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## **Visual Explorations of a New Life: Language, Identity and Landscape in *El futuro perfecto* and *Ingen Ko På Isen***

**Carmen Herrero**

There is no doubt that linguistic plurality is one of the most relevant features of ‘superdiverse’ societies (Vertovec, 2007), but in times of crisis multilingualism may be identified as a feature of insufficient integration and as a risk factor that could undermine political stability, the national unit and social cohesion.<sup>1</sup> As noted by Thomas Nail, the language of migrants can be seen as inferior, matching Aristotle’s first key characteristic of barbarism: ‘the inability to speak the language of the political center’ (Nail, 2015, p. 53). Thus, language policies are central to the political agendas of citizenship and cohesion. Many countries have reacted to the phenomenon of transnational migration by adopting language testing as a requirement for migration or citizenship in the host country, while strategically praising the linguistic richness of migrants. Although multilingualism is recognized as a personal and social advantage in the 21st century, the survival of a migrant language in the receiving society depends to a large extent on the language’s status in the host country and on factors such as cultural and media representations and, particularly, educational policies. In this context, cultural representations of multilingual environments may ‘expose what amounts to a (productive) dissensus between the official institutionalized rhetoric of multilingualism [...] and the practice of multilingualism among citizens or residents (legal or not)’ (Rosello, 2012, p. 223).<sup>2</sup>

Films can provide a good illustration of this dissensus, as they tell us about language ideology and multilingual practice in the country of production. They also expose the changing linguistic landscape in relation to the distribution and exhibition of audiovisual products. Indeed, the power dynamics of language and ideological discourses are particularly relevant given the shifting contexts of audiovisual media spectatorship due to the growth of delayed TV viewing and streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon. The 2019 Oscars provided a prominent example of the debate on film and languages, as the nominations for Alfonso Cuarón’s black-and-white drama *Roma* brought to the forefront several burning

issues: first, the place of films in an age of technological and cultural flux; second, the subject of representation and diversity; and, finally, the power dynamics of language and multilingualism (i.e. the type of subtitles used or lack of subtitles) (Aguilar, 2019; Betancourt, 2019). Significantly, in the last decade there has been a renewed interest in reassessing and reinvigorating the relationship between film studies and language studies by exploring the vibrant and complex narratives that deal with cross-cultural and multilingual practices. An analysis of contemporary documentaries directed by filmmakers who have themselves undergone the transformative experience of migration can offer nuanced readings of transnational and translingual migrations.

This chapter therefore examines two such cinematic works, *El futuro perfecto* (*The Future Perfect*), an Argentine documentary directed and produced by German Nele Wohlatz in 2014, and *Ingen Ko På Isen* (*No Cow on the Ice*), a Swedish/Spanish production directed by Eloy Domínguez Serén in 2015. The aim of the chapter is to examine how these films portray the migrant's language acquisition process and the cross-cultural encounters that give visibility to the experiences, reflections, thoughts and feelings linked to emigration. The chapter analyses three main issues. Firstly, it considers how these documentaries pose questions related to agency, migrants' voices, language and identity. Secondly, it evaluates to what extent the films succeed in moving away from a narrow representation of the migrant figure as a victim by portraying the empowering effects of learning a new language, a central feature in both films. Thirdly, it looks at the way that in each documentary space, displacement, language and filmmaking are closely intertwined.

### **Approaches to Analysing Migrant Representation**

Since the 1990s, numerous feature films and documentaries have addressed different aspects of migration (national identity, integration, ethnicity and identity, among others). The migrants' traumatic experiences have been addressed in numerous European films.<sup>3</sup> In many cases, the 'realistic' representation of migrants' and asylum seekers' struggles constitutes a reaction against the overwhelming xenophobic and anti-immigration rhetoric that permeates media and political discourses and which has resulted in the enforcement of physical and metaphorical projections of walls, borders and spaces of exclusion in cities and rural locations. Examples where spatial exclusion is depicted in films are the family home in Iciar Bollain's *Flores de otro mundo* (*Flower of Another World*); the (real and metaphorical) glass that separates Zulema and other prostitute migrants from their Spanish counterparts in Fernando León de Aranoa's *Princesas* (*Princesses*); and the Chinese sweatshop, located in a

rundown area of Barcelona in Iñárritu's *Biutiful*. Some of the films featuring migration offer a powerful portrayal of the tortuous journey to the 'promised land'. Many present stories of loss and resilience as the refugees and migrants adapt to living in their new country in difficult conditions. Yet there are other films where acceptance and kindness in the host country offer a complementary perspective. A wider framework is required when accounting for films that engage with the complexities of migrants' experiences and with multilingual life narratives, particularly if the films are conceived by nomadic or cosmopolitan filmmakers who incorporate their own experiences and reflections on the migrant condition, such as Rachid Bouchareb, Pawel Pawlikowski, Fatih Akin, Alejandro González Iñárritu and Diego Quemada-Díez, to name only a few (Agier, 2016).

One of the main concerns when analysing migrant representation is how to focus on the migrant figure. Film scholar Shaw argues that films 'are perhaps the best format to represent these "real" people in the public imagination, even if, of course, they are re-imaginings of the real' (Shaw, 2012, p. 229). At a meta-level, postcolonial theory applied to film studies can be used to pose challenging questions related to migrant representation. It is worth noting that postcolonial cinema refers not only to the themes and issues raised in film (i.e. migration, personal identity and cultural perceptions), but also involves the modes of filming and interpreting the text (visual style and rhetorical devices, and visual literacy). Therefore, in the analysis of the films presented in this chapter, the question of documentary style and modes will be considered below. As Ponzanesi and Waller state, 'postcolonial cinema' is an elastic term that evokes both national and colonial frameworks, and 'it is constituted by and within a *conceptual* space in which connections [are made] and inferences [drawn], specifically those that are occluded by national and colonial frames'. This conceptual space can be explored by avoiding essentialisms and by 'learning to navigate a fluid, situational, relational mode of knowledge production, one that requires mutual recognition and engagement as well as new methodological and aesthetic strategies' (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2012, pp. 1–2). According to Ponzanesi, postcolonial cinema also addresses questions of realism and objectivity (e.g. which style is better to get across the migration experience), and how to 'visualize the inner life of uprooted people in order to empower them without reducing them once again to mere visual objects' (Ponzanesi 2016, p. 221).<sup>4</sup>

The relevance of the plurilingual component in filmmaking has been attracting more attention since the publication of Shohat and Stam's (1985) outstanding article 'Cinema after Babel: Language, Difference, Power'. A good example of this trend is *The Multilingual Screen: New*

*Reflections on Cinema and Linguistic Difference*, an edited volume that ‘advocates the opening of film studies to a broader appreciation of the ways in which linguistic difference has shaped, and continues to shape, the medium’s history’ (Mamula and Patti, 2016, p. 2). One line of enquiry in this field is the role of language diversity in films. Dwyer (2005) argues that ‘polyglot films’ are defined by the naturalistic presence of two or more languages at the level of dialogue and narrative. Likewise, other scholars maintain that multilingualism is not a simple decorative component, as it plays a central role in the narrative of contemporary films (Gramling, 2016; O’Sullivan, 2011). Wahl, for example, has analysed the emergence of the polyglot film, a new genre that ‘respects the cultural “aura” and the individual voices of the actors, delivers on a verbal level a naturalistic depiction of the characters, but often has an articulately disillusioning effect because of the use of subtitles’ (Wahl, 2008, p. 338). Among the different subgenres that this term encompasses (existential, globalization, colonization, fraternization and migration), the last one has been particularly relevant in European cinema since the 1990s as a way of representing the consequence of the global realities of migration and diaspora.

### **Translingual Experiences: Language as a Gateway into a New Life<sup>5</sup>**

Nele Wohlatz won the best debut feature prize at the Locarno Festival with *El futuro perfecto* (*The Future Perfect*) that was shot with a very low budget.<sup>6</sup> Set in Buenos Aires, the 65-minute documentary/fiction hybrid *El futuro perfecto* tells the partially fictionalized version of Xiaobin Zhang’s story. She is an eighteen-year-old Chinese girl who arrives in the Argentine capital to be reunited with her parents after they left her to emigrate to Argentina. For the very first time, she gets to know her siblings who were born in Argentina. The family does not speak Spanish and keep their traditions and customs, since they plan to return to China in the future. Xiaobin starts to learn Spanish secretly to be able to get a job, but also as a way of proclaiming her determination to be independent. The film follows the story of learning a language, but also tells the secret relationship of Xiaobin with Vijay, an Indian immigrant.<sup>7</sup>

Eloy Domínguez Serén’s 62-minute documentary film *Ingen Ko På Isen* (*No Cow on the Ice*) was premiered in 2015 at Visions du Réel in Toulouse.<sup>8</sup> *Ingen Ko På Isen* is the self-portrayal of the filmmaker’s experience as a migrant worker. With skilful editing, he records and reflects on his two-year experience, working in different part-time jobs in Sweden, and captures his adaptation to a new country and its cultural traditions. He also establishes a

historical comparison between his own migratory journey and his grandparents' experience, who, like many other Galicians, left their country looking for better life conditions.

Domínguez Serén and Wohlatz share a common interest in non-fiction films as creative exercises. Their works display some of the main strategies of contemporary documentary filmmaking that allow them to challenge the illusion of maintaining a closeness between reality and representation: attention to the genre and its limitations, and reflexivity as a tool to achieve authenticity (Bruzzi, 2006). Adopting a quite spontaneous and authentic style, these documentaries conform with postcolonial cinema, because they deal with current issues of emigration and they play with different modes of filming the migration experience. Although they do not address economic difficulties or acts of intolerance, the shadow of precariousness is sensed in both works. Echoing the feeling of many young Spaniards who left Spain looking for job opportunities after the 2008 crisis, Domínguez Serén voices his personal frustration: 'after a five-year degree and one-year Master's programme, I am the least qualified worker here' (Domínguez Serén, 2015a). The word 'pettring' (apprentice) written on one of the tools is emblematic of Domínguez Serén's marginal position. *El futuro perfecto* has its own way of denoting Xiaobin's liminal position: she first works in a couple of supermarkets and, later on, in her parents' laundry shop. The two films also have in common the representation of the integration of migrants in the new host country. However, they mobilize different rhetorical tools to represent the process of integration. On the one hand, as a semi-documentary, *El futuro perfecto* pushes the boundaries of 'objectivity' and the non-fiction status generally associated with this genre. On the other, *Ingen Ko På Isen* takes the form of a personal filmed diary, inspired by Jonas Mekas' work and the reading of his autobiography, *I Had Nowhere to Go* (1991), which is a reflection on the condition of being a 'displaced' person who connects his homeless status with his artistic experience.<sup>9</sup>

The two films studied here are structured through the process of learning languages and their protagonists' progressive translingual experiences. Multilingual hybrid language practices have emerged as a result of the increasing linguistic and cultural exchanges that take place physically and virtually in communities around the world, a process that has gathered speed with the new migration flows (regional, national and international) and the explosion of digital and virtual transnational communication. The term 'translanguaging' was originally applied to the pedagogical practice of teaching using multiple languages (i.e. in multilingual contexts).<sup>10</sup> However, the understanding of this concept has changed to describe multilingual practices that are increasingly complex due to the impact of globalization and technologies.

Canagarajah defines translinguaging as ‘the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system’ (2011, p. 401). For García, ‘translinguaging [denotes] multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds’ (García, 2009, in García and Li Wei, 2014, p. 22). As polyglot films, *El futuro perfecto* and *Ingen Ko På Isen* conform with one of the key principles of this genre, ‘the representation of language diversity as its protagonists experience it’, as defined by Berger and Komori (2010, p. 9). Although each of the protagonists struggles with integration in a new country in different ways, ultimately, they share a common goal, that is, to learn the country’s language, open the door to a new life and accelerate their integration.

*Ingen Ko På Isen* presents translingual practices in bilingual families and communities. For example, while Domínguez Serén is in Spain, the fluid language practices are reflected in his use of Galician and Spanish. In Sweden his multilingual repertoire includes English, Spanish and later on, increasingly, Swedish. The film captures Domínguez Serén’s cultural and linguistic hybridity that is reflected, for example, in the books that he reads. Translinguaging includes the use of the varied semiotic forms of meaning-making that characterize multimodal texts (García and Li Wei, 2014, p. 29). In the film, beyond verbal language, the director makes use of other different resources for making meaning (still images, moving images and sounds) as he develops his capacity to further participate in the host society.

King, in *Decentring France: Multilingualism and Power in Contemporary French Cinema*, has noted the function of multilingualism as a ‘crucial narrative element, a tool and a strategy for wresting, maintaining and redistributing power among the characters’ (King, 2007, p. 27). In the case of *El futuro perfecto*, the script was developed by both the director and Xiaobin. By adopting the point of view of the protagonist, dialogues are limited and developed progressively as Xiaobin’s experience and knowledge of her new country and language advance. ‘Dominar el idioma es dominar el mundo’ (to master the language is to master the world) is the tagline that appears in *El futuro perfecto*’s film poster. Wohlatz focuses on the acquisition of a new language and culture as the best way to investigate the migrant condition, since it is a process shared by many immigrants, independently of gender, social or class differences. The director draws from her own personal experience and the limitations everybody encounters living in a new language: ‘I think that language determines us, that we can only think as far as words allow us to do so. Maybe that’s why it’s so humiliating to start living in a new language as an adult’ (Beck, 2016). The film follows Xiaobin’s language

learning journey, and Wohlatz uses different resources and images to illustrate this process. Focusing on the filmic, Wohlatz stages the first scenes in a very minimalist style with few dialogues, close to Bresson's films, that the director admits were an inspiration (Girish, 2017; Wynant, 2017). The minimalist style adopted for recording the basic language exchanges both in the classroom and out of the classroom renders Xiaobin's limited Spanish knowledge and shows how unrelated the language learning activities (e.g. drills) are to the learner's real-life experiences.<sup>11</sup> Wohlatz reflects the language limitation by restraining 'the visual information in the same way that the dialogues are reduced to what Xiaobin is learning in her Spanish book' (Douglas, 2016). She opts for using bland colours, the result of filming with a fairly low resolution (2K) and not altering the lack of saturation (colour intensity) in the post-editing process (Douglas, 2016; Wynant, 2017).<sup>12</sup> Increasing the colour intensity of the images to make them more vibrant would have altered the mood of the images. Faded and mute colours perfectly reflect Xiaobin's thoughtful state of mind. The visualization of Xiaobin's inner life prevents a simplified account of the migrant figure and contributes to empowering her, a key characteristic of postcolonial cinema (Ponzanesi, 2016).

### **Language, Identity and Landscape**

For Wohlatz, a person is his/her language and, therefore, second language acquisition is a process that implies developing a new identity (Koza, 2017). The director used acting (mimesis) and performance as similes for language learning, as the place of relationship between the 'abstract' material and the physical real world. The Spanish language activities in the language school Xiaobin attends are similar to the acting process of learning and rehearsing a new role for a play or a film (Wynant, 2017). For Wohlatz, 'language schools could be understood as rehearsal stages for a new identity after immigration' (Beck, 2016). In fact, Xiaobin adopts different names to present her new personae during the documentary. First, she takes the name of Beatriz, the name of the character she role-plays in one of the language activities in the language school. Later on, she becomes Sabrina, a Spanish name that sounds closer to her real one. At this stage Xiaobin speaks Spanish more fluently, but there are opportunities for her to talk in Mandarin, particularly when she needs to express her inner feelings. This is where her translanguaging ability is evident, as she flits between different languages for different purposes. The director further explores the idea of language learning as a performative act by using the real actor Nahuel Pérez Biscayart. In a humorous mode, he plays himself, as an actor, speaking in Mandarin: 'My name is Nahuel. I'm 27 years old. I'm an actor. I speak French, German, Italian, Spanish, English and Vietnamese. I am



now acting that I speak Chinese'. Finally, as her language skills develop even further, Xiaobin's semi-fictionalized character grows and gains in depth. When Xiaobin learns the conditional future tense in one of the Spanish lessons, the film presents three scenarios with different endings for the future of Xiaobin's relationship with her boyfriend. Each of these segments plays with multiple film genres (melodrama, drama and comedy). The visual narration of these potential endings written by Xiaobin reinforces her agency and voice; it projects her inner thoughts and capacity for thinking about her future. It also exemplifies the notion of multilingualism as a way of redistributing power among the characters that was mentioned in the previous section (King, 2007). The film closes with an enigmatic final coda (setting up a trap and catching a feral cat) that seems to imply that Xiaobin now feels confident about her capacity for taking care of herself and for feeling at home.

The philosophy of Wittgenstein is a recurring reference for both filmmakers to emphasize the close link between language and identity. Wohlatz has expressly recognized this connection: 'Language is an essential part of our identity. What you are able to say triggers what you can think – which comes from the philosophy of Wittgenstein' (Douglas, 2016). Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous saying '*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*' is cited to open the press notes of *Ko På Isen*.<sup>13</sup> It echoes philosophical concerns related to language, reality and representation. As in *El futuro perfecto*, the narrative of *Ingen Ko På Isen* is presented and evolves according to the director's language acquisition process. Learning is a key topic and comprises different types: working in the construction building, filmmaking and learning to be a citizen (learning the language and culture of his new country) (Escolano, 2015).<sup>14</sup> During the opening credits, the camera is static, focusing on the landscape and the sound (snow and wind). The first sequence, a kind of preface, establishes a strong connection between language and landscape. It presents language, a new (semiotic) code, in the form of a visual dictionary (see Figure 1). English is used as a lingua franca in the first section of the documentary with subtitles appearing in brackets, a sign of Domínguez Serén's lack of Swedish language skills at this stage. Progressively, different stages of language acquisition are introduced (e.g. listening to the radio and television, audio language lessons and reading books in Swedish). Understanding the others, fellow migrants in his new workplace and the Swedish people, is a key stage in the development of his intercultural skills. However, the film also exposes the filmmaker's identity crisis: 'The closer I get to them, the further away it seems I get from the people I left behind'.



**Figure 1.** Still from *Ingen Ko På Isen* (2015) by Courtesy of Eloy Domínguez Serén. A man fishing at twilight at the end of a pier. The word ‘fisherman’ appears both in Swedish and in English like a dictionary entry

The middle section of the documentary looks back to Domínguez Serén’s homeland (Galicia), his family and their migrant past. At this point, there is an insert in the background of a television programme dedicated to the Spanish philosopher Lledó, who conceives philosophy as a meditation on language and emphasizes the natural propensity of human beings to communicate. Similarly to Wittgenstein, for Lledó, one of the key missions of philosophy is to think about words. The interview with the philosopher highlights the identity value of language and the importance of questioning linguistic discourses, as this reflective process allows genuine and full participation in society by all citizens:

¿Por qué pienso lo que pienso? ¿Por qué tengo la ideología que tengo? Lo que yo soy. Porque lo yo que soy es palabra. Una lengua capaz de manifestar lo que somos. ¿Qué significa belleza? ¿Qué significa justicia? ¿Qué significa bien? ¿Qué quieres decir cuando dices esta palabra? Que debemos de seguir interrogando al lenguaje para evitar que nos manipulen, que no engañen, que nos ‘ignorantifiquen’.

(Why do I think what I think? Why is my ideology as it is? What I am. Because I am word. A language that can express what we are. What does beauty mean? What does justice mean? What does good mean? What do you want to say when you say certain words? We must keep on questioning our own language to prevent from being

manipulated, from being deceived, from being ‘ignorantified’.) (Lledó, in Domínguez Serén, 2015a)<sup>15</sup>

Lledó’s philosophical discourse has a double meaning for Domínguez Serén as he reflects on his bilingual identity as a speaker of Galician and Spanish: ‘Yo soy palabra’ (I am word) refers to his own identity, defined both by language and by his origin, that is, his family (Escolano, 2015).

The following section of *Ko På Isen* marks the return to the language learning experience in Stockholm. The soundtrack includes Domínguez Serén speaking in Swedish, which reveals his desire to learn more about this language, culture and people. When he is able to read in Swedish and understand it, he expresses his appreciation of his new country. The filmmaker has commented that literature was a great source of cultural learning: Mankell, Strindberg, Sjöwall-Wahlöö, Lindqvist, Läckberg’s novels, Tomas Tranströmer’s poetry and Martin Kellerman’s comic strips (Domínguez Serén, 2015b). Domínguez Serén’s ability to communicate in Swedish fostered the development of his cultural knowledge and intercultural skills. The title of the film constitutes strong evidence of this successful process. In the last part of the film, the filmmaker travels around the country, and his proficiency level in the language allows him to appreciate proverbs and sayings that are culturally unique. Domínguez Serén’s choice for the title, *Ingen Ko På*, is a Swedish saying that means there is no immediate danger, and it illustrates his capacity for an in-depth understanding of the nuances of idiomatic language and the specificity of linguistic and cultural references. As he declares during the final part of the documentary, the most valuable aspect of his experience is getting closer to the people and understanding everything around him better.

The interactions between people and a particular environment are strongly linked to identity and place perception.<sup>16</sup> Spaces, identities and cultures are intertwined and mark the way we make sense of the varied places we inhabit. Liminal and in-between spaces and boundaries are particularly relevant for the migrants’ experience and contribute to their hybrid identity.<sup>17</sup> As Xiaobin develops her ability to express herself in Spanish, her world expands, metaphorically and physically. For the filmmaker, the language learning journey is described as a process of grasping concepts that are new or different to the migrant’s language, which is mirrored by the depiction of getting to know a new place:

The idea was to use the camera to do the same as in the dialogues. So at the beginning she is starting from zero, when she arrives in Argentina. When you first come to a place

everything is abstract because you don't share any history, you don't recognise the city's landmarks. So it is a bit like an empty abstract space, not a city in its typical expression, and this is why at the beginning the scenes are very short and mostly a single shot, with no movement. (Douglas, 2016)

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Wohlatz thus translates the learning process into the staging of the film and the portrayal of the urban landscape. In the first section of the film, the *mise-en-scène* is very simple and schematic. For example, the opening of the film – an establishing shot of Río de la Plata with a container ship on the horizon – brings migration and the global flow of goods to the forefront in a portrayal by the filmmaker of the arrival in a new city as superficial and universal. The film does not use picturesque city landscapes. In fact, the Argentine capital is reduced to 'functional' spaces: the house, the supermarket, the bar, the language school, the metro and the streets to get to those places (Batlle, 2016). As Xiaboin develops her language skills, in scenes which are longer and more complex, there are more locations such as the cinema and the river bank. However, throughout the documentary the director opts not to open the indoor spaces of Xiaboin's home. By keeping the camera's field of vision outside the boundaries of the private family space, the director focuses on Xioabin's personal journey. The director also avoids presenting a darker side of immigration (for example, the exploitation and abuse of migrant workers) that could distract the spectator from the documentary's playful features.

Filming spaces and landscape can reveal and echo physical and emotional displacement and project the filmmaker's perception of culture and subjectivity. This is particularly relevant in the case of *Ingen Ko På Isen*, as the landscape and soundscape render the background to Domínguez Serén's *flâneur* experience. Anderson (2016) has noted how in *Ingen Ko På Isen* the filmmaker's choice of themes and his ambivalence in relation to his identity motivate the portrayal of being in a liminal state: in the process of stepping into another structure (society), he feels further away from his previous identity and from those he was close to before the move to Sweden. Domínguez Serén portrays and decodes landscapes while addressing his own subjectivity. The director himself has acknowledged the reflective nature of his work:

For two years, I have been documenting my experience in Stockholm both in pictures and written words, in such a way that my shooting was regularly accompanied by writing on my diary, and vice versa. By doing so I was exploring my new environment

through images and sounds, while at the same time I was also reflecting on this through my writing. Furthermore, I was even learning the Swedish lexicon for all those images, sounds and thoughts. Thus, this straightforward procedure has enabled the different ways of expression to merge harmoniously in this film. (Domínguez Serén, 2015b).

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For Anderson (2016), *Ingen Ko På Isen* constitutes a clear example of a subjective, performative documentary film. As Bruzzi (2000) argues, this type of documentary acknowledges the inexorable presence of performance.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the film there are numerous examples of the self-reflexive gaze, when the director turns the camera towards himself. But it is towards the final part of the film, when he decides to explore the Swedish countryside before leaving the country, that the landscape emerges as a rhetorical device of self-discovery which blends the subject (person and topic) of the film and the filmmaking process. Landscapes are linked to emotions. As Eizenshtein observes: ‘landscape is the freest element of film, the least burdened with servile, narrative tasks, and the most flexible in conveying moods, emotional states, and spiritual experiences’ (Eizenshtein, 1987, p. 217). This is particularly evident in the epilogue. This section, shot as an old Super-8 film, exposes the poetic nature of the filmmaker’s connection with the landscape and his feelings of joy and nostalgia before he leaves his adopted country. These aesthetic strategies fit with key issues in postcolonial cinema, namely, empowering the migrant figure and engaging with a ‘fluid, situational, relational mode of knowledge production’ (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2012, p. 2).

## **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that in times of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007) in which states, regions and urban and rural communities are increasingly diverse, there is a need to acknowledge the close relationship between language and cultures. This calls for an examination of experiences of formal and informal language learning and translingual communication. Hence, migrant artists’ representations of nomadic experiences and their encounters with a new language deserve to be read critically as portrayals of multilingual life. The common core of *El futuro perfecto* and *Ingen Ko På Isen* is human migration and the multiple feelings associated with the process of integration in the host country: loneliness, confusion, excitement and resilience. Both films can be labelled as voyages of discovery articulated around the acquisition of a new language and the exploration of a new environment and landscape. They acknowledge the complex reality of migrants as plurilingual subjects. This chapter argues that, speaking from their own experience as migrant

artists, Wohlatz's and Domínguez Serén's documentaries offer a poetic, humorous and affective reflection on belonging, identity and voice. The films make the migrant figures visible by adopting their point of view and giving shape to their intercultural journey. They visualize not only the obstacles and limitations the immigrants felt but also the strength they found when learning a new language. Moreover, the films depict Wohlatz's and Domínguez Serén's fascination with developing their own filmmaking practice as they question their limitations and capacities as displaced artists, working with images but also 'foreign' words, trying to understand and represent otherness and difference.

In sum, this chapter explores how two contemporary films respond to, incorporate and expand on the visual representation of intercultural mediations and multilingual cultural practices offered in other films. The exploration of more cinematic works and other contemporary cultural expressions that elaborate on the notions of multilingual life, identity, belonging and art is to be encouraged. Showcasing multilingual films created by and about migrants seems particularly valuable for fostering an inclusive space for dialogue about the stories being told on-screen. In the experience of myself and fellow colleagues, a noteworthy feature of screening such documentaries is that they facilitate audiences' engagement with 'active' film-viewing. They open up debates on multilingualism, stereotypes and under-represented identities thematized in cultural products and events.<sup>19</sup> As learning about encounters with a different language, culture, society and landscape frequently appears linked to the perception of languages in these films, there is a straightforward practical application to higher education and secondary school language curricula (second and foreign language). Integrating this type of film in language teaching, supported by teaching resources and other creative activities based on the viewing, can facilitate and enhance discussion amongst students about relevant topics (refugees, migration, borders etc.).<sup>20</sup> Further research could explore how films and different cultural interventions (e.g. curation or festival programming) can open up conversations with and among different migrant communities.<sup>21</sup>

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The resentment, hostility and violent reactions against migrants are linked in many instances to feelings of uncertainty and insecurity. According to Zygmunt Bauman (2004, 2016, pp. 5, 40, 66), the unresolved consequence of economic progress is the 'superfluous' populations of migrants, refugees and other outcasts ('human waste' or 'wasted humans'), who are seen as 'strangers in our midst'. The anxieties and fears around marginalized groups (migrants, refugees, and other outcasts) have triggered different forms of rejection, including systematic acts of violence and other forms of invisible violence.

<sup>2</sup> Although the author refers to countries in the European Union, the ambiguous attitudes towards multilingualism can be perceived in many other countries. See, for example, Lauret's comments on the language and cultural homogenization that took place in the US during the 20th century (Lauret, 2014, pp. 20–27).

<sup>3</sup> See European Coordination of Film Festivals (1998–2000), Santaolalla (2005), Monterde (2008), Berghahn and Sternberg (2010), Loshitzky (2010) and Guillén Marín (2017).

<sup>4</sup> Subjectivity, as something which is profoundly social and intimately particular, is central to Ponzanesi and Waller's definition of postcolonial cinema: 'Postcolonial cinema, while maintaining engagement with collectives, refocuses on the specificity of individuals' (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2012, pp. 7–8).

<sup>5</sup> 'Language and landscape as a gate into a new life' is the tagline to Domínguez Serén's film *Ingen Ko På Isen*.

<sup>6</sup> Born and raised in Germany, Nele Wohlatz studied scenography at the University of Applied Arts, Karlsruhe, and film at the University Torcuato Di Tella, Buenos Aires. In this city she teaches documentary film and has collaborated with the Goethe Institute. She has directed several short films and videos for theatre productions. In 2013, her first feature film *Ricardo Bär* was premiered at BAFICI (Buenos Aires International Festival of Independent Cinema) and received several awards. In 2016, she was selected for the Berlinale Talents Doc Station with *El futuro perfecto*. In 2016, she directed the short film *Tres oraciones sobre la Argentina* (*Three Sentences about Argentina*) in which she again explores language learning and identity. Her new film project, *Noche americana* (*American Night*), was selected for the 2020 San Sebastián's Co-Production Forum.

<sup>7</sup> In the film all the students play themselves, except for Vijay.

<sup>8</sup> Galician Eloy Domínguez Serén studied in different countries (Spain and Italy) and in 2012 moved to Sweden. In this country he directed his first short film *Pettring* (2012) and completed two other projects: the short film *I Den Nya Himlen* (2014) and the medium-feature film *Jet Lag* (2014). After *Ingen Ko På Isen* (*No Cow on the Ice*), Domínguez Serén directed another two short films, *Yellow Brick Road* (2015) and *Rust* (2016), and the documentary *Hamada* (2018), which was selected at the Berlinale Doc Station. He is currently working on a new documentary, *The Darker It Gets*, a Swedish production shot in the Arctic Circle.

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<sup>9</sup> Domínguez Serén has said that this book was an inspiration for reflecting on his own experience as an immigrant (Domínguez Serén, 2015b).

<sup>10</sup> See Canagarajah (2013), García and Li Wei (2014) and Li Wei (2018) for a detailed discussion on the evolution of this term.

<sup>11</sup> Drilling is a technique used in foreign language classrooms where students repeat vocabulary or sentences after listening to the teacher or another student.

<sup>12</sup> 2K resolution is a generic term for a horizontal resolution of approximately 2,000 pixels. The lack of saturation in the images indicates that they lack colour intensity.

<sup>13</sup> Point 5.6 of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921/1961). As noted by Marie McGinn, in his classic work Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) develops a theory about the logic of language. The Austrian philosopher ‘attempts to set a limit to what can be thought by means of an abstract theory that sets precise and exact limits to what can be said’ (McGinn, 2002, p. 5).

<sup>14</sup> Domínguez Serén has said that, as a speaker of the Galician language, he has a special sensibility with respect to the value of a local language which grants access to layers of knowledge related to the culture and the country (Porto/Post/Doc, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> These are the English subtitles of the film.

<sup>16</sup> Altman and Low’s (1992) concept of ‘place attachment’ focuses on the ways in which people connect to various places, and the effects of such bonds in identity development, place-making, perception and practices.

<sup>17</sup> For the concepts of hybrid identity and hybridization, see Nederveen Pieterse (1994), García Canclini (1995) and Anzaldúa (2008).

<sup>18</sup> Bruzzi notes that ‘whether built around the intrusive presence of the filmmaker or self-conscious performances by its subjects – [there] is the enactment of the notion that a documentary only comes into being as it is performed, that although its factual basis (or document) can pre-date any recording or representation of it, the film itself is necessarily performative, because it is given meaning by the interaction between performance and reality’ (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 154).

<sup>19</sup> *El futuro perfecto* and *Ingen Ko På Isen* were included in the 2017 and 2018 editions of the Beyond Babel Film Festival, a small multilingual film festival launched in 2015 as part of the Manchester Metropolitan University Humanities in Public Festival (Herrero, 2020).

<sup>20</sup> *El futuro perfecto* was part of the Schools and Colleges Programme for Spanish Language Students for year 12 students at HOME cinema in Manchester (UK) in January 2020. A free resource, published using Creative Commons licences, is available to download from the Film in Language Teaching Association ([www.filta.org.uk](http://www.filta.org.uk)).

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