian rationality with the practices of her mother (who casts spells and hides a *hamsa* under her bed) as well as Mathilde's more explicitly Jewish religious practices, viewed by Laura as equally irrational. Laura uses the work of Kant, and others who write against emotion and passion, to define a path of escape from the gendered expectations for her future—that marriage and children should serve as primary priorities. She is increasingly derailed from this path, however, by her attraction to Djamel, an undocumented Algerian Muslim who works with her cleaning a school and who, it is implied, has been persecuted for his work as a journalist and as an author working on a book about a Sufi woman mystic. Even as Laura rejects the romantic advances of a Jewish family friend, Eric, a match for which both her mother and sister advocate, the erotic tension between Djamel and Laura increases. Her mother even, despite Laura's objections, even tries to cast spells so that Laura and Eric would end up together and to lessen what she perceives as Djamel's power over Laura.

Two rituals become increasingly important to their relationship: that of the mikvah and that of Laura's nightly walks, which have become part of her enactment of devotion to Kant, always following the same route at the same time. As Mathilde shares her sorrows with the woman known only as the "mikvah lady," this woman offers to help Mathilde learn how to gain pleasure and please her husband while staying within Jewish law. Laura eagerly volunteers to accompany Mathilde to a meeting with the mikvah lady, an act that suggests her own need for sexual education. They meet just for conversation, not including the ritual bath. In this scene, the mikvah lady and Mathilde sit facing each other, while Laura is positioned on a bench at the edge of the room, almost a voyeur. When Mathilde is unable to ask questions or describe the sexual acts that the mikvah lady asks about, Laura begins to ask questions. Her voyeuristic presence in this initial meeting enables Mathilde to engage in the conversation; in future meetings, Mathilde goes alone, and ultimately she is able to derive pleasure from sex with her husband, but only after the mikvah lady tells her that it is not only permitted to do so, but "the law." Only within this carefully circumscribed, heteronormative (i.e., all sexual acts must lead to reproductive sex) framework is Mathilde able to cautiously derive pleasure. For Mathilde, the sisterly connection ultimately enables her to become a participant in the production of meaning through a reinterpretation of Halachic law, as Caporale points out, and simultaneously to carve out a life in which she can take pleasure in sex.³³

For Laura, a reinterpretation of Kantian philosophy that might accommodate her desires for sexual intimacy is less clear. Instead, an almost unwilling deviation from the laws she has set up for her life enables emotional and physical pleasure. When Djamel leaves her a gift, she leaves a note in his locker explaining that they cannot be together; as an audience, all we know of the note are the words "the religious law in which I was raised." At various

points throughout the first half of the film, Laura has drawn on Western philosophy and mythology to emphasize the need to “get my body under control” and insist that she “won’t be a slave to my senses.” After Laura has joined Mathilde at the mikvah, however, and as Mathilde begins to join Laura for her evening walks, Laura increasingly lets go of the tight disciplines to which she has adhered: she breaks her nightly routine and thrashes about in her room while reading. Eventually she waits for Djamel at the school, and they make love. Unlike Mathilde, however, Laura’s increasing access to pleasure only disrupts her life. After Djamel’s family rejects Laura, he interrupts their next sexual encounter to leave her. Undocumented, he says, he cannot afford to leave his family and live alone; as a philosophy student, Laura also cannot afford to find housing for the two. Completely devastated, Laura rushes home to attempt suicide.

The special relationship shared between Laura and Mathilde becomes a space from which they cautiously support each other in explorations of sexuality, where they debate their respective philosophical and religious laws, and where they consider the nature of loneliness. Their relationship and their parallel struggles with sexuality are visually represented through close-ups of their bodies, not following the gazes of men but, as implied in the extreme close-ups, depicting the experience of sensuality of the women’s own bodies. Albou’s cinematic gaze often takes a perspective too close for the viewers to really see the body itself in detail; the lens almost touches the skin, the cloth, the hair, and the hands. The “too-closeness” of this camera at key points in the film, particularly during sexual encounters, illustrates the work of aesthetics as what Lauren Berlant calls a “metrics for understanding how we pace and space our encounters with things, how we manage the too closeness of the world and also the desire to have an impact on it.”³⁴ The transformation in the relationship between law and desire also becomes an aesthetic transformation: Laura and Mathilde both eventually reject a habit of holding sensuality and sensibility at a distance. The aesthetic transformation, however, is also a feminist one that elides an easy appropriation by a pornographic gaze.

A similar aesthetics accompanies those scenes that clearly reveal the social conditions that render their lives, and those of their respective lovers, precarious. The central scene in this regard takes place on a grassy area outside the Hebrew school in which Laura, Mathilde, and their partners all work as janitors. As Mathilde’s husband and a number of children play soccer, they are suddenly attacked by a group of young men, most of whose faces are covered by hoods or scarves. The attackers appear on the scene so suddenly and flow through the frame so quickly that the individual figures are but a blur; initially, the camera has pulled so close that one cannot see the attackers, only Ariel as he falls. Thereafter, the attackers are unrecognizable, but the camera pulls in close to reveal the pain on Ariel’s face. Laura runs out from the school with Djamel to aid Ariel, but as police arrive on the scene, Djamel carefully

turns away and returns quickly to the school. When Laura confronts him, he admits that he doesn't have papers. At this moment, the antisemitic attacks and the precarious situation of undocumented North African immigrants are linked narratively and visually.

This also marks an interruption of familial relationships for Laura and Mathilde. In the final scenes in the film, Ariel and Mathilde choose to move to Israel, presumably partly in response to the attacks, while Laura chooses to stay in Paris. Their lives will likely not be "safer" in the future. A scene in which Mathilde builds a house (their imagined new house in Israel) out of blocks with her children in the apartment, which is already packed up and full of moving boxes, indicates the possibility that the family plans to move into a new Jewish settlement, replicating a complex cycle of displacement and occupation. The youngest son then plays with a helicopter and attacks and destroys the house, symbolizing that the family's new home will be as contested as their space in France. Similarly, Laura's decision to stay in Paris does not suggest that she is "safe." In a striking scene in which Laura's mother calls her daughter "racist" for suggesting that her mother should return to Tunisia rather than move to Israel, Laura is revealed as participating in a discourse of exclusion that locates "secularists" in France and religious people as belonging elsewhere. It is clear when her mother leaves with Mathilde's family somewhat unwillingly that, in spite of all their divisions, she was and is one of Laura's closest allies. Yet neither belonging, romantic and familial relationships, nor physical safety are secured for any of the characters.

In the space that the topic occupies in the film, it could be argued, one could easily miss the gesture toward the replicating violence of colonialism. On the other hand, both of these scenes—the attack on the playground and the toy house scene—are particularly abrupt, even in a film where the editing is generally rather deliberately abrupt, where scenes are cut before they are finished, and where longer scenes may consist of a series of static shots of relatively immobile objects. The transition to these scenes is jarring: the attack is sandwiched between lovemaking scenes, while the bright whiteness of the toy house scene follows immediately after a particularly dimly lit intimate conversation between Laura and her mother.

Nour and Myriam, Islam and Judaism: The Wedding Song (2008)

The Wedding Song depicts the deeply sensual friendship of Myriam and Nour, respectively Jewish and Muslim girls growing up in the same building in Tunis at the onset of Germany's ultimately failed campaigns in Tunisia during World War II. In *The Wedding Song*, the relationship between Myriam and Nour is enacted through frequent touch and the exchange of objects that touch the skin.

The film's production responds to an important development in French cultural memory: in 1998, after a sixteen-year-long investigation and series

of legal fights, Maurice Papon was convicted of crimes against humanity for his role in the deportation of Jews from Paris. During the course of trial testimony, his important role in the massacre of anticolonial Algerian protestors in Paris in 1961 came to light. This moment provided a powerful impetus for recognizing the points of contact between the histories of colonialism and the Holocaust, particularly the connected but ever-transforming forms of racialized thinking that legitimized the violence of both.³⁵ At the same time, the film also speaks to the new incidence of immigrant violence against Jews, as well as the attribution of such violence to Islam. Myriam and Nour's intimacy opens up space for gestures toward the ways in which racism and colonialism render both of their lives precarious, though always in uneven and shifting ways. In this way, the film performs what Michael Rothberg has called "multidirectional memory," which in this case serves as an example of how such gestures parallel, inspire, or otherwise connect to other memories without becoming a form of "competitive memory" that might serve to obscure another memory. In this way, the precarious intimacy of this film constructs not only an interesting memory politics but also one that speaks to the violence of the present.³⁶

Nour and Myriam's interactions are deeply impacted by their relationships with their respective fiancés. Myriam's mother (played by Albou herself) has promised Myriam to the much older Raoul because he will solve their financial difficulties, particularly by paying the large fee that Tunisian Jews have been forced to pay in order to remain in Tunis. Myriam is vehemently opposed to the match. Nour, on the other hand, is deeply in love with the man who has been promised to her: her cousin Khaled. Their marriage is delayed until he can find work; eventually he finds employment with the Nazis.

Both Myriam and Nour continually interrupt intimate moments taking place in the other's romantic or sexual relationship. For example, Nour relies on Myriam to enable her sexual encounters with Khaled. In one scene, Myriam occupies Nour's place in bed while Nour runs to the roof of their building to be with Khaled. In another scene, Myriam follows Nour to the roof, spies on their lovemaking, and then takes the blame for being with Khaled when he is spotted. Nour holds Myriam's head during a painful scene that in long, slow close-ups shows Myriam's body hair being removed by waxing in preparation for her wedding. In this waxing sequence showing gentle, tender touch between the women (and, specifically, between the two friends), Myriam's moaning due to the physical pain as well as the erotic, close gaze of the camera contrasts with the emotional pain of these preparations for Myriam's expected consummation of her unwanted marriage to Raoul. During sex on her own wedding night, Nour insists that she must continue to see Myriam, even as Khaled responds that *he* will decide. In these interruptions of the heterosexual relationships throughout the film, questions of pain, pleasure, and touch continually shift from the relationships between the women and their fiancés to the deep, sensual friendship between the two women.

Yet the final two scenes of the film are, perhaps, most important to an analysis of intimacy. In the penultimate scene, Khaled has taken the bloody sheet from their bed to show their wedding guests, leaving Nour alone; as he and the guests celebrate the consummation of the marriage, bombs begin to fall. Alone, Nour dresses in just a robe and takes her place at the center of a group in a makeshift bomb shelter as dust falls on her. As she begins to recite the Basmala—"In the name of God the gracious and merciful, say, God is one"—she hears Myriam's voice, reciting the opening line of the Shema, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Nour slowly approaches Myriam and then crouches next to her. Embracing each other and rocking back and forth, as seen in the image that opened this chapter (fig. 3.1), the camera then cuts to tightly framed, alternating close-ups that show either face as they again begin reciting their prayers, almost as a duet, each in her own language using similar words. The gentle harmony is violently interrupted by the German punk singer Nina Hagen's "Naturträne" as the bombings continue and the credits roll.

Their religious identities serve, then, as a point of contact and connection, and as a point of disruption, as comfort, division, and a sort of unity in difference. The recitation of similarities between their religious texts is violently interrupted by American bombing brought on by Nazi occupation. The differing positions Myriam and Nour occupy vis-à-vis colonialism and potential Nazi occupation are further evidenced in their relationship to two objects: a bracelet and a white bra, both gifted to Nour by Myriam.

While shopping for her wedding dress with Raoul, Nour passes by. She enters the shop but is thrown out by the shop owner with the words, "We don't want to be seen with a native in here." When Myriam next sees Nour, she gives her a bracelet that was a gift from Raoul. With a series of extreme close-ups, Myriam and Nour's hands touch as they discuss the exchange (see fig. 3.3). As the camera pulls back slightly, Myriam tells Nour, "You can tell Khaled you picked it up in the square. Like you picked up some flyers." Myriam refers here to the Nazi propaganda flyers that she saw Nour pick up in the square. Their faces in this deeply intimate scene reflect love, sorrow, and confusion as they wordlessly try to understand what is happening to them, how to make sense of their various positionings in relationship to religious cultures as well as colonialist, anticolonial nationalist, and racist ideologies.

Later, a Nazi soldier, who raids Myriam's apartment together with Khaled, assaults and possibly rapes Myriam's mother. When Myriam confronts Nour with the fact that Khaled participated in the raid, Nour denies that it is possible. Nour then confronts Myriam with the history that Myriam has been unable to recognize: "Why can you go to school, and I can't go? Why do I wear the veil and you don't? Why can you go outside the house without anybody commenting?" Nour then quickly backpedals, saying, "Politics has nothing to do with you, anyway. You're different, Myriam." "I'm not different," Myriam responds. Myriam is finally confronted explicitly with the



Fig. 3.3. Myriam gives Nour a bracelet. Still from *The Wedding Song* (2008).

reality that sympathy for the Nazi occupiers lies in the hope that they may free Tunisia from French colonization. Myriam's and Nour's educational status is representative of a reality in which Tunisian Jews largely attended school, while most Tunisian Muslims did not.³⁷ This fight inaugurates the largest rift between the two, made worse by the fact that Khaled has chastised Nour for wearing the bra that Myriam gave her, calling it the clothing "of a whore." More significantly, Khaled has demanded that Nour stop seeing Myriam, who is "not someone. She's a Jew!" After the argument, Nour throws the bracelet into the well in their shared courtyard, where it is later retrieved by Myriam and carefully set on the ledge above.

It is contact with religious texts, however, that allows Nour and Myriam to reconnect whenever a rift appears. After the incident with the bra, for example, Nour saves Myriam from being taken when Nazis raid the baths, looking for Jews. Nour holds up the propaganda flyer and says, "She is my sister, she is Muslim." When the soldier hesitates, Nour recites the Shahada, slowly enough that Myriam can repeat after her. Convinced that Myriam is Muslim, the Nazi allows her to go. The deployment of a religious text becomes the source of resistance to antisemitic racism.

After the two friends fight, religious texts also repair the rift. Not allowed to go to school, Nour has taught herself to read Arabic with Myriam's help. When Khaled chastises Nour to stop seeing Myriam and to read the Koran, Nour encounters a passage that suggests that all those who are not Muslim will be damned. Later, however, Nour's father discovers her reading the Koran, learning for the first time that she can read Arabic. Finding that Myriam is returning to the verse that condemns all non-Muslims, he suggests

another verse. Drawing her finger to the page, he asks her to read: “Those who believe, those who follow Judaism, Christianity, and the Sabians, and whoever believes in God and in the Last Day and does good . . . on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve.” The Koran itself offers an opportunity, both in its contradiction and through a verse connecting Jews, Christians, and Muslims. In this way Nour finds the possibility to interpret the text in a way that enables her to continue to nurture her relationship with Myriam. Looking out the window of her house, Nour sees the bracelet carefully placed above the well, retrieves it, and puts it on.

The final scene demonstrates their intimate connection most clearly. When the women return to each other in the time of war, there is a new acceptance of connection across difference. Their religious intimacy, religious touch, occurs not in their response to a religious command but rather in a recognition of touching histories in difference. This intimacy allows the complex positionings vis-à-vis colonialist and racist violence to come to the fore without destroying their friendship completely; indeed, their relationship, even after the two weddings, remains the primary relationship for both of them.

The Wedding Song also speaks to the context of its production. Both the time represented in the film and the time at which the film was made were moments of a certain “hardening of the Muslim/Jewish binary” in public perception in France.³⁸ In this context, the depiction of a historical moment in Tunisia in which Jews and Muslims shared living spaces is considered unusual.³⁹ The film shows various ways that people respond to precarious situations and account for intimacy without ignoring the structures that produce these precarities. On the contrary, moments of intimacy often highlight precarity, violent divisions, and gendered violence as the sustaining friendship between Nour and Myriam continues to thrive in the face of its impossibility. The engagement with gendered violence and oppression, justified by religious traditions or triggered by religiously fueled, political tensions, is equally complex, however, as the film does not present a simple binary between oppression and liberation. Faith, for both main characters, is not something one simply has, embodies, or performs, but both women employ their faith, as exemplified in the multiple uses of religious texts or customs in the film, as forms of cross-religious and even cross-ethnic solidarities in the face of precarity.

Locating Christianity vis-à-vis Racist Violence

Albou’s films offer depictions of faith and religion that show intimate relations embedded in the contexts of faith. In the European context, such intimacies are linked to structures of colonialism and racism. Rather than depicting a religious other as an obstacle to Europe or as always outside of Europe, Albou’s films show complex forms of religious intimacies as intricately tied to European histories and politics. These religious intimacies in turn point back

to a range of racist violence in Europe that obstructs new ways of thinking and living faith and interfaith intimacies as a part of Europe's present and future. Nonetheless, in Albou's films, intimacy and touch move in unexpected ways and can, however momentarily, be unexpected or disruptive forces by revealing racialized religions as producing precarious lives. Any futures imagined in these films move counter to scripts of European secularism; notions of belonging are rewritten in fleeting moments of intimacy that are infused with questions of faith and community.

Against the backdrop of comedies that depict religious others as comedic sidekicks in contrast to European characters, or dramas that revolve around religion or tradition as an obstacle to happiness and love, Albou's films are an important intervention. In many comedies and dramas, Christian Europe is often equated with secularism, while Islam and occasionally Judaism are linked to religiosities seen as external to Europe. Akin's films evade this representational trap by offering complex narratives of love and intimacy without deploying faith as a mere trope or even central theme. By not foregrounding religion as a central marker or identification, however, especially the white German/European characters in his films remain unmarked and presumed to be Christian. It is puzzling, in this context, how difficult it is to find critical depictions of Christian Europe that are unexpected, interesting, and intimate.

Confronting Christianity: The Evil Old Songs

In our search for such reflections, our concluding thoughts return to a short film by Akin: his contribution to a documentary film project initiated by Lars von Trier. In *Visions of Europe* (2004), twenty-five filmmakers from twenty-five European countries were asked to contribute a short film (five minutes or less) about their "vision" of Europe. A surprising number of films in the collection *Visions of Europe* revolve around Christian images, not necessarily to enforce the idea of Europe as Christian but to emphasize the way in which contemporary questions about European identification grapple with religious identity. The contributions *Crossroad* (dir. Małgorzata Szumowska, Poland) and *Euroflot* (dir. Arvo Iho, Estonia), for example, show how "Europe's racist history, its exclusive Christian religious identity, and its restrictive bureaucratic apparatus, produce the unhappy effects that stand in the way of a positively (or happily) coded future for Europe."⁴⁰ This religious grappling, however, mainly takes place in relation to Christianity and to Europe's Christian traditions and pasts; strikingly absent in this collection are contributions that directly address Islam or Judaism in Europe.

Akin's contribution to *Visions of Europe*, *The Evil Old Songs* (*Die bösen alten Lieder*) may offer a reflection on Europe that points to the way in which the "Christianness" of contemporary European identity is confronted with

non-Christian forms of religious identifications. In his cinematic adaptation of Heinrich Heine's poem (written between 1816 and 1826) of the same title, which was turned into a song by Robert Schumann in 1840, Akın uses Heine's context as a foil for contemporary Europe. Heine's poem emphasizes the necessity to move on from the pain and sorrow caused by German nationalism and its exclusion of Jewish and leftist intellectuals. Whether this is a naive hope or a real possibility remains open in Heine's poem, but his characteristically ironic tone might suggest both: the simultaneous existence of hope and despair that accompanies his poetry about Germany. The coffin to bury "those evil old songs" will be so big and heavy that only a magical force will be able to bury it; parts of its weight, the final stanza suggests, come from the inclusion of the love and pain of those who seek to bury songs.

Similar to Heine's poem, Akın's adaptation of the song, filmed in an opulent baroque theater, takes on this topic of burying the causes of violence as a burden and a question, as an impossible but necessary task to move forward. In nostalgic black-and-white imaging, the singer Idil Üner conveys Heine's words in a whispering, eerie tone as she walks around the theater. Interrupting the Heine song, the film switches to color when Üner starts to sing in Turkish, then switches back to black-and-white for the final verse of the Heine song in German. Üner then walks to a record player and starts to play a record with marching music mixed with all sorts of noises. She holds her ears closed as historic images blend over her and the sound becomes louder and noisier. The ironic tone of Heine's poem takes a dramatic turn in Akın's cinematic version. Not only is Europe's coffin too heavy, but the noises of Europe's past are also too loud to be drowned out. The personal experience of this pain continues to be in the foreground. As the performer switches into Turkish and the image switches into color, the film raises the question of what belongs to European pasts, what, precisely, needs to be buried in this coffin, and what might remain of Europe once the coffin is buried.

Akın's film uses Heine's complex positioning in relation to Europe's national histories: Heine was born Jewish but chose to be baptized as a Christian after Prussia restored restrictions that would have limited his career opportunities as a Jew. Eventually he chose exile in France because of his political views and further came to be viewed as overly "Frenchified" by Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals alike.⁴¹ In this poem, Heine writes about Europe in his typically ironic, somewhat sarcastic tone. The film puts Heine's thinking about Europe's histories of religious and political exclusion into dialogue with questions of Turkish German belonging, both by the Turkish parts of the song and by the Turkish background of the female performer and the filmmaker himself. The exaggerated, dramatic, even melodramatic gestures of the singer moving through the hauntingly dark theater associate her presence with the very question of Europe's past, present, and future. In Akın's film, however, this female body is not a vessel for Europe but an assertive, at times angry, potentially transgressive force.

This short film brings us back to considering the way in which bodies, represented in our concluding example by the performing body of the singer, are inscribed with or resist meaning that is religiously and racially coded. Unlike the characters of Albou's films, however, the singer of *The Evil Old Songs* is a solitary figure whose exposure of the intimacy of religion and religious violence occurs outside interpersonal intimacies. Albou's political interventions happen at moments when the films rewrite the imagery and the scripts of religious intimacies and their relationship to and with precarity into intimacies that work toward solidarities. Cinematic narratives that represent these precarious religious intimacies may be rare, but this scarcity makes their interventions even more important. They offer possibilities to envision futures of cohabitation that move contrary to the violent scripts of Christian "secularism": a future of touching histories and presence of difference that can imagine currently racialized religious minorities as part of the shared future of Europe.

Chapter 4



Commodified Intimacy in a Globalizing Europe

In *Flowers from Another World* (*Flores de otro mundo*; dir. Icíar Bollaín, Spain, 1999), Milady, a young Cuban woman, walks away from her life in a rural Spanish village where she had been living with Carmelo (see fig. 4.1). Carmelo is an older Spanish man who, in his words, brought her to Europe as his “girlfriend.” This image conveys a sense of both self-determination and vulnerability within this complex story about abuse, desire, and hope. Milady carries her belongings in one small bag on a country road with barely any traffic. The land looks inhospitable and oppressive—dry and barren grassland with gray clouds low in the sky. Milady walks away confidently from an abusive relationship with Carmelo in the hope of finding a self-determined life in a larger city, but she also leaves her friend Patricia behind. Milady appears isolated yet leaves with the hope and determination that she can build a better life elsewhere. Her departure marks a contradictory moment: it communicates a sense of agency and defiance but also signals a departure toward an unknown, insecure future.

Another Spanish film, *Princesses* (*Princesas*; dir. Fernando León de Aranoa, Spain, 2005), contains a similar image of departure toward the end of the film. Zulema leaves Spain to return to the Dominican Republic of her own volition, and not because she is being deported, as her friend and fellow sex worker Caye insists on pointing out to the border police officers at the airport. Zulema, too, leaves behind an abusive relationship as well as a close, supportive friendship.

In the third film we discuss in this chapter, the coproduction *Lorna’s Silence* (*Le silence de Lorna*; dir. Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne, Belgium/France/Italy/Germany, 2008), walking away takes on new meaning as Lorna, the main character, escapes a likely violent death by running into the forest and hiding in a hut, where she is so desperately isolated that she imagines a pregnancy in order to have any sense of intimate connection.

All three films construct their intimacies outside—even against—the intimacies of heterosexual marriage that would have potentially secured the residency status of the characters in the films.



Fig. 4.1. Milady leaves an abusive relationship in hopes of a better life. Still from *Flowers from Another World* (1999).

Commodified intimacy or intimate labor, whether in the form of sex work, marriages of “convenience,” or care work, exist as gendered forms of labor that are also deeply racialized. In this chapter we consider how these defiant gestures of refusal amid precarious intimacies might challenge any simplified understanding of commodified intimacies. We argue that the precarious intimacies we examine form potential avenues of imagining, however briefly, sustaining and sustainable connection in the face of a neoliberal economy that seems to completely commodify everything, including touch, bodies, and sex. Precarious intimacies further function in these films to show the intertwined forces of border control and commodified intimacy in marriages or, in other words, how border control functions to promote certain forms of intimacy and to prevent others. It matters, we suggest, to read these moments of “leaving” as defiance, rather than as mere reaction to the insecurity produced by neoliberalism. Defiance does not merely reject but also performs possibilities for other futures, if elsewhere. Especially when put in dialogue with each other, the women’s gestures of refusal in these three films pose important political questions about agency, labor, and exploitation in relationship to care work, sex work, and marriages for legal papers. How can we imagine sustaining intimacies, when intimacies are embedded in colonial thought and colonial histories that produce the racialized ideologies and economic conditions that promote sex tourism, feminized care work, and marriage migration? How do we discuss the unique vulnerabilities women face in these fields without resorting to a language of sex-negative victimhood? How do we avoid a false dichotomy between relationships embedded in a context

of commercialization or “convenience” and perceptions of romantic love as more real, particularly when codified in a state-approved heteronormative marriage and in border regimes?

The complicated political terrain at the intersection of commodified intimacy, sex, and sexualized and racialized representation in Europe (in our examples, in Spain and Belgium) drives the narrative tension in all three films. The precarious intimacies in these narratives involve figures whose economic marginality, insecure residence status, and exposure to physical violence are exacerbated by the vulnerability produced by their participation in commodified intimacies. However, aside from depicting the violence and vulnerability that commodified intimacies produce, the films also stage diverging forms of intimacy and love that exist in spite of violent scripts and create ways to think of alternatives, however momentary or imaginary. We look for solidarity in touch, friendship, and community and for solidarities that work against structures of power, dependence, and violent exclusion.

Thus, by reading for precarious intimacies in films about commodified intimacies, we highlight the precarity and vulnerability that these intimacies produce and contrast them with emerging communities of support, care, and even joy. Communities of love and support give the characters the strength to walk away from violence in spite of their precarious legal, social, and economic positions. Caring touch in the face of vulnerability—for, as Judith Butler has suggested, “violence is surely a touch of the worst order”—functions as resistance to the precarity produced by the intersection of the near-total commodification of care workers’ lives marked by racialized forms of exclusion under neoliberal work and immigration regimes.¹

Investigating acts of “walking away,” of refusal and defiance, in the face of the commodification of intimacy illustrates another way to think about one of the major topics of this book: the tension between isolation and community as a feature of the precarious politics of intimacies within and beyond Europe. Isolation in these films is often a physical and violent experience, manifest in walls and borders; in depictions of small villages, small apartments, and hotel rooms; and in the tightness of the public and intimate spaces in which people live—sometimes illegally, sometimes as commodities, seen as objects with exchange value. Gendered and racialized boundaries enforce both isolation and claustrophobic confinement. Against isolation and confinement, community and connection form unexpectedly. Moments of friendship and love offer glimpses into how things could be different (and how they should be different). Films may show moments of community and support for sex workers that shift the focus to their agency, depict moments of solidarity in difference, and, in doing so, emphasize the need for intimacies that engender spaces for resistance. In these moments, imagining sustaining alternative community remains a project oriented toward transformative, just, futures.

Sex Work and Care Work in Europe and Neoliberal Intimacies

The discussion [about globalized sex and care work], as always, got good and complicated because it is true that there are just too many things: (1) the history of the sexual division of labor and its present configuration; (2) the feminization of migratory flows and the “passing along of inequality,” (3) the legal framework which fixes the status of domestic work as subemployment and that of women as subalterns, (4) the content of this work: its temporal, spatial, subjective and other limits and (5) the fronts open for struggle.²

This statement by the Madrid-based research collective *Precarias a la Deriva* maps out a political discussion that is almost too complicated to tackle; to this list we must add the histories and realities of racialized sexualities and racialized labor. Narrative films such as those we analyze in this chapter present narratives that call for a careful study of agency, affect, and the politics of intimacy; but visual moments may also work at odds with narrative movement in significant ways. Further, we are interested in the imaginative work of cinema and of our interpretive practices vis-à-vis cinema, the possibilities for pointing to existing violence and imagining beyond it. Historical contexts, gender and racialized inequalities, shifting legal frameworks, and the understanding of sex and care work as temporary create varying conditions of precarity as well as new “fronts . . . for struggle,” to borrow the words of *Precarias a la Deriva*. The films we analyze create avenues for aesthetic intervention and demonstrate the limits of such intervention.

The precarious intimacies we describe in this chapter raise key questions about the complexities of conceptualizing sex and care work at a time when the valorization of “choice” and “agency” has become a way of obscuring systems of power and violence. In the words of Hester Baer: “Paradoxically, neoliberal policies create a situation of permanent insecurity that disproportionately affects minority groups, while at the same time neoliberal discourses of individual choice, flexibilization, and mobility offer unprecedented opportunities for destabilizing normative roles and eroding traditional social formations in ways that appear empowering.”³ Sex work often serves as the example par excellence of precarious labor, given the inherent insecurity of its conditions; even in cases where it is legal, few labor protections exist, and the work is generally irregular. In cases where the worker is also without secure residency status, the worker’s insecurity is exacerbated. Sex workers of color further negotiate a complex set of conditions in which they have already been hypersexualized in popular discourse, regardless of their work; in which they also are often assumed to be without agency, mere exploited victims of global prostitution; and in which their lack of access to residency or citizenship prohibits access to protections that might ameliorate their vulnerability to violence.

Partially due to these complicated politics of representation, Isolina Ballersteros observes that “films dealing with the . . . subject of prostitution, human trafficking, and the sex trade are in the minority” among fictional films depicting stories of migration.⁴ There are, however, a number of documentary films that explore sex trafficking. The more complex depictions in such films expose “a political double standard and a tragic irony” that, on the one hand, fosters fear of migrants and promotes tight border controls and, on the other hand, promotes the porosity of borders “to facilitate free flow of material and human commodities.”⁵ Neoliberalism, in other words, both stands in tension and collaborates with European border regimes in deeply gendered and racialized ways. Wendy Brown describes the dynamics of “neoliberal governance” as “processes that make individuals and other small units in workplaces responsible for themselves while binding them to the powers and project of the whole.”⁶ The three films about sex work and bodies as commodities that we analyze in this chapter depict the way in which neoliberalism complexly inflects intimate potentials for those who participate in sex work. Sex and care work and its varying relationship to governance are shown to isolate people while, at the same time, they bind them closely to institutions of power and control. Within this dynamic, the protagonists delineate spaces of intimacy; they generate close friendships and even communities of love and care that can construct spaces outside the commodification of intimacy. This is not to deny the ways in which love and care themselves function in commodified exchange as care work but rather to suggest that they cannot be entirely reduced to such commodification.

Sex work, care work, and domestic work compose an arena of migrant labor in high demand in Europe.⁷ This global gendering of migration, by which male and female migrant labor is geographically distributed in patterns, has been theorized by Arlie Hochschild as an extraction of emotional labor from south to north that follows patterns of colonialism while existing in a new relationship to notions of “choice.” Hochschild argues:

Women choose to migrate for domestic work. But they choose it because economic pressures all but coerce them to. The yawning gap between rich and poor countries is itself a form of coercion, pushing Third World mothers to seek work in the First for lack of options closer to home. But given the prevailing free market ideology, migration is viewed as a “personal choice.” The problems it causes we see as “personal problems.” But a global social logic lies behind them, and they are, in this sense, not simply “personal.”⁸

These patterns of gendered labor migration intersect with complex European border regimes.

Legally, sex work is regulated variously among European countries, and national regulation is also affected by the particular ways in which local

communities implement such regulation.⁹ At the European Union (EU) level, there is no mandate for regulation of sex work, which can, however, be addressed in discussions of migration. As a consequence, EU policy discussions around sex work are largely reduced to discussions of sex trafficking, leading to a frequent conflation of all migration of sex workers with sex trafficking.¹⁰ In general, whereas prostitution is legal and regulated in some European countries (for example, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and Denmark), it remains illegal in others (for example, in most Southeastern European countries such as Moldova, Croatia, and Albania). Other countries criminalize the buying of sex rather than offering of sex for sale (France, Iceland, and Sweden); and in yet other countries, the legal status of sex workers is unclear or simply not addressed in the law (Bulgaria and Spain). Although prostitution was legalized in Germany in 2002 in an effort to promote workers' rights and regularize the industry, various barriers have prohibited these effects (including officials who attempt to charge back taxes if the prostitutes register and brothel owners who refuse to issue contracts that would require payment into health care and social security funds).¹¹ The Netherlands legalized prostitution in 2000 and provided avenues for both business registration and labor protection. In Belgium, as was the case in the Netherlands prior to 2000, prostitution is illegal on the federal level but nevertheless tolerated in some cities.¹²

This brief (and certainly not comprehensive) sketch indicates that while some European countries have legalized sex work in an attempt to reduce the precarious positions occupied by the workers, anxieties over sex as marketable exchange continue to drive policy discussions and continue to position sex workers precariously. The films we examine describe distinct kinds of relationships of intimacy and exchange, located in a tension between understandings of sex and care workers as exploited and objectified and as more or less autonomous economic agents. Fear of the agency of the sex worker and of the currency of sex work are closely tied to xenophobic and racialized discourses around sex trafficking and prostitution as drawing unwanted migrants and racial others into Europe.¹³

Women involved in care work, including sex work, exist in a paradoxical situation vis-à-vis EU policies: even as the demand for domestic workers increases dramatically, the countries of the EU tend to ignore domestic work in recruitment policies as well as in legislation that seeks to regulate and regularize immigration.¹⁴ Visual culture participates in larger trends in which commodified intimacies are associated largely with Latin American women.¹⁵ At the same time, care work in all its forms often becomes the only available avenue for income for undocumented women workers, particularly those from Latin America.

These films must also be considered in light of the contemporary intrusions of the state into romantic, sexual, and legal intimacies that occur through the policing of marriages between citizens of EU countries and non-EU citizens

via laws that regulate so-called marriages of convenience and set up state definitions of acceptable intimacy. Belgium, for example, created new laws that defined marriages of convenience and declared them invalid in 1999, around the same time that many of the debates around sex work and legality were intensifying in Western Europe.¹⁶ Furthermore, those who come to Europe hoping to enter into a relationship that might secure their residency status and their economic position face ongoing vulnerabilities, as many countries have laws that would make it difficult to leave such a relationship. Precarious intimacies thus allow us to interrogate how state interventions into sex work and marriage—as well as legitimation of other forms of low-paid and irregular care work—are marked by racism and xenophobia.

Spain: Histories and Contexts

The first two films we discuss are Spanish productions that depict female Caribbean migrants as Spain's sexualized other. In the 1970s and early 1980s, Latin American refugees, arriving primarily from the Southern Cone as asylum seekers, were largely welcomed to Spain and seen as sharing Spanish cultural traditions.¹⁷ As the immigrant demographics changed with increased migration from Africa and as the EU began to "harmonize" immigration policies, attitudes toward later immigrants also changed.¹⁸ Questions around immigration did not really begin to appear on-screen until the early 1990s.¹⁹ Spanish films about migration in the 1990s and early twenty-first century attempted to counter racist media images and reflect an interest in stories about multicultural societies.²⁰ Most of these films, however, were directed by nonmigrant Spanish filmmakers, and, as pointed out by both Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Daniela Flesler, reveal more about Spanish fears about a perceived other than about the lives of migrants in Spain.²¹ Flesler further shows that specifically intercultural romances in Spanish films from the 1990s often draw a picture of a developing Spanish identity that defines itself against a cultural other. In such films, romantic relationships between "North African or African immigrants and Spaniards . . . consistently end in failure," as they often emphasize "Muslim men's difference" and "blame them and their alignment with their 'cultural traditions' for the failure of the romance."²² The Spanish films we examine in this chapter, *Flowers from Another World* and *Princesses*, were released in the late 1990s and the early twenty-first century, but they do not depict migrants from Sub-Saharan or North Africa.

Notably, the two Spanish films we discuss show Spaniards as rather culturally backward and contrast them not with North Africans or Muslims but with Caribbean others who are depicted as more urban and cosmopolitan than the Spanish people. This choice of characters evades the question of racism against African immigrants and places the emphasis on people from

the Caribbean, people who, as depicted in the films, could potentially lead Spain toward a more open and worldly society. This form of differential (or cultural) racism is not just a Spanish phenomenon; the creation of a hierarchy between imaginations of culturally helpful and culturally backward others is a key feature of European racisms.

Commodification, Friendship, Agency: *Flowers from Another World* (1999)

Flowers from Another World predates most of the other films we discuss in this book. Icíar Bollain's success as an actress, director, screenwriter, and producer places her as one of the most important figures in the rebounding of the Spanish film industry beginning in the 1990s.²³ Her second feature film, *Flowers from Another World*, earned the International Critics' Week Grand Prize at Cannes and a number of Spanish national film awards. The film depicts a rural community's attempt to attract women to counter the shortage of women in small farming towns at a time when rural areas were becoming increasingly depopulated in the wake of the rapid "modernization" that occurred after the end of the Franco period.²⁴ It was motivated by an actual "singles party" that happened in the late 1980s as well as inspired by the fact that marriages between rural Spanish men and Latin American and Asian immigrants were increasing.²⁵

The film is set in a small town in the central Spanish province of Guadalajara. It starts and ends with a busload of women arriving in the town for a singles party organized to help the men in town meet women. The story line focuses on three sets of characters: Marirrosi, a divorced nurse and Spanish national who falls in love with the gardener Alfonso; Patricia, an undocumented immigrant from the Dominican Republic with her two small children who meets Damián, a farmer who still lives with his mother; and Milady, a young Cuban woman who comes to Spain with Carmelo, one of the wealthier residents of the town. At the end, Milady leaves Carmelo to go live in a bigger city; Marirrosi, unable to adjust to small-town life, returns to Bilbao; and Patricia remains in the town with Damián.

The film depicts the complex situations of three women and their relationships as they negotiate their legal status, choice, sexual intimacy, care work, and love. Except for her relationship with Alfonso, Marirrosi remains isolated from her surroundings and the other women. Patricia enters her relationship with a clear agenda: she needs papers and a safe space for her two children to grow up. The children's father is Patricia's Dominican husband, but she keeps this previous relationship a secret from Damián, since she forged the divorce papers and is still sending money to her first husband. In contrast, Milady does not arrive in town via the singles bus; she met Carmelo in Cuba, where he regularly goes on vacation. Carmelo does not describe his

trips directly as sex tourism, yet he makes it clear to his friends that women in Cuba are eager to meet and please Spanish men, presumably in exchange for goods or money. Both Patricia and Milady voluntarily enter these relationships, and both are in precarious situations but for different reasons. The people in the town see Milady as an overly sexualized and flirty young Black woman and as “Carmelo’s woman.” At the end of the film, Milady leaves to escape the objectification and domestic violence she experiences in the small town. In contrast, Patricia, aware of the perception of her friend and the racist stereotypes about Caribbean women, casts herself as overly domestic and hardworking. She is a trained beautician who used to live in urban environments, and she tries to hide her trouble adjusting to rural life as a farmer.

As our discussion of the screen shot at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, the film’s complex narrative perspectives and depictions of precarious intimacies are embedded visually in long static shots of rural landscapes. Sometimes the camera slowly pans across the landscape as if to reflect a slow glance across the region and the town. The film is set in fall and winter; the landscape looks barren, brown, and gray, with muted green and rocky hills in the background. The landscape and nature shots are infused with symbolic meaning. The sequence during which Patricia’s daughter gazes at a herd of sheep—most of them white, with one or two black sheep scattered in the herd—for example, is mirrored when she and her little brother come running out of the schoolhouse, the only two Black children in what looks like a sea of white faces. Similarly symbolic, while they are talking in the greenhouse, Alfonso announces to Marirrosi for the first time that he is trying to grow African orchids. She asks him if he thinks they will grow here, and he answers that “anything can grow with care.” The strange connections the film creates between animals, plants, and the women new to the town may reveal how the women from the “outside” are seen as other and how they also uncomfortably, visually and symbolically, replicate an often racialized, patronizing European “care” for an other. The film’s imbuing of plants and animals with symbolic meaning to address the problems of the notion of a stranger illustrates a key tension between the film’s critique of racialized precarities in intimate migration and its participation in racist tropes.

Music echoes the representations of animals and nature to both eroticize and exoticize women of color while at the same time emphasizing their voice and their community. Diegetic music creates contrasts between the rural Spanish community and the Caribbean women. The visitors are welcomed to town with traditional Spanish music played in the village square. This dance facilitates many awkward first interactions between the visiting women and the men of the village. Later in the film, Patricia and Milady play Caribbean dance music in their kitchens as they cook and dance with a group of friends who are there visiting. Their music illustrates their isolation in the town but also the way in which they bring their own sense of community, which already exists in the larger cities of Spain, into this little town. Extradiegetic music,

however, is disjointed and eerie, often accompanied by landscape shots that contribute to a feeling of dissonance.

Visually, the film navigates a similar tension. While the color scheme of the film is gray and brown—also reflected in the rural winter landscape—the women arriving by bus wearing colorful dresses and, later, Milady arriving in her bright red, white, and blue leggings (the white stars against a blue field indicate an American rather than a Cuban flag) literally bring color into the town. Patricia adjusts her clothing quickly and appears to blend in, while Milady continues to stand out by wearing tight, brightly colored clubbing outfits and skintight leggings. Her dress exoticizes her, highlighting the objectifying gaze of the village inhabitants but also inviting the viewer to visually participate in it.

The intimacies in *Flowers from Another World* occupy intensely gendered spaces. The bar and convenience store of the town, where the men gather to watch sports and sometimes soft-core porn movies, to drink, and to gossip, is a male space—except for the white female bartender, who is suspicious of Milady from the beginning. This woman is juxtaposed with the male bar owner, who later allows Milady to help in the bar mainly because, as he states, she is attractive. For Milady, this introduction into masculinized space offers a welcome change from the domestic prison of Carmelo's house, but she quickly loses interest in serving as visual entertainment for the men in the bar. Carmelo's house, clearly bigger than most other houses in the village, is filled with furniture and gadgets Carmelo buys to display his wealth and with the hope of entertaining Milady. This hope is futile and simply highlights his desperate attempt to “domesticate” her. The streets of the town are narrow and dusty, and the domestic spaces in the film, mainly bedrooms and kitchens with low ceilings and small windows, reflect the narrowness of life in this rural town. Indeed, Patricia's ability to stay in the town seems partly linked to her ability to navigate between the domestic spaces of the home and the wide-open spaces of the fields.

Reading for precarious intimacy allows us to critically consider these visual and spatial tensions in relationship to the ways the characters are situated vis-à-vis sex work, sex tourism, care work, and border regimes. The tensions inherent in the precarious intimate relationships between white Spanish men and women of color are also inherent in the film's perspective, the racialized gaze of its camera.

Even before Milady arrives in town, the film depicts Carmelo's desire for her as desperate and embarrassing. Once she arrives, it becomes clear very quickly that she has no sexual interest in him and that his sexual advances and demands annoy her. *Flowers from Another World* includes only one sex scene between this couple, with both of them fully clothed, framed so that the key action is discreetly hidden behind Milady's back. Right after Milady enters Carmelo's house for the first time, she masturbates him by hand while sitting on top of him, quickly, as if to get it over with (see fig. 4.2). Her brief



Fig. 4.2. Milady performs a sexual service for Carmelo in their bedroom. Still from *Flowers from Another World* (1999).

moment of physical power and superiority over him does not last, but it demonstrates Milady's ability "to defy norms . . . as a source of power."²⁶ This scene shows Milady in a position of defiant control. She uses everything at her disposal to illustrate to him that his desire for her is desperate and pathetic. As their relationship continues, he tries to reassert his power over her by resorting to violence. After he beats her when she returns from a spontaneous, short trip to the beach—where she happily dances in a club—she begins to plot her escape. She looks at her bruised face in the mirror to check her injuries. This close-up of her face, staring into the camera, shows her as vulnerable but determined. Any attempts Carmelo makes from this moment on to confine Milady to domestic space, and thus prevent her from leaving, fail. From Carmelo's and the other white Spanish men's perspective, Milady is the immigrant other who is "both desired because she represents what is uncontrollable, especially in the context of potentially unleashing uninhibited lust, and feared because she cannot be controlled."²⁷ As the film's perspective shifts to the friendship emerging among the women of color as the primary affective force of the film, the men's perspective is revealed as deeply sexist and racist.

In contrast, sex between Damián and Patricia is tender, albeit awkward. In the only sex scene the films includes between these two, Patricia giggles and Damián worries that his mother will hear them. Covers drawn, in a dimly lit room, he climbs on top of her as the bed squeaks and creaks. Patricia, uncharacteristically loudly and defiantly, suggests that she does not care if his mother hears them. "Maybe she will go find a man and leave us alone. That would be nice," she giggles. At this moment, Patricia seems exceptionally playful as opposed to her usually subdued behavior vis-à-vis Damián.



Fig. 4.3. Patricia styles Milady's hair. Still from *Flowers from Another World* (1999).

The cold or awkward heterosexual sex scenes depict relationships of power and dependency; the precarious intimacies for which we read emphasize joy, compassion, and friendship between women of color. Patricia and Milady, the only women of color in the town, almost instantly form a close friendship. While the film depicts Milady's objectification and Patricia's dependence on Damián, the camera also occasionally participates in a racialized gaze when focusing on the female characters of color in the film. Yet it also captures the importance of the friendship that develops between the two women; visually and narratively, we argue, the film undermines Milady's objectification and Patricia's subordination not just by critically depicting forms of racialized and sexist oppression but by, at certain key narrative moments, shifting the affective focus to the bond between the women of color in the film.

These friendships offer support, but they also highlight the vulnerability of the characters' experiences in their domestic situations. As Milady and Patricia meet, Patricia appears protective and caring toward Milady; she styles Milady's hair (see fig. 4.3) and offers her emotional support. In exchange, Milady helps Patricia on the farm. This instant friendship stands in contrast to Patricia's interaction with the few white women the film shows, particularly the woman who works in the bar and convenience store in town, who is overtly racist. As their friendship evolves, Patricia and Milady go on car rides together, document their friendship by taking selfies, and share stories about their lives that they do not share with others in the village. The ease with which the two women interact stands in stark contrast to the stifling and oppressive atmosphere that dominates their interactions with the other characters.

Similarly, the film depicts a caring friendship between Patricia and her Dominican friends. When three of Patricia's friends from Madrid come to

visit, they joke about entering through the dirty barn and then ask Patricia about *Damián*. They laugh and tease each other about sex; they cook and dance together; they also point out that Patricia is always welcome to return to their community should she choose to. *Milady* later joins them and again, instant friendship and trust appear to form. This community is juxtaposed with the isolating relationships within the town.

Milady, who had just been beaten by *Carmelo* for spending a night away without telling him, tries to hide the real reason for the bruise, but to no avail. As they say good-bye, Patricia's oldest friend says, "This one cleans cow shit and that one gets attacked by cabinets. I don't like any of this." They all laugh, while the camera shows Patricia's mother-in-law, watching them from the window. As the friends drive away into the darkness, Patricia and *Milady* wave, then turn and, for a moment, look at each other without saying anything. Then they simply say "see you tomorrow" and walk back to their respective "homes." That rapid return to their relatively isolated lives highlights the importance of the evening of friendship and joy. It gives them the strength to return to their domestic lives but also emphasizes the fact that a different life is possible. It might even be a sort of moment that *Sara Ahmed* describes as "finding joy in killing joy": the joyful evening does not obscure the violence faced by *Milady* and Patricia but creates an intimate space in which it can be named and resisted.²⁸ The Madrid friends create a possible community in which solidarities can be formed, however temporary and shifting they might be.

Thus, these moments of connection to communities elsewhere, to joy and love, contrast and clash with (especially Patricia's) desires to conform to expectations, to fit in, and to be a "model immigrant" who, ultimately, helps white, rural, Spanish people overcome their racism and their population crisis. Solidarity between the women is a source of resilience and strength; for *Milady*, this means the strength to leave, and for Patricia this might mean the strength to stay, for the time being, backed by the knowledge that she can return to Madrid should she decide to leave *Damián*. The final scenes imply that Patricia's children find the safe (and potentially happy) childhood home she wants them to have. They play in the snow with the other children in the town and enjoy Christmas with extended family, and Patricia's daughter receives first communion in the town's church. Patricia's friends from Madrid attend the celebrations and make it into the family photo, as they compose the chosen family that offers her emotional support. Friendship, in this film, is a form of intimacy that uncovers the precarious situations in which the female characters find themselves and that empower them to make choices; these choices do not necessarily end their precarious situations, but they shift the focus onto their agency in the process. Choice and solidarity are shown to always exist within the parameters of neoliberal precarity.

Patricia, an urban woman of color, settles and stays in this white, rural town, but she also brings with her a connection to another kind of community



Fig. 4.4. Patricia (*second from left*) eats dinner with her husband Damián, her two children, and Damián's mother. Still from *Flowers from Another World* (1999).

not otherwise found in rural Spain. In this way, *Flowers from Another World* rewrites questions of belonging (rural, Spanish, European). The farmhouse family table has changed; the village has grown. The film also poses questions about the meaning of marriage, family, and parental care. The image in figure 4.4, for example, depicts a seemingly normative, patriarchal family table. Rather than reading this image as simply illustrating how a marriage based on commodified exchange can become normal (and gender normative), we also read it as showing that “normal” marriage is—and always was—a form of commodified exchange.²⁹ This reading is confirmed in the only open confrontation the film shows between Damián and Patricia, when Damián finds out about Patricia's first husband. In his accusations, Damián mentions that he cannot trust her anymore, that for all he knows, she might have worked as a prostitute in Madrid. She, in response, admits to him that she only married Damián so quickly to get legal residency papers for herself and her children. This conversation, which takes place in the fields of their farm, in the gray, wide-open landscape, is the only moment in the film where their arrangements are openly discussed in terms of prostitution. Their relationship, however, continues after this confrontation; the open conversation about their arrangement has actually stabilized their relationship. By staying in the village and with Damián, Patricia is contributing to a national project of sorts: to the population growth in rural, farming communities. Additionally, she inserts and asserts herself and her children as belonging in this town, as she claims ownership of land and a place in the household. In this sense, she breaks through the borders of whiteness erected in this small town and insists on her belonging.

Milady, in contrast, leaves her life with Carmelo and the promise of material (and potentially legal) “safety” and comfort in exchange for sex with Carmelo. A close-up of Milady pulling a door shut behind her concludes her story in the film. Milady refuses to become part of the future of this village, and she refuses to enter a stable domestic arrangement of exchange of sex for financial security and legal residency papers. Leaving Carmelo is not a choice of convenience, since Milady’s financial and legal situation might become more insecure, but her gesture of refusal rejects Carmelo’s violence and abuse, which are integral to his fantasies of who she should be for him. While not embedded in the domestic life and patriarchal structure of a small town like Patricia, at no point does Milady imply that she plans to leave Europe; her talk of the future always includes European urban centers. With determination and defiance, she imagines her future somewhere else in Europe, while her departure points to how intimate violence produces precarity within Europe.

Solidarity in Difference: *Princesses* (2005)

Princesses is a story of friendship between two sex workers in Madrid: Caye, from Spain, and Zulema, from the Dominican Republic, who has no legal residency status. *Princesses* is León de Aranoa’s fourth feature film and the first produced by his own production company. It was received positively in the press, widely seen as the third in a trilogy of social-critical (even neorealist) films that address disadvantaged groups, if sometimes viewed as unrealistic in their depictions.³⁰ León de Aranoa has since continued to direct and write scripts and has also published short stories, cartoons, and illustrations.

Similar to *Flowers from Another World* but released six years later, in 2005, *Princesses* shows prejudices that Spaniards have had specifically about Caribbean immigrants and illustrates the sexualized gaze on the Black, female, Caribbean, or Latin American body. This is a convention of representation that hypersexualizes migrants from certain countries and depicts other migrants as culturally and religiously different; narrative conflicts are often based on these conventions. Both depictions are familiar forms of racialization in a European colonial and postcolonial context.

The multifaceted intimacies of *Princesses* offer ways in which one can read this film as providing moments that question some of the sexualized depictions it perpetuates narratively and visually. Sex, physical proximity, and familial connection all exist largely without accompanying emotional intimacy in the film. Caye’s interactions with her family seem superficial and stifling. Zulema’s private apartment is time-shared with a young family from the Dominican Republic; yet because they suspect that she may use it for sex work, the family demands a strict separation—they do not ever want to see her. Because sex is work for Caye and Zulema, when they



Fig. 4.5. The T-shirt Zulema gives to Caye hangs on a clothesline. Still from *Princesses* (2005).

become physically intimate with partners rather than clients, they express how they struggle with an implicit connection to and disconnect from their work.

The friendship between Caye and Zulema makes sustained intimacy possible, in a connection that both reaches across national borders and defies conventional narratives of intimacy. Gutiérrez Rodríguez reads this intimacy in *Princesses* as a “minor intimacy” and as a manifestation of transculturation, as the “simultaneous possibility and impossibility of reciprocal cultural and social transformation.”³¹ The potential of transcultural transformation is interrupted by the fractures produced by worlds in which social contact between European citizens and undocumented migrants is common but always marked by the existence of legislation and policing that limit such contacts.³² We further suggest that this “minor intimacy” is a precarious intimacy: an intimacy that can raise the potential for solidarity and highlight the conditions of precarity that endanger such solidarities. The intimacy formed between the two women reveals the conditions under which that intimacy must ultimately fail; even so, touch between the two serves as defiant gesture working outside of this failure.

Contact between Caye and Zulema is initially characterized by their competition for clients, marked by Caye’s racist remarks to Zulema about “jungle behavior,” a term that Caye uses to describe nonwhite prostitutes. Caye’s desire for Zulema’s black T-shirt with the words “SEXY GIRL 69” printed in white on the back (see fig. 4.5) motivates the two women’s first encounter and, at the end of the film, when Zulema leaves Spain, she gives the shirt to Caye. Zulema has bought this shirt at the Latino markets, a space that she

shows Caye on a joint shopping spree. The scenes at the markets mark a space within Europe that is unfamiliar to Caye; the Latino neighborhoods and markets of Madrid are Zulema's space. It is in this space that their friendship begins to build. By being in a (to her) strange and foreign space, albeit in the heart of her capital city, Caye builds solidarity with Zulema, and, as Maria Van Liew observes, "it is the solidarity of mutual fascination and respect that leads them to new choices."³³

As their friendship, solidarity, and mutual support develop, Caye introduces Zulema to her family (who know nothing about how they earn their livelihood). Zulema checks in on Caye, and Caye takes care of Zulema after a violent attack by an abusive client who had claimed that he could help Zulema regularize her residency status. In contrast to the violent, abusive, and demeaning intimate encounters during their work, the touch between the two friends is gentle, safe, and caring; they hug and hold hands as they reach across tables and often walk arm in arm. Their touch opens up the possibility for defiance against the many forms of sexual, racial, and state violence that structure their relationship and the filmic narrative, violence that haunts the edges of the film via brief references to Zulema's residency status and, connected to that, her physical vulnerability and abuse.

Zulema becomes crucially important for Caye as a friend and confidante; in return, Caye helps Zulema after she suffers abuse and gives her money for her flight back home after she gets ill. The women do not receive any protection from policemen or other men, such as pimps or their boyfriends, who either cannot or will not "help." Most men in the film are either clueless (in the case of the boyfriends) or they are clients and, particularly in the case of the man who promises Zulema legal residency papers in exchange for abusive sex, abusers themselves. For sex workers without proper papers, the police pose a threat to their livelihood rather than embody a symbol of protection. As their friendship develops, for Caye, police raids begin to signify a threat to her friend's safety rather than a sign of the authorities protecting business for the white prostitutes.

Scenes of hair care in the film exemplify the way in which *Princesses* does not simply contrast intimate friendship with the precarities of legal and illegal sex work but complexly interweaves depictions of structural violence and of intimate touch that defies such violence. In *Flowers from Another World*, the fact that a small rural town in Spain does not have a hair salon for Black people is one of the reasons behind Patricia and Milady's happy bonding: Milady cannot find any professionals to style her hair. In contrast, *Princesses* shows an urban environment where Caye spends much time in a hair salon, and when Zulema leads Caye through the Latino area of Madrid, one sees plenty of beauty salons, boutiques, and cafés frequented by mainly Black customers.

The hair salon Caye frequents is the place where white Spanish prostitutes meet and gossip, where they observe all the prostitutes on the streets, and

where they openly express their racism against sex workers of color. Their discussions often revolve around their perceptions of the foreign (i.e., Black or Brown) prostitutes as a threat to their business. Diana Palardy summarizes their perception:

As the foreign prostitutes charge less than the Spaniards, they get more business from the Spanish clientele, who in turn develop a preference for more exotic styles and looks. This is clearly perceived as a threat to Spanish female identity, at least for this marginalized group of women. In this way, the Other conquers territory that was previously occupied by Spaniards and consequently disrupts the illusion of a stable, homogeneous society.³⁴

At the beginning of the film, the hair salon is therefore marked as an intimate, all-female, gathering space from which the white Spanish sex workers observe what they perceive as a takeover of the streets by others who threaten their livelihood.

Friendship between Zulema and Caye, however, is also mediated by hair. In Caye's apartment, Zulema braids Caye's hair (see fig. 4.6). The private hair care session, taking place in Caye's apartment, is a form of safe retreat from the racialized spaces of the city and of the commercialized hair salon. This complex moment of intimate touch during braiding is a poignant counterpart to the earlier moment in the film in which one of the hairdressers in the beauty salon refuses "on principle" to do "African braids" shortly before she calls the police to report the undocumented immigrants across the street (Zulema avoids arrest because Caye warns her). Zulema reaches across the racialized borders policed by the everyday actions of the hairdressers through Zulema's loving attention to Caye's hair. At the same time, Caye both reifies Zulema's exclusion from Europe and relocates those boundaries to the realm of fantasy when she declares Zulema to be "like a princess from another kingdom."

During the braiding, Caye launches into one of her many monologues in the film. She chats about various career paths she attempted, childhood memories, and princesses. Zulema answers with one-word or brief responses, smiling behind Caye's back as Caye explains that her clumsiness might be due to the fact that she is overly sensitive, just like a princess. Caye then comments that princesses are also supposedly so sensitive that they get sick when they are far away from their kingdom and even die from sadness. As she finishes this thought, the camera cuts back to Zulema who just says "finished," having completed braiding Caye's hair. In this statement, Caye compares both of them to, however different, sensitive princesses: Caye is the clumsy princess and Zulema, foreshadowing her illness and return home, is the princess away from her kingdom. While this comparison brings them closer together, it also clearly separates them as rather different kinds of princesses, a difference



Fig. 4.6. Zulema braids Caye's hair in Caye's apartment. Still from *Princesses* (2005).

left unacknowledged by Caye. This conversation takes place while they are connected through the touch of Zulema's hand on Caye's hair, even as Caye's back is turned. Again, these scenes emphasize their deep emotional connection and their simultaneous difference due to their unequal status in Spain.³⁵

Aside from the intimacy depicted in the braiding scene, Caye's braided hair subsequently triggers conversations about ethnic appropriation and sexualization. Palardy argues that in wearing the braids, Caye is wearing the guise of otherness and "simultaneously transforms into a source of desire and abjection."³⁶ While the film shows how Caribbean sex workers in Spain are subjected to both racialized desire and racist abjection, we also read the braiding scene and the following discussions among Caye's colleagues as attempts to construct multiethnic solidarities among sex workers. The braiding, once it is clear that other white women admire Caye's new style, then also happens in the hair salon that was exclusively visited by white prostitutes, the very space that was previously a white and racist space. Zulema, briefly accepted inside the salon as Caye's friend, braids the hair of some of the other white Spanish women while all peer out through the window to observe the street prostitution scene (see fig. 4.7), accompanied by conversations that again reify Zulema's status as other as well as her tentative and temporary inclusion. Thus, as often is the case throughout the film, the defiant gestures present in touch run against the representations taking place in words and in narrative movement.

Palardy reads Caye's braids and the braiding scene inside the hair salon as a form of cultural appropriation by white Spanish prostitutes with the intent of making themselves more attractive to clients:



Fig. 4.7. Zulema braids a white woman's hair as a white stylist looks on in the hair salon. Still from *Princesses* (2005).

Initially, the braids are associated with conflicts between the two groups of prostitutes because they represent both the Spanish prostitutes' disgust with foreigners and the Spanish men's lust for them. The braids later become associated with economic opportunism, as the Spanish prostitutes' conscious efforts towards self-exoticization help them to obtain more clientele.³⁷

We suggest that both might simultaneously be true: the acceptance of braiding relies partially on cultural appropriation and economic opportunism, but the touch through braiding illustrates how Caye and Zulema's close friendship becomes a transformative force and a new solidarity. One could read Zulema, thus, as a simple device to help Caye—and potentially other white women—overcome their intense racism and their competitive spirit by developing a new business model based on cultural appropriation. The dynamic of the friendship between the two women, however, suggests a more complicated picture: Caye is increasingly emotionally reliant on Zulema, and Zulema, most clearly in the second half of the film, needs Caye's help. Perhaps more importantly, braiding allows Zulema to demonstrate access to knowledge that the white women do not have, and to insist on the normalization of her presence in white spaces. Their emotional interdependency is noteworthy in that it is based on a sustaining, intimate friendship, not on romance or economic competition.

Ultimately, though, in spite of this friendship, the film shows the conditions under which their intimacy must fail. The question of agency, which forms the central narrative in *Flowers from Another World*, is the final

question in *Princesses*. Before Zulema leaves Spain, she gives the “SEXY GIRL” T-shirt to Caye. This clothing exchange, similar to the scene we described in chapter 2 in the film *Fraulein*, serves as a key symbol for intimate connection, a connection that will remain even after the two women have separated: Zulema’s shirt from the Latino market, the item of clothing that started their friendship, stays with Caye in Spain.³⁸ In their final embrace, the camera focuses on Zulema’s face as she gently hugs Caye and strokes her hair, which hangs over the writing on the back of Caye’s shirt. After Zulema has passed through the security gates of the airport, Caye tells two surprised officers that Zulema left because she wanted to, not because she was kicked out. This encounter is remarkable in the context of European cinema representing relationships between citizens and undocumented residents precisely because there has been no contact between Zulema and police or immigration officials. Caye emphasizes Zulema’s agency as a defiant gesture against authority and (male) control over their lives. This emphasis stands in tension with Caye’s dominant voice and perspective in the film. Furthermore, the exchange between Caye and the border officers takes place after Zulema has already gone through the gate; it is mainly important to Caye, as it appears to give her a sense of continued connection to Zulema as well as the confidence in her own ability to make choices. For Zulema, agency means refusing to stay and, similar to Milady, Zulema turns her back on a situation of dependence and abuse. Throughout the film, though, both Caye and Zulema are also depicted as having made the conscious decision to work as prostitutes and, in the case of Zulema, to leave her son and work in Spain.

This final scene again stresses the tension between, on the one hand, taking a perspective that centers on the European subject who relies on the other to enable her own progress, and, on the other hand, depicting a sense of solidarity, friendship, and intimacy between Caye and Zulema that defies (male) control over their bodies and social policing, however tentatively and temporarily. Similar to *Flowers from Another World*, abusers do not prevail, although they are also not really challenged for their abuse. *Princesses* shows sex work as securely embedded in European hierarchies of gender, race, and economic exploitation. The legal precarity of racialized sex workers is thus uncovered as part of a system of neoliberal sexual exploitation. But rather than leaving the sex workers voiceless and victimized, the film develops narratives that allow for moments of defiance born out of genuine, albeit short-lived, friendship. Caye, learning from Zulema’s defiant departure, challenges Europe’s borders by acknowledging Zulema’s challenge. She thus recognizes their shared vulnerability in the context of sex work as well as their different positioning in relationship to European border regimes. Their precarious intimacy highlights what Van Liew calls “international inequalities and global hierarchies of power that disfavor them in different ways” and thus enables a solidarity in difference.³⁹

**Commodification and Isolation:
Lorna's Silence (2008)**

While Spain is often seen as existing on the margins of the EU, our third film of this chapter, *Lorna's Silence*, is set in Belgium, a country that occupies a particular place at the heart of the EU as part of the original European Community founding countries and as a de facto capital that hosts the major EU institutions. “Securely” located in the northern part of central Europe, it is only more recently—after the March 2016 attacks in Brussels—that Belgium also has become the center of discussions about terrorism and safety in European cities. Instead, at the time of the film’s production (and its setting), fears related to this part of the EU were often connected to a fear of the new Eastern European countries added from the eastern expansions in 2004 and 2008, often expressed in fears of sex trafficking.⁴⁰ This dark and formally experimental film tells complex stories of the economy of arranged marriages in exchange for legal papers, locating such exchange in a continuum of care and sex work. In contrast to the first two films we have discussed, *Lorna's Silence* is an experimental film that uses what Bert Cardullo calls a “distant, static camera” to create suggestive imagery and metaphoric meanings.⁴¹ The story is highly dramatic, but the tone of the film is understated. The film voices the potentially most radical, albeit more difficult to decipher, critiques of—not only or specifically European—economies of commodified intimacy.

Lorna's Silence follows the complicated story of Lorna, an Albanian woman living in Liège, Belgium. The film won best screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival in 2008 and addresses themes common in films by the Dardenne brothers such as despair, hope, and belief.⁴² Barbara Menzel argues that in the films of the Dardenne brothers, specifically in *Two Days, One Night* (*Deux jours, une nuit*; Belgium, 2014), the “precarious working conditions” of neoliberal capitalism are depicted through “a dispersed workforce with a range of time-limited contracts, of diverse genders and ethnicities, and in aspirational middle-class settings.”⁴³ The prevalence of these themes in the Dardenne brothers’ films has inspired scholars and critics to focus on questions of morality and ethics.⁴⁴ Joseph Mai, for example, reads *Lorna's Silence* from the perspective of Levinasian ethics, arguing that Lorna’s developing moral consciousness and the subsequent phantom pregnancy demonstrate an alignment with the “possession by another” necessary for ethical engagement from the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas’s perspective.⁴⁵ Menzel reads the Dardenne brothers’ film *Two Days, One Night* as “a gesture of resistance” against precarious work conditions.⁴⁶ Lauren Berlant, in turn, examines their films of the late 1990s to explore how “the impersonal pulses of capitalist exchange have had devastating personal, including physical, effects.”⁴⁷ Such an exchange in *Lorna's Silence* revolves primarily around the commodification of Lorna’s body within and outside of her intimate relationships. Our reading for precarious intimacies in *Lorna's Silence* allows us to

highlight the brief moments of touch and connection that work outside this commodification of sex and intimacy.

The eponymous main character of *Lorna's Silence* has agreed to a marriage with a drug addict, Claudy, to legally reside in Belgium. Desperate to find ways to build her life and open a snack bar with her Albanian boyfriend Sokol, Lorna agrees to another marriage with a Russian (always called simply "The Russian" in the film) who will pay a lot of money in exchange. To enable the marriage, the deal's broker, Fabio, plans to murder Claudy and make his death appear to be a drug overdose.

Lorna, however, has begun to care for Claudy and support him in his struggles to get and stay clean, imbuing both of these marginalized characters with a sense of humanity.⁴⁸ She asks for some more time so that she can file for divorce instead of participating in an orchestrated murder. To speed up the divorce process, she hurts herself and claims that Claudy is physically abusive.⁴⁹ At the same time as she fakes abuse, Claudy and Lorna start to develop a sexual attraction to each other and, one night, make love. The love-making scene emphasizes the vulnerability of their bodies in tender embrace.

The next day, Claudy is murdered. Lorna is emotionally deeply affected by Claudy's death. After fainting and feeling ill, Lorna claims to be pregnant with Claudy's child. Fabio pressures her to have an abortion, but she refuses. Since her (phantom) pregnancy means the deal with "The Russian" is off, Fabio demands the return of the money and sends her off with a man who is supposed to return her to Albania. This tense scene suggests that he was, in fact, charged with disposing of Lorna, whatever that may entail. Realizing this, Lorna escapes from the car, runs into the forest, and breaks into a hut. There, she promises her imagined unborn child that she will keep him or her safe.

Based on this quick description of a complex narrative, it is clear that loving intimacy in this film is brief and, in the end, exists only in Lorna's imaginary love for her unborn child. The majority of the film focuses on the violence of debt, economic dealmaking, and exchange.⁵⁰ The film begins with a close-up shot of money being deposited into a bank for Lorna's snack bar (see fig. 4.8). Throughout the film, men treat Lorna's body as a commodity to be exchanged and traded, as when she agrees to the scheme to marry "The Russian" (see fig. 4.9). In fact, the film often leaves us, Mai points out, "to encounter Lorna solely in the context of the scheme, in which others' lives, even her own, are converted into money."⁵¹ Due to her own precarious position and her hope for a better life in the future, Lorna at first willingly participates in these exchanges, but she seems to carefully guard secrets. The title references her silence, as seen in the many moments in the film when she does not speak, does not reveal her emotions or her agenda. She sometimes expresses her objections and defies some of the plans that others make for her, but it is not until the very end—and through her imagined pregnancy—that Lorna is able to escape.



Fig. 4.8. Lorna deposits money into the bank. Still from *Lorna's Silence* (2008).



Fig. 4.9. Lorna agrees to the marriage bargain. Still from *Lorna's Silence* (2008).

Lorna's Silence, however, is a radical film in that any attempts to create a future based on financial planning and imagined stability within existing national and EU political and social structures fail. The stark critique of neo-liberal capitalism, as Martin O'Shaughnessy argues, lies in showing “how personal ties, precisely because they are not entirely subsumed within instrumental logics, can be powerful mechanisms for exercising evaluation and producing conformity.”⁵² The bank from the introductory shots, for example, appears again in a later scene when Lorna, after imagining her pregnancy,



Fig. 4.10. Passionate intimacy between Lorna and Claudy is the only form of gentle touch throughout the story. Still from *Lorna's Silence* (2008).

wants to open an account for her unborn baby and save money for “him.” This attempt illustrates how she tries to hold on to the hope of stability based on long-term financial planning, which stands in stark contrast with her lived reality, wherein continuous legal and financial precarity create the conditions for ongoing exploitation. The bank clerk, however, tells her that one cannot open an account for a person not yet born. Such a path to stability, or to “a less-bad bad life” that Berlant sees expressed in the Dardenne brothers’ other films, is not accessible to Lorna.⁵³

Visually, the film is and remains dark throughout and often frames Lorna in tight, confined spaces. The camera shows Lorna as isolated, and close-ups of her body create a sense of loneliness. Often doors, tables, or window frames divide people on-screen, creating a sense of isolation. Lorna does not have a community or any friends she could confide in. The frequent close-ups of Lorna’s body visualize her objectification: Lorna in her underwear and in her nightgown, in the shower, at the doctor’s office, and as she exposes her skin to the eyes of others. Her body appears vulnerable and, after she fakes her abuse, broken. Brief moments of gentle and caring touch in the film contrast with how the bodies of the female migrant and of the drug addict function as commodities. The only form of gentle and mutual touch takes place between Lorna and Claudy, who have the two most vulnerable and abused bodies (see fig. 4.10). Even before they make love, her attempts to protect Claudy are against her supposed self-interest. When Lorna has sex with Claudy, their touch defies the commodified intimacies that dominate the film. Emotional attachment, symbolized in her imagined pregnancy, allows her to continue to defy the commodification of her body and her desires.

Lorna's thought of pregnancy enables her to create an "us" based on her intimate connection to Claudy, a connection realized through touch.⁵⁴ After the brief moments of loving and then passionate, sexual intimacy with Claudy, Lorna asserts autonomy over her body—an autonomy that is oriented toward an imagined future. Lying down at the doctor's office for the exam to confirm and date the pregnancy, and, ultimately, to plan the termination of the pregnancy, Lorna suddenly jumps up and hugs the doctor. This is an awkward and unexpected display of affection, but narratively, this is the moment when Lorna's relationship to her body's exchange is transformed as she decides against being examined and refuses to continue to be a commodity. The baby Lorna imagines growing inside her body is a symbol of her determination to imagine a future that exists away from the exchange of bodies, residency papers, and money.

Not even her final escape, however, is visualized in a way that suggests hope. The final imagery of the film is eerie and strange. Lorna pretends that she has to go to the bathroom to escape the car and its driver. When Lorna crouches down in the bushes on the side of the road (see fig. 4.11), she talks to her imaginary baby and whispers, "They want to kill us; I will protect you." She picks up a stone, gets back into the car, hits the driver over the head, and runs off into the dense forest. Freed from her physical dependence, Lorna is isolated and completely marginalized, removed from the economy of the European commodification market in which she had participated. In the forest, away from any form of human infrastructure or community, Lorna can neither be a temporary commodity for exchange nor participate in any long-term financial planning. This eerie space at the end of the film resembles a setting of a dark fairy tale, imaginary and unsettling, a space of momentary "transcendence," "where the impossible new beginning with her child can take place, at least momentarily," and where "Lorna begins being otherwise."⁵⁵ The music added to this scene, a rarity for the films of the Dardenne brothers, emphasizes, in contrast to the rest of the film, that this space remains imaginary and momentary; as Dillet and Puri point out, "there is no real future for Lorna outside this moment."⁵⁶

In that sense, *Lorna's Silence* is a more radical film than previous Dardenne brothers' films, such as *The Promise* (*La promesse*; Belgium, 1996) or *Rosetta* (Belgium, 1999), two films Berlant explores as "engender[ing] new affective practices" within "the productive instabilities of the contemporary capitalist economy."⁵⁷ *Lorna's Silence*, too, is a film about "understanding the difficulty of unlearning attachments to regimes of injustice" and about the power of the "normative promise of intimacy," as Berlant observes. However, none of these attachments or promises materialize for Lorna; she does not conform to regimes of injustice or normative intimacies, nor does the film suggest any way for Lorna to find a sustaining space outside of these systems of exchange.⁵⁸ Her precarious intimacies are situated at a complex nexus of



Fig. 4.11. Lorna plans her escape. Still from *Lorna's Silence* (2008).

power: as an Albanian woman who negotiates marriages for monetary gain and whose challenge to Albanian “traffickers” places her life in danger, she fulfills popular and demonized tropes of the trafficked woman from Eastern Europe or the woman entering into a marriage “of convenience.” Her willing engagement in the various exchanges confuses that trope, while her withdrawal into an imagined intimacy, rather than seeking recourse from national or EU institutions, emphasizes the ways in which “Europe” produces precarity.

Lorna, we argue, remains an ambivalent figure throughout the film. She is defiant but also melancholy, introverted, and often silent. Lorna’s longing for a different life only exists in the imagination. For the majority of the film, structures of violence and exclusion trap Lorna in narrow, dark, and dangerous city spaces, spaces of surveillance and mistrust. The spaces of “illegality” and of insecure residency work for and within European neoliberal economies. The ending, however unrealistically, allows Lorna to imagine beyond the market economy that has saturated European life in late capitalism. She escapes commodification only by leaving behind community and society altogether, and she finds this space of escape only in the mythical, imaginary space of a different kind of familial bond and a hidden life in a forest hut.

Lorna's Silence, similar to *Flowers from Another World* and *Princesses*, builds narrative tension based on fear for the safety of the female migrant’s body and fear of the forms of violence she might face. Similarly to the main characters in the other two films, Lorna also, at least at first, participates in her body’s commodification and appears to hope that this participation might lead to a more autonomous life in the future. However, for Lorna, a

future of autonomy over her body can only be imagined outside any form or social context or civilization. Lacking any intimate connection other than with the imagined child, Lorna's radical isolation only highlights the need for intimacies that can produce spaces for resistance. There appears to be no future space for Lorna within the social economy of the European city.

Resisting Racialized Economies of Intimacy

The three films of this chapter complicate depictions of the entanglements of European regimes with sex work, commodification, race, and legal status. These films write and then rewrite conventional narratives of sex and intimacy, of the cinematic tropes of prostitutes who surprisingly find love, or of an unexpected love story emerging from an arranged marriage or marriage of convenience. The three films resist such narratives of romantic love and tell stories of sex, affection, care, and marriage as commodities in another way: as complex and political stories of precarious intimacy.

Affective labor performed in sex and care work, especially by nonwhite migrant characters in Europe, creates a category of nonbelonging that is unique: while bodies become commodified in the European market and workers are often legal sex workers, their status, motives, and motivations are deemed dubious. This dubiousness is racialized differently, for example, for Eastern European, Latin or Caribbean, or African women and men. The idea that the other enters Europe in an attempt to marry white Europeans and stay illustrates this kind of dubiousness but also shows how being rendered dubious does not necessarily enable social or political transgression. On the contrary, the films show that being seen as suspicious functions as a key factor in the racialized economy of neoliberalism. The assumptions of "dubious motivations" make people vulnerable to exploitation, and their precarious status forces them to make arrangements—or choices—that reinforce their state of insecurity. Sex and commodification of bodies as economic exchange, in these films, is gendered, sexualized, racialized, and driven by global mobility, and neoliberal governmentality attempts to control the women's bodies and their labor. However, the films we discuss show moments where, in spite of these economies, intimacies develop that run counter to determined paths. The intimacies in these films—as community between women of color in *Flowers from Another World*, as friendship between a white and a Caribbean prostitute in *Princesses*, and as imagined familial bonds and escape into nature in *Lorna's Silence*—can neither be written into European forms of intimacy and belonging nor be controlled by institutionalized power. They describe acts of refusal, agency, and determination oriented toward a different future. *Flowers from Another World* shows the way in which such intimacies can undermine European social, domestic, and sexual economies; in *Princesses*, friendship between two prostitutes can defy, however momentarily,

the commodification of women's bodies, but it cannot last; and in *Lorna's Silence*, alternative forms of intimacies can only be imagined entirely outside the structures of social hierarchies and conventions. Aesthetically, the films embed these shifting meanings of intimacy in narratives about belonging and exclusion, visually represented in the desolate countryside of Spain, in the urban spaces of street prostitution in Madrid, and in the dark spaces of illegality and crime in Brussels. This aesthetic also speaks to the discomfort we address in this chapter's three films: while the exchange of sex, care, or affection for money, safety, or papers is often highlighted, the way in which sustaining touch, (possibly) love, race, and racist and sexist assumptions play into these exchanges offers a more complex picture that uncovers the paradoxical workings of Europe.

Precarious intimacies, as a reading strategy, enable a shift in perspective that reveals the multiple meanings of intimacy in these films: sexual intimacy as commodity clashes with the refusal of touch and with the intimacy of community. When put in conversation with one another, these three stories of prostitution, marriage, and sex as global commodity, in the broadest sense, negotiate intimate relationships, physical vulnerability, and a search for self-determination. The films employ precarious intimacies to expose political double standards that inhere in border policies as well as imaginations of immigrants. European borders are both highly restrictive and porous, ever-transforming, and differentially accessible by certain groups and for certain commodities. In this context, the act of walking away that we highlighted at the start of this chapter is an assertion of agency but not an escape from precarity. For sex and care workers, the refusal to engage in touch is an act of defiance against the precarious commodification of their care and affection; but the characters in the films we examined who choose to leave or escape walk toward isolation and economic insecurity. The "choices" offered up to them are so limited that they destroy any fantasy of Europe as a space of free movement, gender equality, and social welfare. The other key act of defiance lies precisely in the touch, connection, and even solidarity between friends and in the attachments the characters form in spite of the racist and sexist exclusions they experience. Acts of leaving and moments of forming connections and community delineate the tension within which the characters in these films try to carve out spaces of resistance.

The precarity lies both in their economic and physical insecurity and in their "freedom" to choose, be it to move, leave, marry, or hide. To return to Isabell Lorey, in the neoliberal state, "freedom is not principally limited by the state, the state does not principally fight against insecurity, but rather both become the ideological precondition for governmental precarization."⁵⁹ The films discussed in this chapter thus illustrate the paradoxical workings of neoliberalism that delineate the experience of economic vulnerability and produce the potential for new forms of resistance and transformation.⁶⁰ They

insist on the capacity—and necessity—for new or different spaces of social connection and community to emerge. Such spaces, however, can only be read beyond the narrative as they are not (yet) written or actualized: they are temporary, fleeting, and—as the three films maintain, within the narrative logic of European spaces of precarity—cannot (yet) last.

Chapter 5



White Fragility and the White Gaze

Race, Gender, and Neoliberalism

In a scene in the 2013 German documentary *Land in Sight* (*Land in Sicht*; dir. Judith Keil and Antje Kruska), the asylum seeker, Brian, acquiesces to his friends' urging and visits a bar seemingly set up for African men to meet German women (see fig. 5.1); his claim for asylum having been rejected twice, a marriage seems to be his only path to legal residency in Germany. This part of the scene in the bar resembles scenes in the Austrian film *Paradise: Love* (*Paradies Liebe*; dir. Ulrich Seidl, Austria/Germany/France, 2012), a film about central European women who travel to African countries (in this case, Kenya) as sex tourists. There, too, white European women meet Black men in bars, at parties, or on the beach (see fig. 5.2). *Land in Sight*, however, focuses its camera exclusively on Brian as he looks around uncomfortably, only to leave the bar by himself, rejecting the idea of exchanging sex for legal papers as a form of prostitution. The film emphasizes Brian's reactions, while the camera shies away from showing the women in the bar. Brian refuses to pursue an exchange of intimacy for the possibility of access to legal papers, and, as he confides to a friend, insists on the importance of feelings for any marriage. Brian's refusal to offer himself up for marriage simply in the hope of accessing legal residency simultaneously complicates and solidifies the cliché of younger African men who are often depicted as "preying" on older white women—portrayed as unattractive—by exchanging sex for legal papers.

While *Land in Sight* focuses on Brian's rejection of a form of commodified intimacy, *Paradise: Love* revolves around the emotional lives of characters who participate in an exchange of sex for money. Whereas Brian insists that sexual intimacy as well as marriage need to be based on love and affection, in *Paradise: Love*, Black men fake affection to uphold the white women's fantasy that this exchange is rooted in mutual affection and desire. Kenyan men and white, female European sex tourists "date" for a few days—or even for the time of the women's stay—and there is no agreed-upon price. Eventually the men in the film ask the women for help with medical expenses for family



Fig. 5.1. Brian ponders finding a potential marriage partner in the bar. Still from *Land in Sight* (2013).



Fig. 5.2. Two European tourists chat with the local bartender at a beach bar in Kenya. Still from *Paradise: Love* (2012).

members, support for local schools, or the like, to maintain the illusion that the money is not a payment for sex.

The starkest contrast between the two films and what sets the tone for this chapter, however, is not the fact that Brian rejects what he describes as prostituting himself but rather the way in which the films engage the racialized and sexualized gaze. The camera in *Land in Sight* follows Brian's gaze and refuses to objectify and sexualize Brian's body and the bodies of the women;

Paradise: Love enhances viewers' discomfort through the way the camera follows the women's gazes—not just their desiring gaze on the bodies of Black men but also the critical gaze on their own bodies as, potentially, undesirable to men. *Paradise: Love* thus uncomfortably highlights intersections between structural racist and misogynist violence and sexual intimacy.

We juxtapose these two examples precisely because the scene from *Land in Sight* provides a brief, unusual contrast to the depictions we analyze in this chapter. *Paradise: Love, Samba* (dir. Olivier Nakache and Éric Toledano, France, 2014), and *Color of the Ocean (Die Farbe des Ozeans)* (dir. Maggie Peren, Germany/Spain; 2011) depict interactions or relationships between white European women and Black African men. The politics of intimacy play out in different ways in these three films, but the films share a heteronormative, racialized, gendered gaze. They largely replicate racist tropes of dangerous Black sexuality manifest here in the gaze at the white, female body; the objectifying gaze of the white woman at the Brown or Black body also remains “the imperial gaze—the look that seeks to dominate, subjugate, and colonize.”¹ Intimacies between the white women and men of color in this set of films do not function to challenge the racialization of precarity; indeed, they may well replicate it. Even at the moments when these films seek to offer up a critical perspective on the violence of neoliberalism and its totalizing market logic that commodifies all areas of life—including bodies and intimacies—the intimacies that animate these critical perspectives remain largely marked by the gendered dynamics of misogynist or imperialist gazes. We rely on the still-useful distinction here that E. Ann Kaplan makes between the look as a mutual process, moving from curiosity (which remains embedded in power, however), on the one hand, and the gaze as a one-way vision, on the other hand.² By analyzing these coexisting gazes, we trace how the politics of whiteness in these films—specifically white femininity—construct intimacies that are deeply racialized and sexualized. White women, in the films we discuss here, are the primary emotional focus. Their precarious relationships to intimacy, often shown as resulting from internalized sexism, stress, or both, turn the focus to white women as (emotional) victims of capitalist modernity, thus whitewashing the dynamic of colonialist exploitation. The Black, mostly male, characters in these films thus become tools to expose and perpetuate white fragility. Reading for precarious intimacies here, therefore, does not open any spaces for community, solidarity, and connection outside the racialized gaze; on the contrary, it exposes the gendered dynamic of racism. Our readings attempt to disrupt these dynamics.

Our analysis of whiteness as a form of racialization is indebted to scholars in the field of critical race studies. In Europe, Black European feminist scholar-activists were and are on the forefront of the critical theorization of whiteness in the European context (for example, Hazel Carby, Sara Ahmed, Fatima El-Tayeb, Gloria Wekker, Peggy Piesche, Maisha Eggers). As Ahmed asserts, whiteness is an “ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up’ space.”³ Whiteness

works as a social structure and a set of somatic norms that allows some bodies to be more at home in the world than others and some bodies to move in the world more easily than others.⁴

In all three films we analyze in this chapter, moments of touching skins on film—of skin contact and sex—serve to illustrate the longing of white female characters for fulfillment, for escape, for tenderness, and for love. Skin, defined by Ahmed and Jackie Stacey as the “fleshy interface between bodies and worlds,” the “boundary object,” and the “site of exposure and connectedness,” has a cultural-political function here.⁵ The white female characters in these films, their gaze replicated by the camera’s perspective, fetishize black skin and the Black, male body as a way to seek attachment to something beyond the limited interactions offered by their everyday lives.⁶ The infusion of these desired relationships with power and the racialized gaze are papered over as the narratives revolve around white women’s search for love, meaning, and compassion. The way in which these films generate a “haptic visuality”—that is, an emotionally and affectively charged gaze of the spectator that “touches” objects on screen—relies on an affective identification between the viewers and the white female characters on screen.⁷ Applied to these films, reading for precarious intimacies means to question the emotional charges of white femininity that these films engender and to decenter their Eurocentric perspective by highlighting the violence these models of intimacy produce and reproduce.

Whiteness, Colonialism, and Neoliberalism

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, several historians and cultural studies scholars have explored the racialized politics of intimacy under colonial rule.⁸ As Lisa Lowe points out, colonial formations of violence and power were created in tandem with the production of notions of intimacy. Such notions of intimacy relied on a sense of interiority that could be possessed by a liberal subject, viewed as accessible only to the white subjects of Europe and North America.⁹ The intimacies of four continents of Lowe’s title, embedded in racialized violent colonial relationships, were sublated by the private notion of intimacy that racialized non-European populations, in part through a distancing from norms of family and reproduction as well as exclusion from processes of “freedom” and “progress.”¹⁰ As Lowe explains, racialized narratives prohibit the legibility of “emergent” intimacies that consist of the “implied but less visible forms of alliance, affinity, and society among variously colonized peoples beyond the metropolitan national center.”¹¹ Progress is often seen instead as the result of a helping hand extended by the global north, whether in the form of charity, enlightenment, or education.¹² Similarly, the legacies of colonialism include the pathologization of Black family structures and the romanticization and legitimation of nuclear family structures formed under capitalism.¹³

The concept of “white fragility,” coined by Robin DiAngelo, finds an application here since white women’s tears or, more generally, white women’s emotional suffering and vulnerability in these films are privileged over critical reflections about racism, whiteness, and power.¹⁴ DiAngelo thinks of white fragility as a “lack of racial stamina” in the face of a challenge to white privilege, a fragility that exists because white people are not forced to confront the structures that produce racisms and white privilege. Although some of the films we analyze were possibly intended as depictions of related struggles against racism and sexism, the way in which the films privilege empathy for the fate of the white female characters stands in the way of addressing the persisting violence of racism. The white female characters desire intimacy, sexual and otherwise, with Black men; however, they are depicted as hurt or as getting hurt in the process, which in turn (re)focuses the narrative on their struggles. White fragility—a fragility depicted as enhanced by the pressures of neoliberalism—does not completely erase moments in these films that show the complexity of the intersections of racism, sexism, and economic and emotional exploitation. The films, however, focus the potential critique of the mutual imbrication of sexism and racism in the exploitations that occur as a consequence of neoliberal economies on white women. This focus obscures potential analysis of how sexism and racism also extend and rely on colonial violence. Black bodies, in this case male, are appropriated as tools to expose and, often just temporarily, cure the fragility of whiteness and offer relief from the pressures of (white, male-dominated) European societies.¹⁵

Ultimately the white women of these films require emotional “rescue” from social isolation and emotional confusion in encounters with Black African men. Wendy Brown has described the “neoliberal homo oeconomicus” as taking “its shape as human capital seeking to strengthen its competitive positioning and appreciate its value, rather than as a figure of exchange or interest.”¹⁶ The demand of self-optimization—of making oneself attractive to and on the market—is also a demand on the female body, which these women hope to escape on their sex vacations as rescuers of Black men or in their relationships with men who are legally excluded from participating in European economies. At the moment that these white characters seek to escape the “competitive positioning” of their bodies, they participate in complex forms of colonialist exploitation of the other—a form of exploitation upon which white Europe is founded. If neoliberalism functions as a contradictory force that prescribes gender norms but also destabilizes them, as Hester Baer suggests, in these films moments of destabilization feed back into normative notions of femininity and whiteness.¹⁷

We begin with the Austrian film *Paradise: Love* that we mentioned at the start of this chapter, a film about white European women who travel to Kenya as sex tourists. The central tensions of the film are negotiations of intimacy and desire, money, age, and privilege. The way in which *Paradise: Love* portrays white women as emotionally vulnerable and hurt in this economic

exchange exposes the internalized sexism of white women but privileges their struggles over the racialized sexual exploitation of Kenyan men. This narrative drive is mirrored, albeit in rather different kinds of stories with different outcomes, in two films that depict white European women who help Black male migrants as they struggle for legal status in or legal entry into Europe: the French film *Samba* and the German film *Color of the Ocean*. The films center on white women who “help” Black men, as well as on the emotional lives of these women—even when the title and marketing of *Samba* are meant, instead, to center on the male protagonist—and draw focus away from the legal, political, and economic precarity in which the African characters find themselves.

Our undertaking in this book has been to deploy interpretive strategies that read for intimate connection in the face of precarity and to describe aesthetic strategies that allow intimacies to reveal the conditions under which precarities are created. We have considered the possible political solidarities enabled by intimacies and questioned conventional emotional expectations of intimacy. This chapter challenges our own reading strategies and points to their limitations by acknowledging how intimacy is easily appropriated as a problematic metaphor for multiethnic or multiracial community. The three films we discuss here show how such appropriations can have diverse political effects: they can cover up the tensions and power dynamics that attach to such community; they can create an emotional focus on whiteness and white fears; and they can obscure aspects of structural racisms. We thus demonstrate that reading for precarious intimacy can also be an act of reordering the way in which emotions cling to bodies, challenging the viewers’ potential desire and hope for, even investment in, intimacies. Ahmed describes emotions as so “sticky” that “even when we challenge our investments, we might get stuck.” She emphasizes, however, that “there is hope, of course, as things can get unstuck.”¹⁸ Ahmed’s discussion of the stickiness of emotions to certain objects considers how such stickiness is informed by histories of contact, of contact we might identify here as histories of colonialism, imperialism, and globalized tourism.¹⁹ In this chapter, we employ precarious intimacies as a reading strategy to question the emotional charges put forth by the intimacies depicted in these films and to redirect the gaze. We read to uncover the politics that make emotions cling to certain bodies and that assume that certain stories make sense. We hope to “make sense” differently, to take apart the idea that racist stories of intimacy and emotional attachment “make sense” at all.

White Women as Fragile Clients: *Paradise: Love* (2012)

The fiction film *Paradise: Love* works with lay actors and actresses to develop a documentary-style narrative about white female sex tourists in Kenya. The



Fig. 5.3. Teresa arrives at the beach in Kenya. Still from *Paradise: Love* (2012).

film appears to simply “document” Teresa’s experiences on vacation; however, Margarete Tiesel, who plays Teresa, is a professional actress while the men she meets in Kenya are mostly played by nonprofessional actors. This combination of professional actors and lay actors creates the confusing and intriguing style—a sort of fictionalized documentary style—that is characteristic of director Ulrich Seidl’s films but that also creates a distinction between the white woman “artist” and the “authentic” Black characters.

Paradise: Love starts with Teresa at home in Austria and at work as a social worker supervising adults with disabilities. A lonely, fifty-year-old single mother, she heads to Kenya for a vacation. Teresa arrives at a tourist resort that is set up for white tourists, mainly German-speaking, it seems; Kenyans appear at the resort only to serve and entertain the white tourists (see fig. 5.3). The fact that many single women travel there as sex tourists is not explicitly mentioned in the film nor made in any way explicit at the resort. The film, however, depicts Teresa meeting a range of men interested in exchanging sex for money or gifts; Teresa forms friendships with other single women staying at the resort who are clearly in Kenya to meet men and have sex, and they instruct Teresa on what to expect and how to approach the men. They openly share their frustrations with their sexual relationships at home and their insecurities about their own bodies, which they hope to overcome by meeting African men. They never address the fact that they pay for sex; rather, they describe the Kenyan men as less obsessed with women’s looks or age than white European men are. When the women talk about the men they meet on their vacations, they objectify and fetishize them using overtly racist language; they describe their smells, the texture of their skin, the build of their bodies, and what they interpret as the men’s “animalistic” desires for

white women. The film challenges the viewer's participation in consumerist consumption of colonialist representations and reveals the fantasy of globalized good feeling.²⁰ Yet, it does so without significantly challenging racist representations, allowing instead for the tourists' racist views themselves to remain the only viewpoint in the film. If the film takes as its premise the mutual othering of the Kenyan men and the European women, ultimately, as Zoë Gross has argued, it is the "beach boys" who "are turned into the object of desire, fetishized commodities to be bought, consumed, and discarded at will," while the women's transgression of norms of femininity simply serve to reactivate colonial relationships.²¹

In *Paradise: Love*, both the overt racism of the characters and the commercialization of sex are represented in such a way as to create discomfort and unease in the viewers. The "haptic visuality" of the film—defined by Laura Marks as the way in which sensual images of skin and touch create affective relationships for viewers—causes intense discomfort through the employment of a racialized gaze onto Black male bodies, and a gaze onto women's bodies that exposes the materiality and supposed flaws of (female) bodies.²² Touch further disconnects the protagonists and leaves the white women vulnerable to schemes designed to maximize the extortion of their money. The focus on the female body directs affective energies in the film away from sex and erotics to vulnerability, exploitation, and objectification. The question of who has the agency over the gaze and who or what directs affective responses is central in any attempt to interpret this film.

Teresa's desired relationships with Kenyan men structure the film. Teresa's first encounter ends with her running away from a hotel where she went with a much younger Kenyan man to have sex. As he pledges his love for her (in English), she appears to get more and more angry and annoyed and tries to instruct him on how to touch her and how to talk to her, what to say and what not to say. When he does not appear to follow her instructions, she fights him off, telling him that she does not believe he loves her, and commands him to stop. Her struggle to stop him offers rather stereotypical images of a Black sexual predator who tries to force himself on a white woman. In this case, however, his forcefulness is portrayed as a need for successful economic exchange.

The second relationship also ends in a violent encounter. Munga first appears on the beach where he "protects" Teresa from other men who pester her to buy bracelets and other accessories. The upholding of a gendered relationship of protected/protector is experienced by Teresa as care and affection. In their sexual encounters, Teresa instructs Munga on how and where to touch her, slapping him when he touches her in ways she dislikes. A woman's sexual autonomy is linked, in the film, with racist violence toward her lover, who is often treated like a child or pet in training.

Teresa's exploitative behavior continues through her photography practices. She not only photographs buildings and people on the streets but also

Munga sleeping naked on the bed. When Teresa takes pictures of Munga, just as she photographs the beautiful beaches, the resort, and the poverty she observes in the town, their sexual relationship is highlighted as a part of Teresa's tourist consumption; Teresa objectifies Munga's body. The film, however, contrasts this scene with another that refocuses the gaze and the emotional charge. In this scene, Munga sits on the couch, looking at Teresa while she is sleeping, covered only with mosquito netting. In these scenes, both characters appear vulnerable. However, the fact that Munga is awake, staring at the sleeping, illuminated, and white body of Teresa shifts the viewer's gaze to him. The question of what he sees and how he might see her body guides the narrative back to Teresa and her vulnerability. Teresa's naked body and her body's exposure to the male gaze give the film its narrative-emotional tension.

As soon as Teresa grows hesitant about handing out more money, Munga disappears. She looks for him, only to be mocked and then dismissed by his wife (whom he had introduced to her as his sister). Munga's wife is the only Black female character introduced in the film. She remains a marginal character, appearing first as a tool to help Munga solicit money from Teresa and then as part of the trope of the "angry Black woman." Other Black women in the film appear only on the margins, as greeters or performers to entertain the hotel guests. When Teresa finally finds Munga, rather by accident, on the beach with his wife and child, she attacks him, pulls his hair, and yells at him that he betrayed her. Munga tries to protect himself but does not fight back. This scene highlights Teresa's violent frustration but also her naïveté; it becomes clear that somehow, emotionally, she not only pretended but actually believed that their relationship was more than the exchange of sex for money. Rather than focusing on the pain and humiliation Teresa causes for Munga by attacking him physically in public, the camera follows her back to the hotel.

When the camera shows Teresa in the guarded resort area, the images convey a sense of loss and loneliness. These shots appear throughout the film, but increasingly so after Munga disappears. Teresa is often alone in her room, almost always in her underwear; she appears lonely as she traverses the vast lobby of the hotel, as she walks the resort grounds or attends some of the activities offered at the resort. When she returns at night, the resort looks eerily empty (see fig. 5.4). This sense of isolation is enhanced by the fact that any of her attempts to connect with her teenage daughter at home continue to fail.

The friends that Teresa made while at the resort visit her in her room on the evening of her birthday to throw her a surprise party, which includes the visit of a male stripper and prostitute. As the man strips, the women start to taunt and touch him; however, in the end he fails to perform sexually and they ask him to leave the room. In this scene, again, the women allude to how his failure to perform could only be a result of them not being



Fig. 5.4. Teresa's resort at night becomes an alienating space. Still from *Paradise: Love* (2012).

attractive enough. However, they also mock him, giggle and laugh, treat him like an animal, and call him animal names, clearly assuming he does not understand anything they say—an odd assumption, since many of the other Kenyans they encounter seem to be proficient in German. The discomfort of this scene is multiple; first, the camera witnesses the discomfort of the stripper himself, who endures the women's harassment and objectification; viewers, however, are then made complicit with the actions of the women—themselves uncomfortable—as the camera lingers on the stripper's body and highlights his “failures.” Again, the film's emphasis on the discomfort of the women, who feel physically rejected and whose plans for a “fun” party prove inadequate, complicates the viewing perspective. The women are depicted as failing in their endeavors.

Teresa's final “relationship,” in which the man she takes to her room—the shy bartender Josphat—refuses to perform oral sex on her, illustrates how this film builds the narrative of (aging) white women as ultimate victims. Teresa's feelings are clearly hurt by his refusal; she first tries to emotionally manipulate him by telling him that this makes her sad, but when he continues to refuse, she asks Josphat to leave, yells at him not to steal her money, and rushes him out without giving him enough time to get dressed. This final and failed sexual encounter has a twofold effect. It shows how Teresa confidently orders the men around and aggressively gets rid of them if they do not meet her demands, but, again, it shifts the focus to her insecurity, perceived unattractiveness, and loneliness. Once alone, Teresa cries in her room. Scenes like this expose the emotional pain of internalized sexism the women experience;

however, they also perpetuate the idea that ultimately, however racist and exploitative these white women act, they leave as the primary victims of this sexual economy.

The implication is that the women's access to money and global mobility, in the end, only hurts them emotionally. The image of Teresa crying as she lies on her hotel bed is one of the final images of the film, followed only by shots of the beach at night and Teresa's lonely beach walk the next morning. The women's struggle with their own, internalized sexism—the feeling that their bodies are not desirable to men, that they are too old and not slim enough to be attractive, and so on—is oddly highlighted by their access to sex tourism. The film, implicitly, contrasts this struggle with what viewers might imagine when they think about male sex tourism. While it is clear that the women try to dominate the men, sometimes mock them and treat them like children or pets, the viewer gets the sense that since there is no agreed-upon price for their sexual services, the men try to exploit their customers financially by manipulating them emotionally. The economy of the men's sex work remains unexplored; the film does not narrate their lives beyond the lies they tell to solicit money. The women's desire for intimacy and the disappointment of this desire are the driving force of the narrative and focus the spectator's emotional engagement on white personhood, in this case on the fragility of the (aging) white female body.

The film privileges viewer empathy with the white women rather than the men targeted by economic and sexual exploitation by portraying the women in emotional, and sometimes physical, pain. Margarete Tiesel's experience as a professional actress further directs attention to the vulnerable character she portrays so sensitively. While there are brief moments where the women appear to bond with one another, perhaps as a result of sharing experiences and, possibly, pain, they are, in the end, in competition with each other. All the gendered oppressions, beauty standards, gendered norms of dating, ageism, and the economic status of women in Europe continue to operate in spite of the fact that the women travel to Kenya to escape these regimes as clients, as sex tourists, and as economically in charge. Ultimately, the women appear to be as abused as the men they meet. Their quest for sexual and emotional fulfillment is futile.

White women are cast as precarious subjects because they suffer from the emotional effects of neoliberal gender politics; their desperate search for intimacy is a result of this precarity and, following the logic of the film, must fail. The film depicts racism, sexism and ageism without showing any way out. Victimhood serves as an affective charge that is attached to the white female body and emotionally overshadows the economic and sexual forms of exploitation in which the women participate; the camera and narrative arc of the film focus—particularly intensely in the concluding scenes—on white women as victims of neoliberalism and internalized sexism. Our readings for precarious intimacies in the case of this film highlight the ways in which

these cinematic gestures perpetuate racist, demeaning, and sexist perspectives while dressing up as socially critical.

In *Paradise: Love*, the “political economy” of intimacy, defined by Lisa Lowe as “a particular calculus governing the production, distribution, and possession of intimacy,” reproduces and centers whiteness by creating “asymmetrical and unevenly legible ‘intimacies.’”²³ *Paradise: Love* asks viewers to confront their whiteness through an experience of discomfort but then reaffirms white privilege by highlighting the vulnerability of white women.

In the following analyses, we trace how the “meaning of whiteness rests, in part, on the mobility of whiteness: whiteness moves” and whiteness “disaffiliates from ‘old’ racisms; cultural racism and neo-Nazism.”²⁴ *Samba* and *Color of the Ocean* appear to address racial difference by focusing on interracial relationships or encounters, but the emotional focus continues to rest on the fragility of white femininity. We read past the emotional precarity ascribed to the white female characters and expose how the depiction of intersections of racism and sexism in intimate encounters remains a tool for reaffirming (European) whiteness. Alternative connections that may lead to future solidarities emerge only when we critically dissect the way fragility emotionally attaches to white female bodies and follow the camera to the brief images that pose different questions, questions about possible futures beyond the racist politics of white fragility.

White Women as Fragile “Helpers”: *Samba* (2014) and *Color of the Ocean* (2011)

While offering radically different narratives from *Paradise: Love*, two films from the 2010s, *Samba* and *Color of the Ocean*, also depict forms of white women’s vulnerability and narrate struggles for intimacy that embody personhood as female whiteness. In these films, the focus shifts explicitly to depictions of the kind of emotional abuse white women suffer by living in the contemporary, neoliberal economic climate of central Europe, which has created a sense of emptiness and loneliness in these women’s lives. Both films portray main characters who, presumably, have money and successful careers but who seem to suffer some form of emotional breakdown or crisis. They try to cure their emotional injuries, it seems, by trying to “help” African men. While the men appear to trigger empathy in the white female characters, the narratives prioritize empathy for the plight and struggles of white women. In both films, Black female characters are narratively and visually sidelined.

The connection between the white female protagonist and the Black man is depicted as a form of transgression in both films. The erotic tension of such (racially, nationally, and economically) “transgressive” encounters is a trope of romantic films, comedies and tragedies alike. This conventional narrative

trajectory, for example, is taken up in classics such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (*Angst essen Seele auf*; West Germany, 1974) and in films such as *Lila Says* (*Lila dit ça*; Ziad Doueiri, France/United Kingdom, 2004), where interracial relationships are shown as transgressing social, political, or economic boundaries. What is particularly interesting in the two films we discuss in this section—and what echoes Fassbinder's classic and connects the two films to *Paradise: Love*—is the way in which they explicitly thematize unequal power relationships only to end up in a strange reversal: the drama lies in the fact that white women largely *fail*, in spite of their position of dominance and power, to establish possible political solidarities with Black men, while Black women largely fall out of the narrative altogether. This failure of their gesture of compassion and support affectively refocuses the narrative on white women. Rather than creating empathy for or a sense of solidarity with undocumented or refugee characters, the demand for emotional empathy attaches itself to the white female main characters. Our analyses offer a way to uncover how this kind of racialized and gendered empathy constructs and affirms European belonging as white. We also read for openings that allow us to challenge and rethink these emotional charges.

Samba is different from *Paradise: Love* in many ways. Directed by two filmmakers of Moroccan and Algerian heritage, *Samba* seeks to provide a relatively nuanced story for the undocumented Senegalese protagonist working his way toward becoming a chef. Samba becomes involved with Alice, a white female main character who suffers from burnout due to her corporate job and wants to engage in something meaningful by volunteering to help migrants obtain legal status in France. Alice's first "case" leads to the encounter between Samba and Alice and an apparent attraction. She, prompted by him, immediately breaks the rules of encounter and slips him her phone number.

Beyond a sense of purpose, however, Samba appears to bring joy back into Alice's life. When first introduced, Alice appears shy and awkward, clutching a purse full of sleeping pills; once she meets the life-affirming Samba, she starts to show courage, acts playfully, expresses her passions, and reduces her medication dosage. Despite the fact that he is constantly threatened with deportation and incarceration, has to take on new identities by buying fake IDs, and is continuously searching for employment, however precarious, it is ultimately *his* joie de vivre that supports *her*.²⁵ He is caring and sensitive, always willing to attentively listen to Alice. While evident, this strange reversal is not problematized in the film.

Viewers learn little of Samba's background, his reasons for coming to France ten years earlier, or his family situation. The film explores Alice's story as one of emotional breakdown and suffering, while equating her emotional fragility with his legal and economic insecurity. This is particularly evident when Samba appears at the aid center after being released from prison. When he asks, "What should I do?" he is asking how he should survive, work, maintain housing, and manage the stress and constant fear of being caught.

After her repeated suggestions to avoid stations and spaces where he is more likely to be caught, his frustration gets the better of him and he begins yelling. She shouts back about her exhaustion and the difficulty of her job, where a document is always missing or a line empty. The film seems to set up their frustration as parallel: they scream for roughly the same length of time, apologize to each other, and then Samba expends additional energy ensuring that Alice is not mad at him.

During the ensuing conversation Alice confides that she suffers burn-out from long workdays without recognition, treated “like a slave.” Alice describes “losing it” and smashing a cellphone on the head of one of her colleagues and pulling his hair. She confesses that she started therapy and took time away from the corporate world. Her volunteer work with refugees is part of this attempt at therapy; however, she continues to complain of insomnia and still tends to lose her composure, even in her volunteer position. It is not until she becomes friends and then lovers with Samba that she starts to slowly heal. Maybe as an effect of this role reversal, *Samba* does not explicitly thematize Alice’s reactions to Samba as a white savior complex. From the start of the film, white women’s fragility is privileged over the precariousness of undocumented life in Europe. Samba appears never to lose his sense of joy and his will to keep trying, even after he is beaten up by another migrant he met while in detention and thrown into the Seine.

The relationship between Samba and Alice becomes cautiously romantic in the second half of the film. In a scene that strangely resembles *Paradise: Love*, Alice gives Samba directions on how to massage her shoulders (see fig. 5.5). Although Samba and Alice have hugged in friendship before, this is one of the first scenes of erotic touch between the two. Alice’s fragile, thin body and pale white skin are set in contrast with Samba’s tall, muscular frame, his strength, and his dark skin. The sequence starts with a conversation in Alice’s apartment the morning after a birthday party for one of Alice’s coworkers at the volunteer center. Alice and Samba sit on the sofa, rather far apart, and Samba starts the conversation by asking Alice if she is feeling better. The conversation focuses on her mental health and well-being as she points out that she was able to reduce her medications. They sit back down on the couch, closer together, and Samba starts to gently massage Alice’s arm. He asks her if she can feel anything. She then instructs him to try her shoulders instead and asks him to continue when he implies he might stop; they still address each other in the formal “vous,” but the camera emphasizes their physical closeness. Close-ups of his hands massaging her shoulders and arms and Alice closing her eyes and sighing as she enjoys his touch emphasize the erotic tension of this scene; she leans back to press against his body as she instructs him not to speak. The camera frames their faces together in a close-up, highlighting his attentive gaze on her and her closed eyes. A noise from the bathroom interrupts their intimacy. They run into the bathroom as cold water is spraying out of the broken showerhead. Alice screams hysterically and loses her



Fig. 5.5. Samba massages Alice's shoulders. Still from *Samba* (2014).

composure as he calmly tries to stop the water. The film then cuts to a scene where Samba instructs Alice to pet ponies in the city park to calm herself down, since petting horses and ponies, as he has pointed out before, has always worked for him if he needed to calm down.

This scene of evolving intimacy that relies on Samba's care and worry for Alice's mental health is followed by a scene where Samba and Walid run from the police during a raid of the construction site where they work illegally. Their legally precarious situation is highlighted and aligned with her mental instability, but, in a stereotypically gendered way, the men's emotional resilience is contrasted with Alice's emotional fragility. Even when Samba's fear of heights threatens to overcome him as they try to escape the police over the Paris rooftops, the film emphasizes the humor of the situation rather than focusing on his vulnerability in that moment.

The fact that Samba manages to stay in Paris at the end of the film is enabled by a coincidence: he ends up with the jacket and passport of the man who beat him up, threw him into the river, then fell in himself and drowned. Due to the documentation they find in the jacket of the drowned man, the police assume that Samba is the one who is dead. The death of one migrant enables another one to stay, but this violent death of a migrant character is not the focus of the dramatic tension. Instead the film focuses on how Samba, finally, has a way to stay in Paris and to, presumably, continue offering emotional support for Alice. Alice, with Samba's emotional support and wearing his favorite "good luck" T-shirt, secures a job in the corporate world. She can return to her life, possibly more productive and emotionally resilient. By taking on the identity of another African man, Samba can continue his life as a (now legal) African refugee in Paris.

The film ends with Samba dropping Alice off for her job interview. She enters the room confidently, wearing his T-shirt under her suit. The song playing is Syreeta Wright and Stevie Wonder's cover version of the 1969 song "To Know You is to Love You." Wright sings, "When I am down and feeling sad, you always comfort me. To know you is to love you," as the camera cuts to Samba, petting ponies in the park, then confidently walking along the streets of Paris, disappearing into a crowd of Parisians on the busy sidewalks.

Reading for precarious intimacies in *Samba* exposes fragility, whiteness, and femininity as well as the affective responses this film attempts to trigger. Visually, the film emphasizes Alice's fragility, her nervous gestures, her very pale skin, and her petite frame, especially by contrasting her to the tall and muscular Samba. In this film, arguably in contrast to *Paradise: Love*, the neoliberal reintegration of the white, female subject seems successful. The relationship ends "happily" as he stabilizes her emotionally. In the end, he can stay in France legally and they both secure jobs, as a chef and in management, respectively. Alice discovers the papers Samba uses to assume his new legal identity, but it was not her plan or her effort that saved him. He can stay in Paris—to be there for her, to help her function—because another person died. The film's focus on Alice highlights the desire for intimacy as a need of white women in order to function in or in spite of neoliberalism. The way in which this film recenters whiteness also redeems a neoliberal logic of productivity by suggesting that women can live as neoliberal subjects as long as they receive intimate support to do so. In her new job, a confident Alice takes charge of a room full of men, while Samba departs for a successful day of work, petting the horses he sees along the way. Recentring whiteness (and curing white fragility) is symptomatic of an attempt to make the crisis of the white subject central for constructions of European intimacies; neoliberalism, then, is something white women simply need to learn how to (emotionally) cope with.

Only in the last moments of the film is this particular intimate dynamic potentially undone—by showing the two characters apart from each other: Alice in the boardroom and, in a much longer sequence, Samba leaving his new job. In these images, Samba appears to take ownership of Paris, confidently and with joy. In contrast to some of the other films we discuss in this book, the main character Samba is firmly a part of Paris by the end of the film. The film, however, does not show solidarity in intimacy; Samba claims space by reestablishing a heteronormative intimacy of black resiliency and white fragility. Indeed, the fact that Samba spends time petting horses at this point signals his earlier vulnerability as a psychological—rather than political—problem that can now be adequately managed.

Color of the Ocean returns to a European space of nonarrival similar to what we described in the film *Welcome* in chapter 1: the beaches and detention camps, here not of northern France but of the Canary Islands. The film follows the plight of Zola and his son Mamadou, who try to enter Europe



Fig. 5.6. Nathalie witnesses the arrival of migrants at the beach. Still from *Color of the Ocean* (2011).

from Senegal but are captured on the beach and end up in a refugee camp on Gran Canaria without much hope for obtaining legal refugee status. Similar to the films we discussed in chapter 1, the focus of the story is not their arrival but their journey: their quest for legal recognition, their escape from bureaucracy into illegality, and the violent, tragic death of Zola, who does not survive an attack by traffickers who try to steal his money. Implied at the end of the film, Mamadou will be allowed to stay in Europe because his father died. *Color of the Ocean* intertwines Zola's unsuccessful attempt to arrive in Europe with the dramatic story of a border police officer, José, who processes new arrivals, and the story of a German woman, Nathalie, who is on vacation on the island. As Nathalie plans to go for a swim in the ocean, she witnesses the arrival of people on a boat, among them Zola and Mamadou (see fig. 5.6). Nathalie is emotionally affected by what she sees and tries to help by bringing water and, similar to Alice in *Samba*, slipping Zola her phone number, which seems to give her the sense of purpose she appears to lack in her life. In trying to help Zola and his son with money for their journey to France, Nathalie defies her boyfriend, Paul, who advises her against helping the migrants. Ultimately, however, Zola falls into the hands of traffickers who beat him up to steal the money Nathalie gave him. Zola dies of the injuries he sustains in the attack and his son, now orphaned, will be allowed to grow up in an orphanage somewhere in Europe.

The white European characters—Nathalie as well as the initially stern, closed-off border officer José—undergo emotional development in this film. In the end, Nathalie appears guilty and confused, but possibly changed. Similarly, the border police officer has changed his attitude—not necessarily because of his encounter with Nathalie or Zola but by learning to express empathy after his sister, a drug addict, dies of an overdose. Zola, in contrast, does not evolve into a multidimensional character. He is driven solely by his

quest to safely arrive in Europe with his son. Even though he manages to protect his son on the dangerous journey across the ocean, the reasons why he left Senegal remain unclear, which, in turn, casts a shadow of doubt on his decision to leave and expose his son to these potentially deadly dangers in the first place.

The tension that carries the narrative derives from Nathalie's defiance of her partner, Paul, and her determination to help Zola and Mamadou. Paul, in addition to trying to convince her not to get involved with helping refugees, orders her to turn off her cell phone, and Nathalie argues with him about empathy and guilt. In the first quarter of the film, the conversations between Paul and Nathalie take place online and over the phone. They mainly revolve around him pleading with her not to offer her help; he assures her that someone will take care of the migrants. She appears shocked by his cold detachment—a detachment that is mirrored in their relationship, in their mediated conversations, and then in their misunderstandings and awkwardly cold conversations in the dark hotel room when he arrives to join her at the hotel in Gran Canaria.

In one brief scene toward the middle of the film, for example, the camera moves from a close-up of his face in the foreground to Nathalie sitting on the bed dressed in a black minidress, putting on her shoes, as they get ready for a New Year's Eve party. Paul looks down at her and she asks him, "Is everything ok?" The camera then focuses on her, with his back covering half the screen as he simply answers yes. Such conversations illustrate their lack of trust, the secrets she keeps from him, his suspicion of her, and the lack of compassion and passion between them. At the party, minutes before midnight, Paul tells her he loves her and that she can tell him anything. In response, she simply kisses him. This act of physical intimacy papers over their missing emotional and intellectual connection. Again, they are framed as distant from each other, filmed first through a mirror and then, as the camera shows a close-up of their faces kissing, in the cold, blue, flashing light of the techno club.

In contrast, Nathalie's brief encounters with Zola emphasize their connection. The two do not exchange many words and they do not touch, but their conversations are intense and focused. In the short scene where Nathalie hands Zola the money she hopes will help him and his son reach the European mainland, the camera emphasizes their repeated eye contact. Nathalie's attempt to help with this money, however, not only fails, it arguably is the reason the traffickers attack Zola, ultimately leading to his paralysis and death. When Nathalie visits Zola in the hospital (again, without Paul knowing), Zola lies in bed, immobile, and entrusts her with his thoughts: if he was dead, he knows that his son would be able to stay. Nathalie tentatively counters, saying, "Fortunately, you are not dead." The camera shows close-ups of both their faces as they look at each other. José interrupts the conversation and orders Nathalie to leave. When she returns to the hospital, after

yet another fight with her boyfriend, she finds out that Zola has died. José's response to this news is "Everything is good," since Mamadou can now stay in Spain. Had Zola lived, he and his son would have been deported. Without her involvement, neither he nor his son would have been able to find a way to enter Europe. The film narrates Zola's plight and death; however, this is done mainly through attention to Nathalie's struggles, reactions, emotional breakdowns, and fights with her boyfriend.

Aside from Nathalie, the film introduces another legal European resident: the border agent José, who is depicted at first as an emotionally closed-off and stern man. In spite of the fact that he seems dismissive of and annoyed by the migrants who arrive on the island, José appears to develop a sense of connection to Mamadou, mainly after the boy's father dies. Yet, his emotional development occurs not primarily because of his encounter with the child but because of his feeling of guilt for having been unwilling (and possibly unable) to help his drug-addicted sister. To further complicate José's story, the film shows a conversation he has with his sister's dealer, a man José knows to be one of the migrants who arrived on the island. Aside from confirming stereotypes of African drug dealers in Europe, the dealer character never takes shape in the film and mainly serves as a tool to illustrate José's reform from a cold and closed-off man to a character who can express empathy. The shifted focus from the stranded migrants to José, who continues to sternly enforce the European border regime, further emphasizes how the film does not manage to create emotional depth in the African characters. Nathalie, after her failed attempt to help Zola, seems to bond with José in a scene that further emphasizes the importance of the European characters as the tragic figures in the film. Their failed attempts to find or maintain intimate relations, to "help" migrants, and to find meaning in life more generally bonds them together. Both are tragic figures in that their failures are explained as a result of the violent, emotionless structures of the neoliberal Europe they find themselves operating in and, maybe more important, that operate on them. The potentially "happy ending" for the child is eerily similar to the ending of *Samba*, where the death of one migrant secures the legal status of another. The fact that the child is now "safe" in Europe seems to give Nathalie and José a sense of satisfaction and purpose. By focusing on white characters' emotional struggles and on the lessons they learn, as opposed to the migrant characters' struggle over life and death, the film, in a perverse twist, recenters whiteness.

The water, as a metaphor in the film, though, remains ambivalent. The ocean water is a symbol for death—vast, threatening, and turbulent—but water is also a symbol for life and hope. Water in this film, reminiscent of the use of water in the French film *Welcome*, takes on a double meaning: the dry landscape, the threat of dying of thirst when the migrants arrive on the beach, and the threat of drowning in the ocean are contrasted with Nathalie swimming and diving in the ocean, the desire for an ocean view, and the beauty of the beach. The landscapes—mountains, dunes, dusty-looking cities, fences,

and temporary detention centers—stand in contrast with the sleek hotel, nice dinners, and dance parties the tourists enjoy. Similar to *Paradise: Love*, in *Color of the Ocean* the resort space illustrates the emptiness of the tourist experience and the missing connection between Nathalie and Paul. Yet, this safe space exists like an island on an island.

At the end of the film, all the characters look out onto the ocean. Nathalie, who seems to reconcile with Paul, moves into a much brighter room with an ocean view in their posh vacation resort. José's journey with Mamadou is interrupted by yet another arrival of a boat full of migrants on the beach. He rushes there with Mamadou, who also helps to hand out drinking water to the migrants. The final sequence shows a parallel movement of José and Mamadou. The camera follows José as he walks down the beach toward the water; he appears to stop right where the waves come crashing to shore. The camera then cuts to Mamadou and follows him, walking down toward the water as well. In the final image, Mamadou is staring out onto the ocean as the image freezes and slowly fades to black. The ocean, for Mamadou, symbolized their journey, the threat of drowning and dying of thirst on a boat, and, ultimately, the loss of his father and family. At the same time, Mamadou staring into the distance is an image of a child looking toward his future. In this case, the suggestion is that Mamadou will have a future in Europe, enabled by the death of his father. While there is a way in which these final scenes can be read as a clear critique of how Europe processes migrants; how people are driven to lie, hide, risk their lives, and die; and how some Europeans' "help" is clumsy and ignorant, the image also, however uncomfortably, suggests hope: at least the child has a chance for a better future. This hope redeems Nathalie, and the fact that José appears to have taken Mamadou under his wing seems to partially compensate for the racism and emotional coldness he displayed toward migrants at the beginning of the film. The ambivalence of the ocean spaces originates in the film's focus on the struggles of the white, European characters. The white subject, a victim of neoliberalism and suffering from having to enforce or observe the coldness of the European border regime, remains the central affectively charged figure in this film.

In this way, *Color of the Ocean* contains moments that challenge the white savior complex in interesting ways. Trying to help is portrayed as both necessary and naive, and it is in this tension that the film develops its main white characters' tragic journeys. The white Europeans protect fortress Europe, but they also appear to suffer from its effects. Being agents in this fortress, then, enables these intimate encounters with the other, in this case the African refugees, but the film also depicts these encounters as preventing any of these intimacies from being successful. In a strange twist, showing the white European subject as the (emotional) victim of fortress Europe—as the one who suffers from the way Europe enables but then thwarts encounters between European citizens and migrants—offers a telling insight into, again, a form of European racism: the construction of the privileged burden of being white.

Neoliberalism, Racism, and White Fragility

If we return to the central question of this book project—namely, how stories of intimacy can create a different matrix of connection and love that does not perpetuate the neoliberal, colonial regime of racialized and gendered violence—the films we discuss in this chapter do not offer any answers. In our analyses, we read for what is wrong; we are compelled to read as killjoys, for the feminist killjoy is, as Ahmed observes, “assembled around violence; how she comes to matter, to mean, is how she exposes violence.”²⁶ Reading these films for precarious intimacies exposes how the gendered politics of whiteness work for and with colonial and neoliberal structures. The emotional victimization and fragility of white women becomes visible as a racist and sexist trope (although we acknowledge, in the case of *Samba*, the ways in which the film challenges other racist tropes). In the three films we discuss, moments of touching skin or intimate contact refocus the narrative on white female fragility and vulnerability. Tellingly, then, the attempt to show the intersections of race and gender in these intimacies results in recentering whiteness and the “caring” white subject as female. This recentering is enhanced by the fact that Black female characters are absent, lack agency completely, or are depicted only on the margins of the narrative. Any critique of neoliberal economic structures, then, functions in gendered and racialized terms. First, white people (mainly women) appear as the victims of neoliberalism, ignoring a reality in which white wealth is built on the backs of Brown and Black people. Second, neoliberalism is mainly depicted either as a problem for white women or as something that, ultimately, white women can or must learn to cope with as long as they receive (emotional) “help.” At the same time, Black men develop strategies that exploit white women or transform the economic problem into a psychological one that can be managed with self-care and a productive chosen career. The three films capitalize on a double gaze: the male gaze onto white female bodies and the objectifying racist gaze onto the Black male body. Our readings uncover these kinds of political traps and read through them to expose the violent, gendered constructions of racism under neoliberalism.

It is in this context that we end this chapter by evoking images from all three films as possible ways to expose not only how whiteness and white femininity carry certain emotional, narrative charges but also how these emotional charges are part of the violent politics of European racisms. This means doing “violence” to the white characters in the films by reading them against their emotional charge. Images expose certain structures of violence but also offer glimpses into how they could or need to be different. In *Paradise: Love*, Teresa’s exploitative camera and her racist objectification of the Kenyan men she meets, her isolation in her hotel-resort, and her guarded walks on the resort beach expose her as just another white European tourist in a tourist resort: exploitative, sheltered, and isolated. *Samba* ends with

Samba confidently disappearing into the urban space of Paris. For the final minutes, Alice is not the focus of the film; he does not need her. The characters in *Color of the Ocean* stare out at the sea; Nathalie moves into her room with an ocean view as people continue to arrive, stranded at the beaches; Mamadou brings water to the new arrivals and looks toward an uncertain but European future. In these sequences, the perspectives of the white European characters appear limited. Moments in the films undercut and defy the emotional charges of intimacy in the service of whiteness. The characters of Teresa, Alice, and Nathalie call for emotional solidarity; they are depicted as vulnerable and fragile, but at certain moments, the films—and certainly our readings—expose their complicity in the violent regime of European racism.

In reading *through* these political-emotional structures, we try to read against the emotional charges put forward by these films. By redirecting the gaze (to return to the image of Brian in *Land in Sicht* at the beginning of this chapter) we deconstruct, while at the same time continue our search for openings that allow for different readings, for shifting and changing emotional directives. This practice of reading is an act of careful analysis but also an act of defiance against the politics of emotion put forth in these constructions of gendered whiteness.

Chapter 6



Conclusion

Precarious Intimacies, Collaborations, and Solidarities

So, we start again? Once more the same question: I still don't know: what is your film about? [The lighting equipment fails, crew mumbles; scenes from a bondage performance, electro pop music, snippets of cartoons and a live music performance as the ending credits roll across the screen; camera is rolling again, mumbling as the crew tries to set up the failed lighting equipment again]

—But you consider yourself a feminist?

—Yes, definitely.

—from *Lovely Andrea* (dir. Hito Steyerl)

What are the potentials and pitfalls of precarious intimacies, and how might we think about future collaboration and solidarity? We began our ruminations on these questions by pointing to director Hito Steyerl's theoretical work on images of Europe in our introduction to this book, and we find it fitting to refer to her artistic works to focus our conclusion. *Lovely Andrea* (Germany/Austria, 2007) was commissioned for the international art festival documenta 12. It traces Steyerl's search for photos of herself taken in 1987 when she earned money as a bondage model. For this photo shoot, she used the first name of her high school friend Andrea Wolf, who is featured in Steyerl's earlier project called *November* (Austria, 2004). *November* takes as its starting point the kung fu film that Steyerl made with Wolf, her "best friend" at the age of seventeen. *November* reflects on Wolf's death, presumably at the hands of the Turkish army while she was participating in actions with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, (known by the initials PKK, corresponding to its name in Kurdish). Both *November* and *Lovely Andrea* construct an intimacy between Steyerl and Wolf and expose the multiple forms of violence that inhabit that intimacy—including Steyerl's appropriation of Wolf's identity and image when Wolf cannot consent and of a narrative of Wolf's life in which Wolf cannot participate. *Lovely Andrea* and *November* further

become, in many ways, an intimacy of images produced and circulated in violence, and they depict an imagined solidarity that may never actually come to fruition but that informs Steyerl's visual challenge to the violence of war, nationalism, and neoliberalism.

Steyerl's films offer a way to reflect on and synthesize the political readings and theorizations of precarity and intimacy we propose in this book. Though we analyze feature-length, mainly fictional, films that were released in commercial theaters or produced with funding from mainstream television, Steyerl's films do not fit this description. Her work is mostly screened in gallery spaces or displayed in museums. *Lovely Andrea* and *November*, like all of Steyerl's work, are deliberately political and multilayered. In *Lovely Andrea*, the search for images produces uncomfortable intimacies between the viewer and the images, as well as uncomfortable encounters between Steyerl and the (notably only) men she contacts in her search. Her reasons for participating in these photo shoots were economic: she needed to make money as a film student in Tokyo. Her economic precarity led her in front of the camera; her curiosity leads her to direct a searching camera back at the men who took or archived her bondage images.

The artist's search in the pornography archives and bondage studios of Tokyo is framed by a shot of the artist herself in a small, dimly lit room, in front of a window overlooking the cityscape of Tokyo (see fig. 6.1). The initial query, "What is your film about?" is unanswered, followed instead by an abrupt cut to the title of the film projected over a shaky handheld camera recording a narrow staircase. At the end of the film, we see the same frame and the question is repeated but left unanswered yet again. Instead, the equipment fails, the spotlight goes off, Steyerl's face recedes into shadow, and the film cuts to the ending credits.

Lovely Andrea makes meaning through associative montage work, intercutting scenes from pop music, Spiderman and Spiderwoman cartoons (particularly images of webs), allusions to the web as internet, and the ropes and bondage tools used in Shibari bondage photography, film, and performance. After the team finds the image series featuring Steyerl, entitled "Lovely Andrea," they meet the photographer, who admits on camera to the coercive practices of tricking models into participating without ever paying them. The next section, "Work Is Bondage," illustrates the intersections of precarious labor, sex work, and art in Steyerl's search for the images. Yet, in the section titled "Freedom," shots of Shibari bondage produce the idea of weightless floating in a web of ropes, thus challenging traditional dichotomies between freedom and bondage. The associative interplay between webs and nets as devices for floating and for connection across space, on the one hand, and of bondage as violence and exploitation, on the other hand, carry *Lovely Andrea* visually and narratively, which is yet another level on which the film connects and contrasts intimacy, precarity, and violence. The visual intimacy between the viewer and the performer becomes linked to



Fig. 6.1. Hito Steyerl is questioned about the purpose of the film. Still from *Lovely Andrea* (2007).

a complex challenge to a dichotomous relationship between freedom and bondage.

It is not possible to answer the question “What *Lovely Andrea* is about?” but the film illustrates an interrogation of intimacy vis-à-vis the violence and limits of film itself. *Lovely Andrea* navigates questions of voice and artistic expression as ways to create meaning and stories in an industry—and within a web of images—that relies on capitalist exploitation of the bodies of women and racialized others but also provides a medium through which Andrea’s stories can be told and larger social questions can be raised. The violence of representation is further observed in the film in the photographs of torture that emerged from the American prison Abu Ghraib during the Iraq War.

Lovely Andrea remains full of tension in its depictions of intimacies and bonds; it considers the impossible work of creating an ethical visual representation while emphasizing all that is wrong. As Hester Baer and her colleagues write, “Steyerl’s films uncover layers of history, they [acknowledge] the perceived impossibility of political action in the current moment while also seeking aesthetic avenues not only to describe this impossibility but also to rewrite it as emergence.”¹

After the credits, the shot of Steyerl in front of the city window appears one last time. The camera rolls, the failed lighting equipment works again, and the male voice asks, “But you consider yourself a feminist?” Steyerl has an answer to this question, and she has the final word in the film, saying, “yes, definitely.” The “but” of the question, however, implies the challenges to feminism worked through in the film.

Thus, *Lovely Andrea* poses the questions of how to create feminist perspectives within an economic and political context that is exploitative, sexist, and violent; how to affirm bodily self-determination within a context that often fails and fails us; how to find generative power for that perspective in precarious intimacies; and how to remain critical of our position as feminists while building feminist solidarities. This set of questions is similarly true for *November* and the precarious intimacies represented there. In the film treatment for *November*, Steyerl suggests,

We are in the period of November, when revolution seems to be over, and peripheral struggles have become particular, localist, and almost impossible to communicate. In November, the former heroes become madmen and die in extralegal executions somewhere on a dirty roadside and information about it is so diffused with predictable propaganda, that hardly anyone takes a closer look.²

The isolation and seeming particularity of struggles, as opposed to being embedded in larger movements, are reflected in our need to begin with intimacy to get to solidarity. Steyerl’s work explores how to take a closer—or close—look and stresses the importance of looking closely precisely at a time when politics appear diffuse and when political struggles are rendered “private.” Taking a closer look, then, also means connecting personal, intimate stories to the political sphere to unearth precarity, violence, and oppression, but it likewise means searching for new spaces of political intervention in the intimacies of Wolf and Steyerl, which could potentially found future solidarities.

Our book, too, is about a search that is, in many ways, impossible, as much as it is about writing toward new ways of imagining alternatives or strategies for what Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing calls “collaborative survival.”³ As Carrie Smith-Prei and Maria Stehle argue in *Awkward Politics*, “the trouble we find ourselves in is being faced with the necessity of doing feminist politics in the face of its impossibility.”⁴ Our analysis becomes an attempt to expose the stickiness of emotions under precarious conditions, which means—drawing on Sara Ahmed’s language—considering how certain emotions attach to certain bodies and how the vulnerabilities of some come to “matter” more than the vulnerabilities of others.⁵ Precarious intimacies also derive from the importance of our critical perspective on our own affective responses to these films, to the work we are trying to do, and to the people who might read and engage with our work. Some of the films or certain moments in the films shift

affective solidarities and challenge genre conventions. At other times, we try to read against the emotional charge of the films by developing critical readings. As we collaborated, as we wrote and rewrote, we tried to hold each other accountable for acknowledging our own positions and biases as we do this political-analytical work, but sometimes, we know we fall victim to our own (privileged) positions. To develop our work as social-aesthetic engagement with the world that surrounds us is, and remains, our goal. This goal includes working toward connections and solidarities in spite of forces that work against them; it means imagining and validating wide-ranging forms of nonviolent, sustaining intimacies, but it also means that we never, ultimately, fully arrive at these notions. Films, like any art form, can lay bare moments of political tension, aesthetically and emotionally.

Precarious intimacies, like any artistic practice, may “drift,” creating moments of disruptive or even transformative possibility, or they may “leave their practitioners, along with their viewers, readers, and other participants, adrift in compromised and compressed conditions, thus reinstating, if not compounding, the all-too-frequent precarity of cultural labor and life.”⁶ As Tsing has reminded us in her consideration of the importance of survival in the face of ecological precarity, neither narratives of progress nor ruin can “tell us how to think about collaborative survival,” but we must nevertheless persistently seek to imagine differently.⁷ For us, the search for moments of sustaining touch and intimacy provided one way to imagine differently. We hold up these moments even as we need to be constantly aware of the fact that we—in our case, white women with stable, academic employment—are embedded in structures of privilege that also prohibit the futures we seek to imagine. We recognize that these intimacies can only be beginnings and that much larger solidarities are necessary for the transformations we desire; we acknowledge that we have not even begun to explore how the intimacies we call for need to fully engage the challenges of neoliberalism *and* environmental catastrophe, and their mutual interdependence.

In the chapters of this book, we puzzle through the intimacies we see on-screen, the touching skins, intimacies at a distance, and other forms of exchange, connection, and closeness. We examine the conditions under which such intimacies form, and we trace their power and their limits. We explore the politics of intimacy on-screen, their intersection with precarity, and the importance of affective connections and solidarities, all while proposing to consider *how* we read intimacy and touch in film politically. The (mainly fiction) films we analyze depict sexual relationships or friendships between (mainly Western) European residents and those whose legal status is precarious; same-sex relationships; encounters between sex workers and clients; intimacy and touch between white and brown bodies, between Muslims, Christians, and Jews; and instances of care within the most unlikely of chosen community or family. Our chapters grapple with political questions and tensions that are not specifically European, but, in the scope of this book, we

show how these tensions play out in Western European cinematic production. Europe surfaces in our discussions as a powerful concept, as a fortress, and as an entity that creates and enforces forms of violence; but Europe is also a space that engenders new forms of contact that can offer refuge, however momentarily, against such violence.

The films we discuss question definitions of Europe and, at times, transgress Europe's borders; however fleetingly, the power and violence of European border regimes is called into question and even briefly vanishes. Each chapter moves between exposing these forms of violence and searching for ways to envision futures in moments and images that show how different lives could be possible. These not-yet-possible moments are what we emphasize as fleeting instances of thinking, feeling, and living otherwise. This means that while we write about Europe and use examples that address specifically "European" questions, we see our more crucial contribution in the kind of reading strategies we suggest. Intimacies evoke strong affective responses; affect can generate moments that break conventional patterns of touch, passion, desire, and, in some cases, love. In these breakages we locate new forms of political engagement that reach beyond the precarity, violence, and abuse that so often have become an accepted part of conventional/generic forms of intimate encounter. In the face of new nationalisms rising within Europe and across the globe, challenging our thinking about Europe—an oscillating, transnational concept—and imagining other ways to encounter and connect is also, maybe yet again, a way to see alternatives to exclusive regimes of national as well as European belonging.

The films we discuss in this book are but a small sampling of European films that depict relations of precarious intimacies. A large body of European films released in the twenty-first century addresses politically charged issues through stories of intimate encounters in and in spite of Europe. We develop and mobilize strategies to read for the politics of such films, politics that expose the violence of persisting definitions of belonging, of divisions, and of borders, but also politics that may suggest new forms of solidarity and conviviality. As we describe with the concept of precarious intimacies, these two tendencies often coexist. The challenge to untangle these tendencies and our hope for a feminist ethics of care in the service of justice that challenges racisms and intimate violence led us to write this book. This challenge is ever so urgent as we finish this book at a moment in history when right-wing populists gain support across Europe, democratic values appear to be pushed aside in the face of racialized panics, and important debates about consent to intimate touch free of coercion are intensely visible. The gestures and moments we highlight in the films might be fleeting and temporary, but their implications are political in that they challenge exclusive notions of belonging and identification. They create community.

The arc of the stories about precarious intimacy that we trace illustrates the way in which we also read for an ethics of cohabitation, for ways of

living in solidarity across difference (and even distance), for ways that insist on space for marginalized groups to participate in articulating futures. We also demonstrate limits; in the face of contemporary political realities, reading for love, care, and connection will not and cannot become too positive a story, yet the barriers we encounter cannot result in stasis. While it continues to be important to expose the ways in which racism, colonial thought, and neoliberal capitalism circumscribe the possibilities for intimacy, it might be equally important, in the face of everything that is wrong, to try to search for moments where emotions, stories, and images lead to productive ways of creating alternate, nonviolent futures.

In a conversation that took place in the last stages of this writing, Karina Griffith and Peggy Piesche articulated important points about solidarity and community that we are considering as we think about future collaborations and the future of collaboration. Griffith and Piesche's conversation probed the importance of sustaining and sustainable Black communities in Europe. Addressing the differences that exist in Black European positionalities and histories, and among the diverse experiences of Blackness in Europe, Griffith argues, "as long as you are working toward sustaining and creating community—a sustainable way of living—then you belong. This is allyship, and it is a permanent negotiation."⁸ Piesche adds that sustainable Black communities move beyond the temporary, claim a past, and project a future.⁹

This conversation, coinciding as it did with our encounter with Tsing's book, opens up further questions about other solidarities, sustainability and sustenance, belonging, and community building; it also emphasizes for us the importance of continually challenging the workings of whiteness. At their best, precarious intimacies may generate connection, collaboration, and care necessary for imagining critical futures—not utopias of the "good life" but rather glimpses of how better, more sustaining lives can be possible. These are preconditions for solidarities and community, even if they are not enough to assure the larger solidarities necessary for political transformation. By insisting that we read for precarity as always challenging intimacy, we also insist that "something" (narratives of whiteness, racist exclusions, gendered violence) always needs to be exposed for something else to be envisioned; it is in fleeting potentialities, potentialities that do not paper over the violent structures that attempt to undermine them, that we see moments where alternatives emerge.

Bringing these films into conversation with one another has served as an avenue for uncovering precarious intimacies, but it is certainly not the only, nor an ideal, avenue for finding new forms of intimate solidarities. Most of the films we analyze explore complex intimacies, but only at certain moments do they gesture toward rarely achieved, political solidarities. Maybe, for a more "utopian" outlook, we also have to look elsewhere: at open access forums, theories of futurity, Afrofuturism, and visions for community and connection that find alternate avenues for imagining a "what if" that is more

mobile, not as tied to emotional and narrative conventions, as European cinemas are, and less bound to a market that is dominated by Western viewing conventions.

Cinema remains an important medium for social-aesthetic expression, but in our everyday lives, we most frequently encounter the precarity of intimacies in digital social media. Digital media—understood broadly as infrastructures where, as Ara Wilson observes, “relationships take place in environments comprised of . . . material and immaterial, functional or failing networks”—enable and foreclose many of our social interactions in the twenty-first century.¹⁰ Digital media also constitute, as Helga Sadowski puts it, “an arena for negative differentiation, not only through access to hardware . . . but also . . . along the lines of harassment and exclusion, which limit access to contextual participation.”¹¹ Steyerl’s visual imagery of webs and ropes speaks to us here as well, as we think through how digital spaces provide opportunities for complex networking and connection, which we may draw on while also considering the ways digital spaces enable violence and exclusion. Thinking about digital spaces makes the dilemma we start with most evident: the way in which violence is enacted and reenacted does not mean we cannot or should not try to imagine alternate ways of interaction and life. Digital intimacies can be threatening, but they can also be sustaining; letting violence exist uncontested is not an option.

If we assume more mobile positions, as we suggest throughout this book, film can offer but one avenue to sense precarity and our shared vulnerabilities. Intimacy, defined by Lauren Berlant as a mobile form of attachment, allows us to trace how emotions attach to certain bodies and narratives and to highlight moments that create new and different emotional charges.¹² As Ara Wilson states, “the desire to resist forms of knowledge that perpetuate or rationalize global inequality (e.g., ideological reifications of family, sexuality, community) motivates the use of intimacy as a rubric.”¹³ Mobile intimacies circulate more freely, they do not attach permanently, they can be recoded and hacked, they are temporary and momentary, but they point to possibilities against the very structures of impossibility. Our thinking and rethinking of precarious intimacies, then, is, in the spirit of Berlant, a project that appraises “how we have been and how we live and how we might imagine lives that make more sense than the ones so many are living.”¹⁴

It is the cinematic moments that “make sense,” where a sensual, intimate connection seems to make momentary happiness and community possible, that highlight the structures that stand in the way of such happiness. Fariba/Siamak and Anne make love just before Fariba is deported; Lotte and Ayten touch hands across the empty space of the detention cell; Manu and Abbas dance on the train just before Abbas gets arrested; Myriam and Nour pray together in their respective languages as their voices are drowned out by falling bombs; Caye and Zulema stroll through the Latino market in Madrid, where Zulema momentarily escapes racist harassment and fear of arrest;

and the child Mamadou, in the care of a border officer, looks out across the ocean, presumably toward his future in Europe, as people arrive on the beach, thirsty, hungry, and facing the scrutiny of border police. Violence disrupts these moments of intimacy, moments that imagine, however fleetingly, different lives.

In the face of a tedious and emotional search, and confronted with failing technical equipment, Steyerl's film ends with the assertion of a feminist "yes, definitely." We end this book asserting that—definitely—developing new (reading) strategies that uncover the emotional charges and politics of moments of intimate contact matter, because in the face of all that is and can go wrong, we can and must envision different outcomes that imagine intimacy as sustenance, solidarity, and collaboration.

NOTES

Introduction

Epigraph sources: Sara Ahmed, “Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects),” *Scholar and Feminist Online* 8, no. 3 (Summer 2010), http://sfonline.barnard.edu/polyphonic/print_ahmed.htm; bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 64; Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015), 28.

1. Beverly M. Weber, *Violence and Gender in the “New” Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 77–112.

2. See Judith Butler in Jasbir K. Puar, “Precarity Talk: A Virtual Roundtable with Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Bojana Cvejić, Isabell Lorey, Jasbir Puar, and Ana Vujanović,” *TDR/The Drama Review* 56, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 169–70.

3. Precarias a la Deriva, “Adrift on the Circuits of Feminized Precarious Work,” *Feminist Review* 77 (2004): 167–71; Fatima El-Tayeb, “Making Do: Survival Strategies under Precarity (Parts A and B),” *eScholarship*, University of California–Santa Barbara, October 6, 2013, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/15g682w5>; Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, *Migration, Domestic Work and Affect: A Decolonial Approach on Value and the Feminization of Labor* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 101.

4. Gutiérrez Rodríguez, *Migration, Domestic Work and Affect*, 101 (emphasis in the original).

5. See Judith Butler in Puar, “Precarity Talk,” 169–70.

6. See Isabell Lorey in Puar, “Precarity Talk,” 165.

7. El-Tayeb, “Making Do.”

8. Ara Wilson, “The Infrastructure of Intimacy,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2016): 249–50.

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10. Alison M. Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology,” *Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (1989): 151–76.

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Care: A Feminist Approach to Human Security (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 59, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucb/detail.action?docID=744005>.

13. Robinson, *Ethics of Care*, 59.

14. Wilson, "Infrastructure of Intimacy," 251.

15. Lauren Berlant, "Intimacy: A Special Issue," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 282, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448875>.

16. Judith Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance," in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, ed. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016), 12.

17. Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 4.

18. Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*, 28.

19. Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015), 17.

20. Lowe, *Intimacies*, 21.

21. Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, trans. Christine Jones et al. (London: Verso, 2002), 91.

22. Fatima El-Tayeb, "Time Travelers and Queer Heterotopias: Narratives from the Muslim Underground," *Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 88, no. 3 (2013): 305–19; Peggy Piesche, "Der 'Fortschritt' der Aufklärung—Kants 'Race' und die Zentrierung des weißen Subjekts," in *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte: Kritische Weisheitsforschung in Deutschland*, ed. Maureen Maisha Eggers et al. (Münster: Unrast, 2005), 30–39.

23. Hito Steyerl, "Europe's Dream," *Springerin, Hefte für Gegenwartskunst*, no. 2 (Summer 2001), <http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft.php?id=8&pos=0&textid=0&lang=en>.

24. Yosefa Loshitzky, *Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 8.

25. El-Tayeb, "Making Do."

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29. Hake, "German Cinema as European Cinema," 112.

30. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 2015).

31. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 30–34.

32. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, introduction to *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 5.

33. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 129–30.

34. Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 3; Isabell Lorey, “Governmental Precarization,” trans. Aileen Derieg, *Transversal Texts*, no. 1 (2011), <https://transversal.at/transversal/0811/lorey/en>.

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39. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Ginette Verstraete, “Women’s Resistance Strategies in a High-Tech Multicultural Europe,” in *Transnational Feminism in Film and Media*, ed. Katarzyna Marciniak (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 125.

40. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 255.

41. Jin Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others* (London: Pluto Press, 2015).

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43. Lowe, *Intimacies*.

44. For the most recent look at this history, see “Recent Quality Film and the Future of the Republic of Europe,” special issue, *Studies in European Cinema* 15, no. 2–3 (2018). In that volume, two articles that speak to these questions specifically are Malte Hagener, “Migration and Refugees in German Cinema: Transnational Entanglements,” 110–24; and Michael Gott, “Lost in Transit or Ready to Take Off? Airport Cinema and European Identity,” 180–97.

45. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 4.

46. See Deniz Göktürk, “Migration und Kino—Subnationale Mitleidskultur oder transnationale Rollenspiele?,” in *Interkulturelle Literatur in Deutschland: Ein Handbuch*, ed. Carmine Chiellino (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 329–47.

47. Sandra Ponzanesi, “Europe in Motion: Migrant Cinema and the Politics of Encounter,” *Social Identities* 17, no. 1 (2011): 89.

48. On “haptic visualities,” see Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), xi.

49. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, “Introduction: Dermographies,” in *Thinking through the Skin*, ed. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (New York: Routledge, 2001), 4.

50. Claudia Breger, “Affects in Configuration: A New Approach to Narrative Worldmaking,” *Narrative* 25, no. 2 (May 2017): 231; Jasbir K. Puar, “Homonationalism as Assemblage: Viral Travels, Affective Sexualities,” *Revista lusófona de estudos culturais* 3, no. 1 (2015): 319–37.

51. Marks, *Skin of the Film*, xii.

52. Randall Halle, *German Film after Germany: Toward a Transnational Aesthetic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 6.

53. Alex Lykidis, “Minority and Immigrant Representation in Recent European Cinema,” *Spectator: The University of Southern California Journal of Film and Television* 29, no. 1 (2009): 45.

54. Ipek Çelik Rappas, “Refugees as Innocent Bodies, Directors as Political Activist: Humanitarianism and Compassion in European Cinema,” *Revista latinoamericana de estudios sobre cuerpos, emociones y soceidad* 9, no. 23 (April 25, 2017): 81–89; Hester Baer, “Affectless Economies: The Berlin School and Neoliberalism,” *Discourse* 35, no. 1 (November 27, 2013): 72–100, quotation at 74.

55. Baer, “Affectless Economies,” 95.

56. Barbara Mennel, *Women at Work in Twenty-First-Century European Cinema* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019).

57. Mennel, *Women at Work*, 204.

58. Mennel, *Women at Work*, 204.

59. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

60. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 86.

61. Georgina Born, Eric Lewis, and Will Straw, “Introduction: What Is Social Aesthetics?” in *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*, ed. Georgina Born, Eric Lewis, and Will Straw (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2017), 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822374015-001>.

62. Born, Lewis, and Straw, “What Is Social Aesthetics?” 4.

63. Steyerl uses Benjamin’s term *Vergegenwärtigung*, which is often translated as actualization; here, however, “making present” as re-presencing better conveys Steyerl’s point. Hito Steyerl, *Die Farbe der Wahrheit* (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2008).

64. This notion of presencing and re-presencing may have something in common with Claudia Breger’s articulation of world making (in conversation with Gilles Deleuze, among others), which she defines as “a performative process of configuring affects, associations, attention, experiences, evaluations, forms, matter, perspectives, perceptions, senses, sense, topoi, and tropes in and through specific media, including mental operations as well as graphic notations, words and gestures, images and sounds” (Breger, “Affects in Configuration,” 231). Unfortunately, the kinds of intimacies we often find in the films are momentary and specific—gestures toward future possibilities but ones that often work against the narratives of the film. Our frequent emphasis on moments rather than narrative, thus, derives not from a postmodern antipathy toward narrative (which Breger explores in her discussion of world making) but rather from the reality that the precarious conditions revealed by precarious intimacies in our readings have prohibited the kind of sustained intimacy that could actually be seen as integral parts of the filmic narratives.

65. For a detailed discussion of the politics of awkwardness, see Carrie Smith-Prei and Maria Stehle, *Awkward Politics: Technologies of Popfeminist Activism* (Montreal: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2016).

66. Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 21.

67. Judith Butler, “Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (April 1, 2012): 134–51.

68. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 554; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 72.

Chapter 1

1. In addition to the films that we analyze, see, for example, *Terraferma* (dir. Emanuele Crialese, Italy, 2011), *Fuocoammare* (*Fire at Sea*; dir. Gianfranco Rossi, Italy, 2016), *#MyEscape* (dir. Elke Sasse, Germany, 2016), *Land in Sicht* (*Land in Sight*; dir. Judith Keil and Antje Kruska, Germany, 2013), *Willkommen auf Deutsch* (*Welcome in German*; dir. Hauke Wendler and Carsten Rau, Germany, 2014), and *Neuland* (*Newland*; dir. Anna Thommen, Germany/Switzerland, 2013). For a detailed discussion of hope and films of journey, also see chapter 1 of Loshitzky, *Screening Strangers*.

2. Nilgün Bayraktar, *Mobility and Migration in Film and Moving Image Art: Cinema beyond Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3.

3. Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, 91.

4. Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance,” 18.

5. Jutta Lauth Bacas and William Kavanagh, introduction to *Border Encounters: Asymmetry and Proximity at Europe’s Frontiers*, ed. Jutta Lauth Bacas and William Kavanagh (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 11.

6. Bacas and Kavanagh, introduction to *Border Encounters*, 12.

7. Bacas and Kavanagh, introduction to *Border Encounters*, 13.

8. Bacas and Kavanagh, introduction to *Border Encounters*, 14.

9. Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 21; 32.

10. See, for example, Manasi Gopalakrishnan, “‘Islamic State’ Reportedly Training Terrorists to Enter Europe as Asylum Seekers,” DW (Deutsche Welle), November 14, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/islamic-state-reportedly-training-terrorists-to-enter-europe-as-asylum-seekers/a-36389389>; Alfred Hackensberger, “Das nächste große Schlachtfeld ist Europa,” *Welt*, June 29, 2015, <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article143186475/Das-naechste-grosse-Schlachtfeld-ist-Europa.html>; Paul Hockenos, “Opinion: Refugees Will Change Europe for the Better,” Al-Jazeera America, October 25, 2015, <://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/10/refugees-will-change-europe-for-the-better.html>; Eva Thöne and Maria Feck, “Das sind die neuen Europäer,” *Spiegel Online*, March 1, 2017, <://www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/fluechtlinge-in-europa-das-ist-das-projekt-the-new-arrivals-a-1136048.html>.

11. Khursheed Wadia, “Regimes of Insecurity: Women and Immigration Detention in France and Britain,” in *The Securitisation of Migration in the EU: Debates since 9/11*, ed. Gabriela Zadaridis and Wadia Khursheed (Houndmills, U.K.: Springer, 2015), 91–93.

12. Wadia, “Regimes of Insecurity,” 94.

13. Klaus J. Bade and Myron Weiner, *Migration Past, Migration Future: Germany and the United States* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 85–86.

14. Bade and Weiner, *Migration Past, Migration Future*, 86; Konrad Hugo Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 215–16.

15. “Migration and Migrant Population Statistics,” Eurostat, modified September 3, 2019, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics.

16. Guido Rings, *The Other in Contemporary Migrant Cinema: Imagining a New Europe?* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1.

17. Rings, *Other in Contemporary Migrant Cinema*, 1.

18. Ipek Çelik Rappas, “Refugees as Innocent Bodies,” 83.

19. Lauren Berlant, “Austerity, Precarity, Awkwardness” (unpublished manuscript, November 2011, PDF), 2, <https://supervalentthought.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/berlant-aaa-2011final.pdf>.

20. Çelik Rappas, “Refugees as Innocent Bodies,” 84.

21. David Farrier, “The Journey Is the Film Is the Journey: Michael Winterbottom’s *In This World*,” *Research in Drama Education* 13, no. 2 (June 1, 2008): 223–32.

22. Muhammad Abbas Khan, “Pakistan’s National Refugee Policy,” *Forced Migration Review*, no. 46 (May 2014): 22–23; Daniel A. Kronenfeld, “Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Not All Refugees, Not Always in Pakistan, Not Necessarily Afghan?” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 1 (March 2008): 43–63, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem048>.

23. Lykidis, “Minority and Immigrant Representation,” 37; Farrier, “Journey Is the Film Is the Journey,” 226, 223.

24. Loshitzky, *Screening Strangers*, 121, 122.

25. Lykidis, “Minority and Immigrant Representation,” 37.

26. Loshitzky, *Screening Strangers*, 125.

27. Çelik Rappas, “Refugees as Innocent Bodies,” 85.

28. Bruce Bennett and Imogen Tyler, “Screening Unlivable Lives: The Cinema of Borders,” in *Transnational Feminism in Film and Media*, ed. Katarzyna Marciniak, Anikó Imre, and Áine O’Healy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 27.

29. Lowe, *Intimacies*, 47.

30. Sabine Hess, “De-Naturalising Transit Migration: Theory and Methods of an Ethnographic Regime Analysis,” *Population, Space and Place* 18, no. 4 (July/August 2012): 428–40.

31. Arash T. Riahi, director’s statement, *Ein Augenblick Freiheit/For a Moment of Freedom* (website), accessed May 4, 2017, <http://p106906.typo3server.info/51.0.html?&L=1>.

32. Riahi, director’s statement.

33. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 2.

34. In this sense, the films along with Daniela Berghahn’s argument that in films depicting diasporic families, “transnational mobility . . . is undeniably a force that transforms the structure and identity of the family, yet it does not necessarily result in its fragmentation and rupture. Even where journeys end in death and separation, as they often do, these experiences give rise to new beginnings and new alliances.” Daniela Berghahn, *Far-Flung Families in Film: The Diasporic Family in Contemporary European Cinema*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 80.

35. Richard Phillips, “An Interview with Philippe Lioret, Director of *Welcome*,” World Socialist Web Site, April 17, 2010, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2010/04/lior-a17.html>.

36. Calais Migrant Solidarity, “Trapped on the Border,” in *Migration, Squatting and Radical Autonomy: Resistance and Destabilization of Racist Regulatory Policies and B/Ordering Mechanisms*, ed. Pierpaolo Mudu and Sutapa Chattopadhyay (New York: Routledge, 2016), 54.

37. Calais Migrant Solidarity, “Trapped on the Border,” 54–55.

38. Calais Migrant Solidarity, “Trapped on the Border,” 63.

39. Calais Migrant Solidarity, “Trapped on the Border,” 64.

40. David Cox, “Welcome Highlights British Hypocrisy as Well as French Brutality,” *Film Blog, Guardian*, November 9, 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2009/nov/09/welcome-film-immigration>; Phillips, “Interview with Philippe Lioret.”

41. Sébastien Fevry, “Mémoires en dialogue: Shoah et sans-papiers dans le cinéma français contemporain,” *Image and Narrative* 14, no. 2 (2013): 51–62; Sébastien Fevry, “Immigration and Memory in Popular Contemporary French Cinema: The Film as ‘Lieu d’entre Memoire,’” *Revista de estudios globales y arte contemporáneo* 2, no. 1 (2014): 239–63.

42. Romain Chareyron, “Entre utopie et dystopie: Espace urbain et immigration illégale dans *Welcome* et *Le Havre*,” in *Racines et déracinements au grand écran: Trajectoires migratoires dans le cinéma français du XXIème siècle*, ed. Marianne Bessy and Carole Salmon (Leiden, Neth.: Brill Rodopi, 2016), 130.

43. In fact, Lioret himself lobbied against this law that punishes French citizens who help clandestine immigrants with a fine or up to five years in prison: Nicole Beth Wallenbrock, “Clandestine Boat Immigration in French Film: The Homo Sacer on the Norman Coast; *Welcome* (2009) and *Le Havre* (2011),” in *Migration and State Power: Global Humanities*, ed. Frank Jacob (Berlin: Neofelis, 2016), 123–39.

44. Butler, “Precarious Life, Vulnerability,” 148, 150.

45. One of the most controversial aspects of Germany’s asylum laws has been the *Residenzpflicht*, which allowed the restriction of asylum seekers to the community to which they were assigned, often even after receiving some sort of asylum status. These restrictions on movement were significantly liberalized in 2015, but the 2017 Integration Law introduced new means of restricting refugee residency.

46. El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 54–56.

47. Bayraktar, *Mobility and Migration in Film*, 9.

48. See Ahmed, “Happy Objects”; Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.

49. Claudia Breger, “Configuring Affect: Complex World Making in Fatih Akin’s *Auf der anderen Seite* (The Edge of Heaven),” *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 69.

50. Lauren Berlant insists that not all attachments, or even all optimisms, are cruel, though the majority of attachments analyzed in her book are understood as cruel optimisms.

51. Sara Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 21, 32.

52. Alana Lentin, “Racism in Public or Public Racism: Doing Anti-Racism in ‘Post-Racial’ Times,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 1 (2016): 1–16.

53. El-Tayeb, “Time Travelers and Queer Heterotopias,” 307.

Chapter 2

1. Berghahn, *Far-Flung Families in Film*; Patricia Anne Simpson, *Reimagining the European Family: Cultures of Immigration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 55–82.
2. Jasbir K. Puar, “Rethinking Homonationalism,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 2 (May 2013): 336–39; Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others*; El-Tayeb, *European Others*, esp. 122–24.
3. Puar, “Rethinking Homonationalism,” 336. See also Jin Haritaworn, Tauquir Tamsila, and Esra Erdem, “Gay Imperialism: Gender and Sexuality Discourse in the ‘War on Terror,’” in *Out of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness/Raciality*, ed. Adi Kuntsman and Esperanza Miyake (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 71–95; El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 119, 129.
4. El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xxxvi.
5. El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xxxvi.
6. Daniela Flesler, “New Racism, Intercultural Romance, and the Immigration Question in Contemporary Spanish Cinema,” *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* 1, no. 2 (September 2004): 103.
7. Barbara Mennel, “Criss-Crossing in Global Space and Time: Fatih Akin’s *The Edge of Heaven* (2007),” *Transit* 5, no. 5 (2009), <https://scholarship.org/uc/item/28x3x9r0>.
8. Gulay Icoz, “The Interconnectedness of the Past, the Present and the Future: Where Turkey–EU Relations Have Been, and Where They Are Heading,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 24, no. 4 (2016): 494.
9. David Gramling, “On the Other Side of Monolingualism: Fatih Akin’s Linguistic Turn(s),” *German Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 367, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1756-1183.2010.00088.x>.
10. Berghahn, *Far-Flung Families in Film*, 116. Berna Gueneli has further pointed out that the music used in this film constitutes a sort of aural touching, what she terms a “heterogeneous European polyphony.” Berna Gueneli, “The Sound of Fatih Akin’s Cinema: Polyphony and the Aesthetics of Heterogeneity in *The Edge of Heaven*,” *German Studies Review* 37, no. 2 (May 2014): 337–38. The touch of skin here functions differently, less to highlight heterogeneity than to provide a moment of defiance of the violent structures that would render various intimacies impossible.
11. Niels Uhlendorf, *Optimierungsdruck im Kontext von Migration: Eine diskurs- und biographieanalytische Untersuchung zu Subjektivationsprozessen* (Wiesbaden, Ger.: Springer-Verlag, 2018), 99–101.
12. Faye Stewart, “Filming Faith and Desire: Encoding and Decoding Identities in Angelina Maccarone’s ‘Fremde Haut,’” in *Colloquia Germanica* 47, no. 1/2 (2014): 163, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44242732>. See also Rachel Lewis, “The Cultural Politics of Lesbian Asylum: Angelina Maccarone’s *Unveiled* (2005) and the Case of the Lesbian Asylum-Seeker,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12, nos. 3–4 (2010): 424–43; Ponzanesi, “Europe in Motion.”
13. Lewis, “Cultural Politics of Lesbian Asylum,” 430–31.
14. Sabine Jansen and Thomas Spijkerboer, *Fleeing Homophobia: Asylum Claims Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Europe* (Amsterdam: COC Netherlands and VU University Amsterdam, 2011), 50, 8, <http://dare.uvu.vu.nl/bitstream/handle/1871/23884/Fleeing?sequence=2>.

15. Lewis suggests that this act also gestures to a particular Iranian context in which transsexuality was seen as a positive alternative to homosexuality. Lewis, “Cultural Politics of Lesbian Asylum,” 433.

16. Stewart, “Filming Faith and Desire,” 163. See also Lewis, “Cultural Politics of Lesbian Asylum,” 433.

17. Stewart, “Filming Faith and Desire.”

18. In 2015, however, Štaka received a Max Ophüls Prize for “socially relevant film” for her film *Cure: The Life of Another One* (*Das Leben einer Anderen*, 2014).

19. J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Sub-cultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 5.

20. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 10.

21. Recall our discussion of the role of the gift, including the exchanged wet-suit, in the film *Welcome* in chapter 1. We will return to a film that features an exchange of clothing in chapter 4: the Spanish film *Princesses* (León de Aranoa, 2005). Also see Fatih Akin’s *Goodbye Berlin* (Tschick, 2016), when Maik gives Tschick his jacket just before the second part.

22. Deniz Göktürk, “*Kleine Freiheit* by Yüksel Yavuz,” *TRANSIT: A Journal of Travel, Migration, and Multiculturalism in the German-Speaking World* 1, no. 1 (2005), <http://transit.berkeley.edu/2005/yavuz/>.

23. The violence that took place at the Cologne Main Train Station on New Year’s Eve 2015 raised racialized fears of men of color in particularly pointed ways. See Stefanie C. Boulila and Christiane Carri, “On Cologne: Gender, Migration and Unacknowledged Racisms in Germany,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 24, no. 3 (2017): 286–93; Vanessa D. Plumly, “Refugee Assemblages, Cycles of Violence, and Body Politic(s) in Times of ‘Celebratory Fear,’” *Women in German Yearbook* 32 (2016): 163–88; Beverly M. Weber, “The German Refugee ‘Crisis’ after Cologne: The Race of Refugee Rights,” *English Language Notes* 54, no. 2 (2016): 77–92; Beverly M. Weber, “‘We Must Talk about Cologne’: Race, Gender, and Reconfigurations of ‘Europe,’” *German Politics and Society* 34, no. 4 (2016): 68–86.

24. Göktürk, “*Kleine Freiheit* by Yüksel Yavuz.”

25. Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, “Transculturation in German and Spanish Migrant and Diasporic Cinema: On Constrained Spaces and Minor Intimacies in *Princesses* and *A Little Bit of Freedom*,” in *European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 119.

26. Gutiérrez Rodríguez, “Transculturation,” 115.

27. Gutiérrez Rodríguez, “Transculturation,” 125, 127.

28. Gutiérrez Rodríguez, “Transculturation,” 115.

29. Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 89; 159.

30. Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 89.

31. Berlant, “Intimacy,” 281.

32. Lauren Berlant, “Lauren Berlant on Her Book *Cruel Optimism*,” Rorotoko, June 4, 2012, http://rorotoko.com/interview/20120605_berlant_lauren_on_cruel_optimism/?page=2.

33. Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed.

Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 175–94.

34. Haritaworn, Tamsila, and Erdem, “Gay Imperialism”; Sara Ahmed, “Problematic Proximities: Or Why Critiques of Gay Imperialism Matter,” *Feminist Legal Studies* 19, no. 2 (2011): 119–32, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-011-9180-7>; Puar, “Homonationalism as Assemblage.” See also Antke Engel, *Bilder von Sexualität und Ökonomie: Queere kulturelle Politiken im Neoliberalismus* (Bielefeld, Ger.: transcript Verlag, 2015).

35. Puar, “Homonationalism as Assemblage,” 25.

36. Breger, “Configuring Affect,” 68–69.

37. Breger, “Configuring Affect,” 70.

38. Sara Ahmed, “Multiculturalism and the Promise of Happiness,” *New Formations*, no. 63 (December 22, 2007): 135.

39. Spivak, *Aesthetic Education*, 72.

Chapter 3

1. For discussions of the power of such visual symbols, see Weber, *Violence and Gender*. For analyses of the way in which they are deployed to oppose Islam to secularism, see Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007); El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 81–120; Weber, *Violence and Gender*. For a discussion of the linkage of Islam to gender violence, see Yasemin Shooman, “*Weil ihre Kultur so ist*”: *Narrative des antimuslimischen Rassismus* (Bielefeld, Ger.: transcript Verlag, 2014), 83–124; Weber, *Violence and Gender*.

2. Catherine Wheatley provides an important exception here—both as a scholar who explicitly engages faith and by discussing several filmic exceptions to this trend. Wheatley points to a handful of European films—*Habeaus Papum*, *Dis-enclosure*—between 2006 and 2012 that prominently feature nuns or priests as a way to question “the place of Christianity in contemporary European society.” Catherine Wheatley, “Deconstructing Christianity in Contemporary European Cinema,” in *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema: The Postsecular Constellation*, ed. Costică Brădăţan and Camil Ungureanu (New York: Routledge, 2014), 13.

3. Although, as Faye Stewart argues, there are numerous coded references to Islam in the film that leave the relationship to faith radically open. See Stewart, “Filming Faith and Desire.”

4. On the relationship of religion in these films to religious text and textual interpretations, see Marzia Caporale, “Women (Mis)Reading Religious Texts in Karin Albou’s Films *La Petite Jérusalem* and *Le Chant des Mariées*,” *Women in French Studies* 2012, no. 1 (2012): 283–97. On notions of Frenchness and difference, see Alexandra Preitschopf, “Identitätssuche zwischen Orthodoxie und Emanzipation: Der Spielfilm *La Petite Jérusalem* (2005) als Spiegel ‘neuer jüdischer Identität’ im zeitgenössischen Frankreich,” *Chilufim: Zeitschrift für jüdische Kulturgeschichte* 14 (2013): 97–128; Nathalie Ségeral, “Frenchness, Jewishness, and ‘Integration’ in Karin Albou’s *La Petite Jérusalem*,” *Jewish Culture and History* 14, nos. 2–3 (2013): 87–99.

5. Camil Ungureanu, “What Is the Use of Postsecularism? Conceptual Clarifications in Two Illustrations,” in *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema*, ed. Costică Brădăţan and Camil Ungureanu (New York: Routledge, 2014), 201.

6. Mosche Zimmermann, “Between Jew-Hatred and Racism: The German Invention of Antisemitism,” in *Racisms Made in Germany*, ed. Wulf D. Hund, Christian Koller, and Mosche Zimmermann, Racism Analysis Series B, Yearbook, vol. 2 (Zurich: LIT-Verlag, 2011), 41–63.

7. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 26.

8. Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 54–58; quotation at 58.

9. Sirma Bilge, “Beyond Subordination vs. Resistance: An Intersectional Approach to the Agency of Veiled Muslim Women,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31, no. 1 (2010): 9–28; Shooman, “Weil ihre Kultur so ist”; Beverly M. Weber, “Gender, Race, Religion, Faith? Rethinking Intersectionality in German Feminisms,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 22, no. 1 (February 2015): 22–36.

10. El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 81–120; Scott, *Politics of the Veil*; Weber, *Violence and Gender*, 1–112.

11. Iman Attia, *Die “westliche Kultur” und ihr Anderes: Zur Dekonstruktion von Orientalismus und antimuslimischem Rassismus* (Bielefeld, Ger.: transcript Verlag, 2009); Alana Lentin, “Post-Race, Post Politics: The Paradoxical Rise of Culture after Multiculturalism,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37, no. 8 (2014): 1268–85; Weber, *Violence and Gender*.

12. Lentin, “Post-Race, Post Politics”; Weber, *Violence and Gender*, 4–11.

13. Lowe, *Intimacies*.

14. Sian Hawthorne, “Displacements: Religion, Gender, and the Catachrestic Demands of Postcoloniality,” *Religion and Gender* 3, no. 2 (August 2, 2013): 172, 174.

15. See Weber, “Gender, Race, Religion, Faith?”

16. On the German and Dutch context, see Göktürk, “Migration und Kino”; Marc de Leeuw and Sonja van Wichelen, “‘Please, Go Wake Up!’” *Feminist Media Studies* 5, no. 3 (2005): 325–40. On the French context, see Claire Cosquer, “Race, sexualité, et luttes de véridiction : La racialisation dans les représentations cinématographiques de la ‘ tournante ,’” *Genre, sexualité et société*, no. 16 (December 20, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4000/gss.3842>.

17. Weber, *Violence and Gender*, 40–77.

18. See Colleen Hays, “Beur–French Romances in French Comedies: Postcolonial Mimicry or a Challenge to Essentialist Identities?” *Journal of European Studies* 46, nos. 3–4 (2016): 312–25; Nicole Beth Wallenbrock, “Almost but Not Quite Eating Pork: Culinary Nationalism and Islamic Difference in Millennial French Comedies,” *Performing Islam* 4, no. 2 (December 2015): 107–27.

19. Berghahn, *Far-Flung Families in Film*, 182.

20. Heather Merle Benbow, *Marriage in Turkish German Popular Culture: States of Matrimony in the New Millennium* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 100–115.

21. Maria Stehle, *Ghetto Voices in Contemporary German Culture: Textscapes, Filmscapes, Soundscapes* (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2012), 106–13.

22. Mine Eren, “Cosmopolitan Filmmaking: Fatih Akın’s *In July* and *Head On*,” in *Turkish German Cinema in the New Millennium: Sites, Sounds, and Screens*, ed. Sabine Hake and Barbara Mennel (New York: Berghahn, 2012), 183.

23. Deniz Göktürk, “Turkish Women on German Streets: Closure and Exposure in Transnational Cinema,” in *Spaces in European Cinema*, ed. Myrto Konstantarakos (Portland, Ore.: Intellect, 2000), 69.

24. Polona Petek, “Enabling Collisions: Re-Thinking Multiculturalism through Fatih Akin’s *Gegen die Wand/Head On*,” *Studies in European Cinema* 4, no. 3 (2007): 181.

25. See, for example, Matthias Matussek and Lars-Olav Beier, “From Istanbul to New York. Interview with Director Fatih Akin,” *Spiegel Online*, September 28, 2007, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/spiegel-interview-with-director-fatih-akin-from-istanbul-to-new-york-a-508521.html>.

26. Caporale, “Women (Mis)Reading Religious Texts,” 284.

27. Caporale, “Women (Mis)Reading Religious Texts,” 284; Catherine Portuges, “French Women Directors Negotiating Transnational Identities,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 115 (2009): 47–48.

28. On explicitly addressing religious Jewish characters, see Preitschopf, “Identitätssuche zwischen Orthodoxie und Emanzipation,” 101–2. There are very few French films that address Jewish life in France. There are also very few feature films produced in Germany that show Jewish German characters in the present. One of the few exceptions is Dani Levi’s film *Go for Zucker (Alles auf Zucker)* (2004), a satirical unification comedy. Maybe tellingly, however, Levi, who now lives in Berlin, is Swiss and not German.

29. Timothy Peace, “Un antisémitisme nouveau? The Debate about a ‘New Antisemitism’ in France,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 43, no. 2 (2009): 108–9.

30. Peace, “Un antisémitisme nouveau?” 109.

31. Maud S. Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France: History of a Conflict* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014), 3.

32. Caporale, “Women (Mis)Reading Religious Texts,” 287.

33. Caporale, “Women (Mis)Reading Religious Texts,” 285.

34. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 12.

35. Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 234–35.

36. We might see *Little Jerusalem* as one of a number of films excavating the intimacies of histories of colonialism, the Holocaust, and genocidal violence, such as *Hidden (Caché)*; dir. Michael Haneke, France/Austria/Italy/Germany, 2005) and *Free Men (Les hommes libres)*; dir. Ismaël Ferroukhi, France, 2011). This is a recent turn toward often obscured connections; one of the earliest filmic representations of the Holocaust, *Night and Fog (Nuit et brouillard)*; dir. Alain Resnais, 1955) also made such connections explicit, but these would disappear from European film for decades after.

37. Michel Abitbol, “From Coexistence to the Rise of Antagonisms,” in *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013), 303.

38. Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France*, 2–3.

39. Abitbol, “From Coexistence to the Rise of Antagonisms,” 297.

40. Maria Stehle, “‘Happy Object’ Europe? The Search for Europe in Essayistic Documentary Films,” *Studies in European Cinema* 13, no. 2 (2016): 113.

41. Richard S. Levy, *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2005).

Chapter 4

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2. Precarias a la Deriva, “Close Encounters in the Second Phase: The Communication Continuum; Care-Sex-Attention,” *Caring Labor: An Archive* (blog), December 14, 2010, <https://caringlabor.wordpress.com/2010/12/14/precarias-a-la-deriva-close-encounters-in-the-second-phase-the-communication-continuum-care-sex-attention/>.

3. Hester Baer, “Redoing Feminism: Digital Activism, Body Politics, and Neoliberalism,” *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 1 (2016): 21.

4. Isolina Ballesteros, *Immigration Cinema in the New Europe* (Chicago: Intellect, 2015), 93.

5. Ballesteros, *Immigration Cinema in the New Europe*, 116–17.

6. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 129.

7. Laura Agustín, *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 53.

8. Arlie Russell Hochschild, “Love and Gold,” *Scholar and Feminist Online* 8, no. 1 (Fall 2009), http://sfonline.barnard.edu/work/hochschild_01.htm.

9. Ronald Weitzer, *Legalizing Prostitution: From Illicit Vice to Lawful Business* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 105.

10. Giulia Garofalo, “Sex Workers’ Rights Activism in Europe: Orientations from Brussels,” in *Sex Work Matters: Exploring Money, Power and Intimacy in the Sex in Industry*, ed. Melissa Hope Ditmore, Alys Willman, and Antonia Levy (London: Zed Books, 2010), 45; Roberto Scaramuzzino and Gabriella Scaramuzzino, “Sex Workers’ Rights Movement and the EU: Challenging the New European Prostitution Policy Model,” in *EU Civil Society: Patterns of Cooperation, Competition and Conflict*, ed. Sara Kalm and Håkan Johansson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 139.

11. Weitzer, *Legalizing Prostitution*, 117–18.

12. Weitzer, *Legalizing Prostitution*, 108.

13. Kirsten L. Isgro, Maria Stehle, and Beverly M. Weber, “From Sex Shacks to Mega-Brothels: The Politics of Anti-Trafficking and the 2006 Soccer World Cup,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 16, no. 2 (2013): 171–93.

14. Gutiérrez Rodríguez, *Migration, Domestic Work and Affect*, 51.

15. Gutiérrez Rodríguez, *Migration, Domestic Work and Affect*, 11.

16. Maité Maskens, “Bordering Intimacy: The Fight against Marriages of Convenience in Brussels,” *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 33, no. 2 (Autumn 2015): 45.

17. Flesler, “New Racism,” 104; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, *Migration, Domestic Work and Affect*, 38.

18. Flesler, “New Racism,” 104; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, *Migration, Domestic Work and Affect*, 39.

19. Gutiérrez Rodríguez, “Transculturation in German and Spanish,” 117.

20. Gutiérrez Rodríguez, “Transculturation in German and Spanish,” 117.

21. Flesler, “New Racism”; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, “Transculturation in German and Spanish.”

22. Flesler, “New Racism,” 106, 112.

23. Marvin D’Lugo, “Recent Spanish Cinema in National and Global Contexts,” *Post Script—Essays in Film and the Humanities; Commerce, Tex.* 21, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 4–5.

24. Parvati Nair, “In Modernity’s Wake: Transculturality, Deterritorialization and the Question of Community in Iciar Bollain’s *Flores de otro mundo* (Flowers from Another World),” *Post Script* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2002), 43.

25. Iciar Bollaín, Malcolm A. Compitello, and Susan Larson, “A ambos lados de la pantalla con Iciar Bollaín,” *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 5 (2001): 200.

26. Diana Palardy, “Lust and Disgust: The Rhetoric of Abjection in the Spanish Immigration Films *Bwana*, *Flores de otro mundo* and *Princesas*,” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 92, no. 7 (2015): 834.

27. Palardy, “Lust and Disgust,” 834.

28. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2017), 200.

29. In *The Edge of Heaven* (discussed in chapter 2), the character of Yeter and her relationship with Ali function similarly. Their explicit agreement that their marriage will serve as an arrangement of financial support for Yeter highlights the ways in which marriage commodifies intimacy.

30. Gabrielle Carty, “La mujer inmigrante indefensa: *Princesas*, lejos de su reino,” *Iberoamericana* 9, no. 34 (2009): 129, <https://doi.org/10.18441/ibam.9.2009.34>. León de Aranoa’s earlier two feature films, *Barrio* (1998) and *Mondays in the Sun* (*Los lunes al sol*, 2002), are considered to be the first and second film of this trilogy.

31. Gutiérrez Rodríguez, “Transculturation,” 127.

32. Gutiérrez Rodríguez, “Transculturation,” 127.

33. Maria Van Liew, “Transnational Reciprocity: Liminal Love in Fernando León de Aranoa’s *Princesas*,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 29, no. 5 (2012): 454.

34. Palardy, “Lust and Disgust,” 835.

35. Further, see Gutiérrez Rodríguez, “Transculturation,” 127–29.

36. Palardy, “Lust and Disgust,” 836.

37. Palardy, “Lust and Disgust,” 837.

38. As we discussed in chapter 2, clothing exchanges are a trope in films about intimacy and friendship; see, for example, Leontine Sagan’s *Girls in Uniform*, Andrea Štaka’s *Fraulein*, or Fatih Akin’s *Goodbye Berlin*, all listed in the filmography at the back of the book.

39. Van Liew, “Transnational Reciprocity,” 452.

40. Isgro, Stehle, and Weber, “From Sex Shacks to Mega-Brothels.”

41. Bert Cardullo, “The Cinema of Resistance: An Interview with Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne,” *Studies in European Cinema* 7, no. 3 (December 2010): 187.

42. Joseph Mai, *Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 118–19.

43. Mennel, *Women at Work*, 64.

44. Benoit Dillet and Tara Puri, “Left-over Spaces: The Cinema of the Dardenne Brothers,” *Film-Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (2013): 370.
45. Joseph Mai, “Lorna’s Silence and Levinas’s Ethical Alternative: Form and Viewer in the Dardenne Brothers,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 9, no. 4 (2011): 435–53.
46. Mennel, *Women at Work*, 64.
47. Lauren Berlant, “Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal: Post-Fordist Affect in *La Promesse* and *Rosetta*,” *Public Culture* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 274.
48. Dillet and Puri, “Left-over Spaces,” 371.
49. Under Belgian law at the time, a divorce on the grounds of consent required that the marriage last at least two years; abuse served as grounds for expedition of the divorce.
50. On the violence of debt, see Martin O’Shaughnessy, “The Crisis before the Crisis: Reading Films by Laurent Cantet and Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne through the Lens of Debt,” *SubStance* 43, no. 1 (March 4, 2014): 82–95.
51. Mai, “Lorna’s Silence,” 440.
52. O’Shaughnessy, “Crisis before the Crisis,” 94.
53. Berlant, “Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal,” 291.
54. Mai, *Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne*, 121.
55. Mai, *Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne*, 123, 122; Mai, “Lorna’s Silence,” 445.
56. Dillet and Puri, “Left-over Spaces,” 374. On the rarity of music in the films of the Dardenne brothers, see Dillet and Puri, “Left-over Spaces,” 373; Mai, “Lorna’s Silence,” 450.
57. Berlant, “Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal,” 277.
58. Berlant, “Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal,” 296; 301.
59. Lorey, “Governmental Precarization.”
60. Baer, “Redoing Feminism,” 21.

Chapter 5

1. bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 7.
2. E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze* (Routledge, 1997), 16–18.
3. Sara Ahmed, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness,” *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (August 1, 2007): 150, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107078139>.
4. Ahmed, “Phenomenology of Whiteness,” 160; 162.
5. Ahmed and Stacey, “Introduction: Dermographies,” 1–2.
6. Ahmed and Stacey, “Introduction: Dermographies,” 4.
7. On “haptic visuality,” see Marks, *Skin of the Film*, xi.
8. Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
9. Lowe, *Intimacies*, 36.
10. Lowe, *Intimacies*, 36.
11. Lowe, *Intimacies*, 19.
12. On charity, see Timo Kiesel and Daniel Bendix, “White Charity: Eine postkoloniale, rassismuskritische Analyse der Entwicklungspolitischen Plakatwerbung in Deutschland,” *PERIPHERIE–Politik • Ökonomie • Kultur* 30, no. 120 (2016): 482–95; White Charity: Schwarzsein und Weißsein auf

Spendenplakaten (website), “White Charity,” accessed March 4, 2018, <http://www.whitecharity.de/>.

13. Hazel V. Carby, *Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (London: Verso, 1999), 71.

14. Robin DiAngelo, “White Fragility,” *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 3, no. 3 (May 16, 2011): 54–70.

15. The isolation of white women in these films has affinities with a recent wave of German art films often described as films of the Berlin school (Berliner Schule), which frequently show the effects of what Hester Baer describes as the “affectless economies.” Berlin school films use an affectless economy to “create a critical space of reception that emphasizes both affective and intellectual responses to the hegemony of the neoliberal present” (Baer, “Affectless Economies,” 95). The impacts of the transformations under neoliberalism on social structures and intimate relationships cause confusion and emotional isolation.

16. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 33.

17. Baer, “Redoing Feminism.”

18. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 16.

19. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 89.

20. Martin O’Shaughnessy, “Cinema, Sex Tourism and Globalisation in American and European Cinema,” in *Contemporary Cinema and Neoliberal Ideology*, ed. Ewa Mazierska and Lars Kristensen (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 2017), 231.

21. Zoë Gross, “Unpacking the Landscape of Female Sex Tourism in Kenya: A Film Analysis of *Paradise: Love*,” *Gender, Place and Culture* 25, no. 4 (2018): 513.

22. Marks, *Skin of the Film*, xi.

23. Lowe, *Intimacies*, 18.

24. Andrew Baldwin, “Whiteness and Futurity: Towards a Research Agenda,” *Progress in Human Geography* 36, no. 2 (2012): 183.

25. We are reminded here of the film *Toxi* (dir. Robert Stemmler, Germany, 1952), in which the Black titular character, Toxi, takes on the role of dispensing a certain kind of absolution for Germany’s racist past and present. For a thorough examination of *Toxi*’s relationship to postwar reconstruction of race, see Angelica Fenner, *Race under Reconstruction in German Cinema: Robert Stemmler’s “Toxi”* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

26. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 252.

Conclusion

1. Hester Baer, Carrie Smith-Prei, and Maria Stehle, “Digital Feminisms and the Impasse: Time, Disappearance, and Delay in Neoliberalism,” *Studies in Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Literature* 40, no. 2 (2016): 16, <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1881>.

2. Hito Steyerl, “November,” *TRANSIT: A Journal of Travel, Migration, and Multiculturalism in the German-Speaking World* 1, no. 1 (2005), <http://transit.berkeley.edu/2005/steyerl/>.

3. Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*, 19.

4. Smith-Prei and Stehle, *Awkward Politics*, 206.

5. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 74–75.

6. Elizabeth Adan and Benjamin Bateman, “Emergent Precarities and Lateral Aesthetics: An Introduction,” *Minnesota Review* 2015, no. 85 (November 1, 2015): 107–18, quotation at 109–10.

7. Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*, 19.

8. Griffith quoted in Gabi Kathöfer and Beverly Weber, “Heimat, Sustainability, Community: A Conversation with Karina Griffith and Peggy Piesche,” *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 54, no. 4 (November 2018): 419, <https://doi.org/10.3138/seminar.54.4.002>.

9. Piesche quoted in Kathöfer and Weber, “Heimat, Sustainability, Community,” 420–21.

10. Wilson, “Infrastructure of Intimacy,” 248.

11. Helga Sadowski, “Digital Intimacies: Doing Digital Media Differently,” (Ph.D. diss., Linköping University, Linköping, Swed., 2016), 37, DiVA, <http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1047582/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

12. Berlant, “Intimacy,” 284.

13. Wilson, “Infrastructure of Intimacy.”

14. Berlant, “Intimacy,” 286.

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- Akın, Fatih, dir. *Goodbye Berlin (Tschick)*. Germany, 2016, Lago Film. DVD Studiokanal, 2017. 89 min.
- Akın, Fatih, dir. *Head-On (Gegen die Wand)*. Germany and Turkey, 2004, Arte France. DVD StudioCanal, 2017. 117 min.
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