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**A Tiny Boat Lost at Sea:
Trauma and Ethics in *Havarie [Collision]*
by Philip Scheffner (Germany, 2016)**

Abstract: A distant image of a boat adrift in the Mediterranean Sea, with thirteen refugees on board. Taken from a YouTube clip, the image is dealt with and stretched in slow motion. The unsynchronized soundtrack is composed of faceless voices of migrants and refugees. The fragmented soundtrack and the “processed” still-frame repetitive image underscore that *Havarie [Collision]* is a documentary which engages not only with the refugee question. It also reflexively questions the conventions governing the representation of suffering in the media.

While the visual image is undermined, the voice assumes a significant role. Thus one’s attention is drawn to listening to voices expressing their traumatic experiences of migration. The human voice is perceived as an inner expression of trauma, a vehicle that embodies ethical significance (Caruth, “The Wound” 8-9; Dolar 86) Jacques Derrida talks of specters that haunt Europe, spirits whose evasive presence cannot be controlled nor silenced (xix). Hamid Naficy shows that exile cinema emphasizes the voice, different languages, and accents (18-38). It undermines the hegemony of the picture and modernity, and moves towards the acoustics of exile that mixes the pre-modern and post-modern. I would like to argue that the divide between image and voice has ties with Jean-François Lyotard’s concept of *le différend* – a term relating to languages that never meet and are untranslatable, as long as one language enforces itself on and silences the other (13).

In addition, I would like to connect the film’s faceless voices with the ethical concepts of Emmanuel Levinas: he intertwines the term “face” (*le visage*) with “the said” (*le dit*) and seeks a moment of epiphany through face or language (that are not necessarily visual or verbal), a moment which impels us to listen and arouses our ethical responsibility toward the Other (*Totality*; “The Saying” 5-7). I suggest that

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the film's faceless world, where thirteen men wait for a rescue that never arrives, forces one to reflect on one's blindness and deafness while watching the Other.

Keywords: trauma, ethics, voice, face and "*hester panim*" (hiding of the face).



Figure 1. The repetitive long-distance image of the migrants' boat: still from *Havarie*, copyright pong

Havarie [*Collision*] opens with a woman's voice relating how at age of twelve she saw her father taken away, never to return:

I'm at the window, I watch my father, he's standing there with these people. They're terrorists. He's talking to them. But I understand nothing. I was just watching.

The dramatic description "depicts" the words of a child looking out of the window, seeing but not hearing. Contrastingly, the spectators hear a description but see nothing, neither the speaker nor the setting. Instead they see distant, fragmented figures of a boat adrift on its way from North Africa to Europe, with thirteen men aboard. It comes from a three-minute clip, shot on a cellphone, uploaded to YouTube, and "processed" in slow motion (one frame per second). Alongside it the film builds a complex soundtrack of testimonies and phone-calls by refugees, migrants, human traffickers, sailors, and a cruise ship passenger who filmed the clip from a distance (Figure 1). Now and then we hear the cruise ship's communications system, reporting the exact coordinates of the boat's location, as well as a Spanish coastguard ship prohibiting any approach to the trapped people, but promising to send a rescue unit to the location. The film's 93 minutes is the time they wait for a helicopter's arrival, and every

few moments there are reports that it's getting closer. Initially it seems to be an incident happening in real-time with inherent tension – did the helicopter arrive, were the people rescued? But the illusion of a diegetic sequence disintegrates, because the picture itself is slowed down, jerky, replayed in a loop, and the complex soundtrack is composed of fragments of voices, without bodies and faces, unconnected directly to the incident. This spaceless and timeless event creates the sense of a situation that has halted for ever. I would like to suggest that the use of these expressive rhetorical devices reveals that the film does not focus only on the question of North African refugees en route to Europe, but it also reflexively raises questions on the representation of traumatic events.

Many films in recent years have tried to tell the story of refugees or migrants, responding to the growing numbers of people on the move across the globe. Europe alone faced its worst refugee crisis since the Second World War, with more than a million people applying for asylum in 2015, and again in 2016. In 2017 alone, the UN estimated that close to 27,000 people are known to have died at sea (there is an overall lack of clear data on migratory movements (Schurmans). Though films about refugees, their migration westward, and their journeys full of hope, are nothing new, what has changed over time is the perception and the representation of moving people (Van de Peer). Some scholars claim that the figure of the illegal (or undocumented) migrant in Western societies is close to the point of starting a new subgenre (Schurmans) Others relate to “Mediterranean thinking,” ways of achieving ethical and spectatorial solidarity by visualizing experiences of the Mediterranean sea (Van Der Peer). To name just a few films that revolve around Mediterranean crossings: Merzak Allouache's *Harragas* (meaning: “those who burn” the borders; Algeria, France 2009), Jonas Carpignano's *Mediterranea* (Italy, 2015), and Wolfgang Fischer's *Styx* (Germany, Austria, 2018). Though they are feature films, they portray the journey's hardships in a most realistic way, confusing the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. For example: the principal role in *Mediterranea* is played by Koudous Seihon, who himself made the journey from Burkina Faso to Italy some years ago, almost drowning at sea (Van Der Peer). The recent “refugee crisis” was accordingly responded to with a ‘wave’ of contemporary documentaries. For example, in *Tanger, le rêve des brûleurs* [*Tangiers, the Burner's Dream*] (2003), Leila Kilani follows the lives of Sub-Saharan and Moroccan youth contemplating immigration to Europe through the dangerous Mediterranean crossing (Morocco, France, 2002). A different documentary approach is presented in the series *Exodus: Our Journey to Europe* by James Bluemel and Jack MacInnes who gave cameras to some of the people who smuggled themselves into Europe (UK, 2016). Another approach is that of *Fuocoammare* [*Fire at Sea*] (2016) by Gianfranco Rosi. Rosi chooses to set the migrants' dangerous crossing against a background of the ordinary life of islanders on the Sicilian island of Lampedusa.

Although *Havarie* can be grouped with these films by its subject matter, it has a distinctive marking-point due to its aesthetic choices, and can thus also be regarded as part of a growing group of documentaries whose filmmakers choose to position their camera as a critical, self-

conscious eye exploring conventions governing the representation of suffering in the media, particularly regarding the current flow of images of migrants and refugees. Images of violence and human suffering are nowadays flooding every screen, small and large, becoming part of our daily routine. Recent documentaries that can be defined as “essay films” challenge the conventional modes of representation and choose an alternative way to perform – by avoidance and absence. A similar attitude is visible in *El mar la mar* by Joshua Benetta and J. P. Sniadecki (United States 2017). The film takes place on the border between Mexico and the United States and follows the route to the U.S., that only the poorest migrants take. The film relates this human drama through the voices of survivors, trackers, and inhabitants of the desert. We don’t see the faces of the speakers; just weathered, often degraded 16mm footage of the land and the fragments of life that cling to it.¹ These films deal with traumatic and painful events by avoiding direct violent images and visual reconstruction; they seem to purposely distance themselves from the signified, and instead of direct images they use “processed,” distorted or even abstract images. A substantial number of those films go even further and choose to hide or erase the human face, a choice that carries a deep cultural and ethical significance. While the image is impaired, the human voice assumes an essential part of the spectator’s experience, especially when the voice is detached from body and face. In this paper, I focus on *Havarie* as a case-study of essay films that seek alternative and creative rhetorical means to express trauma. I discuss the ethical significance of broken images, a faceless diegetic world, and the crucial role of the voice. I try to understand whether the human voice can become “the face of the Other” in the ethical sense of the word, i.e., a cinematic tool that impels one to listen to silenced and grief-stricken voices.

The question of the gaze

“keep visual contact” (*Havarie*)

Samuele Pucillo, the hero of *Fuocoammare* [*Fire at Sea*] is a 12-year-old boy who lives his everyday life on the island of Lampedusa, on whose shores hundreds of migrants in overcrowded boats land on a weekly basis, many perish on the way. There is a moment in the film that can be interpreted as a key metaphor for the west’s refusal to see; Samuele, who has a lazy eye, goes for a checkup, and the doctor explains:

We have a problem with this eye, it’s a lazy eye... It’s an eye that doesn’t work. So, your brain doesn’t receive images from the left eye, so we have to force it, to use the left eye... we’ll force your brain to use the lazy eye and make it work. (Trans. from Italian)

As mentioned previously, the testimony that opens *Havarie* is given from the point of view of a girl standing and watching a traumatic incident from a distance. The film continues to address the question of the gaze: in mid-film, the camera changes direction and we



Figure 2. The cruise ship, hove to near the little boat – still from *Havarie*, copyright pong

discover the cruise ship “Cruise Adventure of the Seas” (Figure 2). Identifying the viewpoint is a significant moment because of the symbolic power-relations between the tiny boat and the cruise ship with over 5,000 passengers and crew on board. We hear on the ship’s communication system the coastguard’s instructions: “OK sir, please keep *visual contact* with the small boat, we will keep you informed about the rescue unit.” The polite reply from the cruise ship is: “Thank you very much sir, we’ll *keep visual contact* with the refugees on the boat” (my emphasis). Implicit in the conversation is that the ship must stay in touch and maintain eye contact with the refugee boat, but not approach it. Terry Diamond, the amateur photographer who shot the clip, describes the situation:²

They were at a distance from the ship, you sort of *try to zoom in and get a clear understanding of what you were actually physically looking at*, and then you realize: my God, *there’s human beings in this*. You start trying to imagine why they’re there. What’s driven them there. And to certain extent, you start to try and put yourself in their position. But you can *never replicate it*. You can only assume that it was something drastic enough to drive people to do that sort of thing. They were waving, and people were waving back at them. It was a strange, strange sight. (*Havarie*, my emphasis)

The photographer understands that photography fails to get across the experience of the people on the boat and apparently the film follows his profound words, attempting to create a new perspective. In an interview, Scheffner said that initially he planned to make a conventional documentary which would show the faces of the witnesses, and the clip would appear as it was uploaded to YouTube. But while working on the film, more and

more refugees arrived in Europe, and images of refugees on boats seemed to be on every TV channel. The filmmakers decided they must react to that flow of images in a reflexive way, and return the gaze to the spectators:

The images were everywhere. On every news channel. Not the action itself but the representation had changed. We had the feeling that we had to react to that. [...] But at a certain point, I said, ‘But what about *our* perspective? What do we actually see in these images that are right there in our living rooms? And how can we include the questioning of our own way of seeing these images? How can we bring this into the film?’ (Interview with Scheffner, Wagner)

Another film maker, Jonas Carpignano, worries that all visual mediums will soon reach saturation point, calling it “a bombardment of images and misery that is becoming reality. We may all become numb to it” (Jones). Similarly, Luc Boltanski who draws on Hannah Arendt’s term “spectacle of suffering,” speaks of “distant suffering.” Both terms engage with the divide between those who suffer and those who watch them from a distance. Boltanski is concerned with the spectator’s passivity and inability to commit morally and act:

... But what form can this commitment take when those called upon to act are thousands of miles away from the person suffering, comfortably installed in front of the television set in the shelter of the family living room? [...] On what conditions is the spectacle of distant suffering brought to us by the media is morally acceptable? (xv)

Libby Saxton speaks of the ethical and political aspects of that distance and suggests that “the rhetoric of mainstream news coverage works to dissimulate and discourage reflection on the unequal relation between protected Western viewer and vulnerable non-Western other” (67). Susan Sontag cites the catastrophes “unfolding in distant corners of the globe” that create “tele-intimacy with death and destruction [...], battles and massacres filmed as they unfold have been a routine ingredient of the ceaseless flow of domestic, small-screen entertainment” (16, 18). These images might end up in a “narcissistic pity which masquerades as altruism” (“Tracking Shots” 67). Thus, the film’s alienated and reflective modes of expression can be seen as means to contemplate the spectator’s responsibility “over the purportedly immoral ‘effects’ of such images” (64).

The Missing Picture

“How to represent the unrepresentable” (Elsaesser, “Postmodernism” 195)

The Missing Picture (2013) by Rithy Panh narrates the story of Panh’s childhood when the Khmer Rouge ruled over Cambodia. Most of his family perished – starved or tortured to death in the labour camps that were intended to “re-educate” the people. Panh searches in vain for a missing picture – proof of the mass murder. At same time the film undermines

the search and represents personal and collective trauma with a visual alternative – static clay figurines placed in minimal settings. Panh understands that the image must be missing, that he was not really looking for it and comments in the film: “Would it not be obscene and insignificant? So I created it. I give you today neither the picture nor the search for a unique image, but the picture of a quest: the quest that cinema allows.” Geoffrey Hartman contends that “the absolute evil experienced by our generation ... threatens the mimetic.” He asks whether it is possible to bridge the abyss that has been opened, and if it is possible that narrative representation is conceivable for that evil? (*The Longest Shadow* 446). Libby Saxton believes that “filmmakers are faced with the task of making the invisible visible and the absent present.” She adds that their responsibility lies in revealing “what lies beyond the visible: hidden traces, missing bodies, mechanisms of concealment and erasure, and skewing of perception they entail” (“Blindness” 14).

I would like to suggest that *Havarie*, along with other documentaries dealing with trauma and human suffering, is influenced by an ethical crisis concerning the image – a crisis of figurability. Questions concerning the ethics of representation grew sharper in view of technology enabling the photographing of horrors unfolding in the twentieth century (Saxton, “Blindness” 1-10). The documentarist Claude Lanzmann declared that he created his monumental film *Shoah* (1985) out of resistance to concrete images of horrors, and preferred to use verbal testimonies. Libby Saxton suggests that Lanzmann excluded archive images and refused on principle to use material in which the perpetrators had photographed the victims, because of their nature and significance, and spurred by his conviction that horror cannot be represented in terms of narrative, ethics, or aesthetics (“Tracking Shots” 26, 48). Contrastingly, the art historian Georges Didi-Huberman prefers “images in spite of all” – *Images malgré tout*. He addresses four photographs providing evidence of the extermination in camps, taken by inmates at the risk of their lives. Those scraps of celluloid made the Holocaust visible for him, recovering their individual identities, even in the face of their collective destruction. Their act shows the power of images as evidence, testimony, and, here, as resistance. What the Nazis wanted to destroy in Auschwitz was not only life but “but also the very form of the human being and with it the human image” (239). The image becomes a moral imperative, an act of resistance to the urge to eradicate people’s humanity, and with them their images.

Scheffner uses the images taken at sea by an amateur photographer but chooses “to handle” the original found footage with radical slow motion (one image per second). Laura Mulvey relates to “delayed cinema” and addresses the Freudian concept of deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*), which describes how the unconscious preserves an experience whose influence will take effect at a later date. The change of temporality undermines the image’s indexical status, and creates a displaced perspective, a new kind of ontology of ambivalence and uncertainty. The co-presence of movement and stillness, continuity and discontinuity,

combines two human fascinations: one with the boundary between life and death and the other with the mechanical animation of the inanimate, particularly the human figure (7-16). Years before, Walter Benjamin had similarly explored the technological processes of photography and proposed his concept of “optical unconscious.” He suggested that photography could reveal something else, something threatening that may not be visible, aspects of existence that elude our conscious grasp: “It is through photography [...] that we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis” (510-12). I would like to refer to another temporal device in the film and borrow the term “dead time” which refers to the time lapse created in jump cuts, and apply it to the gap created between image and voice. Mary Ann Doane claims that “the time that is excluded or elided is constituted as ‘dead time,’ as time which by definition, is outside of the event” (159); it creates a “conjunction of cinematic time and temporality” (160); and generates a “disembodied unanchored time” (163).

Havarie's aesthetic strategies of a “broken,” slowed down, repetitive image of thirteen men crammed in a tiny boat, and the gap it creates between voice and image, suggest that the filmmakers purposely distance themselves from realistic modes of expression and emphasize reflexively that the film is a text. Thomas Elsaesser relates to the post-traumatic cultural effect, the situation of a signifier without a referent – characterizing the postmodern situation. He maintains that it does not imply the absence of the signified or the referent from reality, but rather its distancing from the signifier, because the event is so traumatic that it cannot be accessed (“Postmodernism” 111). Similarly, Dominik LaCapra sees the emphasis on distorted, disturbing narrative modes as a cultural post-traumatic reaction. Trauma is initially caused by an inciting incident, whose horrific dimension cannot be represented by language or any other symbolic system. In the heart of the traumatic experience there is an excess that evades any representation, a shocking event that leaves an empty lacuna – a gap that cannot be represented: any attempt at representation is doomed to create a sense of failure (*History and Memory* 44). The film can thus be classified as “trauma cinema” – films dealing with “world shattering events whether public or personal,” in a non-realistic mode, and are characterized by “disturbance and fragmentation,” a split narrative and style, reflecting the inherent difficulty of representing trauma. Trauma films “disremember” by drawing on innovative strategies for representing reality obliquely, by looking for mental processes for inspiration, and by incorporating self-reflexive devices” (Walker 19). Elsaesser uses the Freudian term *parapraxis* to describe the failure of performance: a unique style that expresses loss, mourning, and distorted realities that represent a post-traumatic state. Cinematic expressions of the poetics of parapraxis employ rhetorical devices such as repetitiveness, bad timing, “wrong” cuts, bad puns, double takes – aesthetics that emphasize the failure of representing trauma. He describes it as “politics of performative failure” whose misalignments, double-takes and “parallax” effects together constitute a kind of “mourning

work-in progress” (“Absence” 109-110). While Elsaesser analyzes post-war German fiction films, *Havarie* demonstrates that alternative style characterizes not only fiction but also documentaries. The film can be grouped with “essay films,” a “sub-genre” of documentary cinema that is characterized by its search for a cinematic language beyond time and space, and modes of expression that are merely factual or descriptive. These films, that challenge the spectator intellectually, try to express mental concepts, hidden thoughts and ideas. They integrate different aesthetics: experimental, postmodern, avant-garde, and art films, and they use poetic and creative license in their attempt to articulate the subjective qualities of experience and memory. As a result, the boundaries are blurred between the personal and the public, the fictional, the experimental and the documentary (Rascaroli 1; Corrigan 4-6).

Bodiless Traumatic Voices

“The problem is not counter posing words to visible images. The words do not replace the images. They are images.” (Rancière 97)

When the visual image is constantly undermined, the voice assumes a significant role. *Havarie* accentuates the cinematic role of the human voice by separating it from body and face. Scheffner, the director, explains the importance of the shift from the visual to the auditory:

Of course the important thing is what do you see? By listening to the voices and sounds, you always have to reinterpret the image. It takes on totally different associations. Things seem linked, but then this connection disappears. So you have to question again and again and again how you interpret what you see. You’re not sure, and you can’t be sure. (Wagner)

The symbolic power of a disembodied voice has been cited widely in research studies. In the early days of the talkies the voice was generally synchronized with the phantasmatic body and thus enhanced the film’s realism; it was described in terms of “totality” and “organic” (Doane 163). Only later, filmmakers discovered the cinematic, ideological and political power of unsynchronized voices that create a different kind of spectatorship and listening. Mladen Dolar in his book *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006) suggests that the human voice is perceived in two apparently contradictory attitudes: the first sees the voice as distinct from all other sounds:

What singles out the voice against the vast ocean of sounds and noises, what defines the voice as special among the infinite array of acoustic phenomena, is its inner relationship with meaning [...] as the bearer of an utterance, the support of a word, a sentence, a discourse, any kind of linguistic expression. (13-14)

The other attitude suggests that the voice is not just a vehicle of meaning but also has many physical qualities connected to self-expression and individual identity: intonation, pitch, timbre, depth, accent, color, musicality, etc. (15). Nevertheless, Dolar suggests that

even the pre-symbolic infant's babbling is a textless voice that serves as an expressive tool for communicating with the other. The first cry may be caused by pain, hunger, frustration or fear but as soon as someone responds to it – there is already an addressee. The cry is interpreted, becomes speech addressed to the other, and in fact seeks an answer (26-27). The first voices the baby listens to are also an important part of understanding the centrality and primacy of the voice. Many scholars rely on psychoanalytic theories and suggest that the voice is an essential part of human experience which, from the primal stage of our infancy is tied to separation and abandonment. Jacques Lacan saw the voice (like the gaze) as – *objet petit a* – a term that stands for the unattainable object of desire of the libido. In the early stages of his life the baby is wrapped in a “sonorous envelope,” whose center is his mother's soothing voice; the maternal voice establishes his connection to her phantasmatic body. But the pre-symbolic imaginary unity is severed by the separation of the father who represents the symbolic, the letter and the Law (315). Kaja Silverman concludes the sense of loss connected to the voice: “Thus the subject is haunted by a sense of loss, absence, or lack. The subject can never be whole or complete, and for which it consequently yearns” (74). Amy Lawrence suggests reading the loss in a positive way: “where the subject works through its relationship with the other and, in doing so, momentarily, and pleasurably, reconstructs a sense of wholeness” (20). Lawrence's interpretation of the loss opens up the possibilities of an ethical reading of the voice.

The voice's primal characteristics become essential in cinema. Michel Chion coined the term *acousmètre* – in cinema, a voice lacking a body, whose origin is invisible. He spoke of the *ombre parlant* (the speaking shadow), which has no face, no body, and is unlocatable. The *acousmètre* is within the screen and not within it, roams above it but doesn't enter it, and brings disequilibrium and tension. The voice is an invitation to see, “and it can be an invitation to the loss of the self, to desire and fascination” (24). The film is pursued by the voice which is located in a liminal, nameless place, an outlying area or border zone. Chion connects the cinematic voice to the soul, then to death:

Particularly in the cinema, the voice enjoys a certain proximity to the soul, the shadow, the double, – these immaterial, detachable representations of the body, which survive death and sometimes even leave it during its life. When it is not the voice of the dead, the narrative voiceover is that of the almost dead, of the person who has completed his or her life and is only waiting to die. (47)

The body-voice relations have been interpreted in many ways. Dolar sees the voice as the missing link that holds bodies and languages together. He borrows Badiou's poetic term “incorporeal bodies” and suggests they present “a break in the world of what exists, a rupture in the continuities of bodies and languages,” He portrays the physical aspects of the metaphor: “the body implied by the voice, disembodied as it may seem, is enough to be cumbersome and embarrassing; in all its living presence, it is also the corpse one cannot

dispose of” (60). Thus, the bodiless voices in the film create a sense of a rupture, a break in the world, a sense of detachment and death.

Havarie has two notable elements identified with post-trauma: one is repetition – and indeed the film is an “acting out” over 93 minutes of an image that constantly recurs; and the second is the use of cinematic voice to communicate the trauma and loss to the spectator. Geoffrey Hartman defines video testimony as a genre in its own right. He sees it as a “counter-cinematic” genre, and suggests that verbal testimonies have “minimal visuality” (“Memory.com” 11), the restriction of the visual field leads to an individual embodied voice that maximizes the “mental space” opened up by the image (4). The film contains several traumatic testimonies: the refugees’ trafficker describes death in his boat; a girl sees her father kidnapped, never to return; a man hides in his home and hears two women being dragged away, abused, and murdered. Another testimony that doesn’t seem part of testimonies given by the migrants and refugees, is given by the passenger who filmed the video – Tony Diamond from Belfast. In his youth he saw how a childhood friend aged fourteen was shot by British soldiers. (In a way, his testimony reverses the stereotype of the power relationship between the western “rich” tourist who took the video and the refugees filmed on the boat).

Many scholars relate to the giving of evidence as a “speech act” – a performative act that becomes material evidence of the truth, and at the same time, an act that brings moral and political subjects into being, sometimes almost in spite of themselves (Givoni 148). Contrastingly, other historians contend that testimonies do not provide sufficient basis for documentation. They are given so long after the events, and although people appear spontaneous, they are actually mediated. Memory dissipates or is mixed with things the survivor heard or read about (LaCapra, “Trauma, History” 376). Hartman does not completely rule out the demand for historical accuracy, but maintains that documenting oral memories does not try make survivors into historians. Rather it awards them value as human witnesses of a situation that negated humanity; the person who tells the story is important and so are the things he describes. The emphasis is on the significance of the event and the witnesses’ state of mind, even if the testimony has informative errors (*The Longest Shadows* 133-7). Our times are called “the era of testimony” (Wieviorka 2006), but the tension between the need to speak and the inability to speak, makes every testimony a paradox. Dori Laub describes the inability to speak it as “self-inflicted imprisonment” (79). Hartman discusses how the silence penetrates the survivors’ speech, and in consequence, gaps and ruptures – traces of the abysmal horror – are contained within and by means of their speech. At the same time, despite the difficulty in speaking about the horror, Hartman rules out the totalistic gesture that places authenticity in a void, in silence, in the absence of what lies at the heart of the trauma (*The Longest Shadow* 133-7).

Cathy Caruth relates to the vocal aspects of trauma and writes on “the wound and the voice” based on Sigmund Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where she analyzes

the wounded voices of the dead as a “traumatic neurosis,” a kind of reconstruction of a traumatic event that emerges involuntarily. Freud proposed that damage to the mind is an opening in time, the self, and the world. It is not a physical wound that can easily be healed, but an event that happens so unexpectedly that the awareness cannot encompass it, and then enforces itself repeatedly through the survivors’ nightmares and recurring actions (Freud qtd. in Caruth 2). Trauma is thus a movement between the crisis of death and the crisis of life, between the need to tell and the inability to cope with surviving that incident (1-8). Raya Morag refers not only to human voices and contends that “the sound symbolizes the unapproachable essence of a traumatic event” far better than a visual image “could ever” do (“Chronic Trauma” 122). Morag suggests that when films emphasize the vocal aspect, it brings spectators closer to the repressed horrors, even familiar sounds become part of the “uncanny” (125).³ *Havarie* toys with our auditory perception – the sound effects during the film are not the sounds of the sea, but mainly urban soundscapes, where the interviewees are situated: traffic, noisy coffee shops, house interiors, phone calls – so the gap between we see and what we hear is purposely confusing. Only at the very end we can hear the sea and the people’s cries for help.

Caruth also proposes the ethical dimension of recurrent trauma – the voice crying out from the wound is the voice of the Other (8-9). The witnesses in the film bear the sense of responsibility and guilt: the child who watched her father’s kidnappers gave them the car keys; the witness to the women’s murder hid at home with his family, listening to the screams for help. The photographer from Belfast feels guilty because if he’d been at home a moment before, his friend would have entered his house and wouldn’t have been shot by the soldiers. Dolar comments that for generations, Western culture saw the voice as having ethical significance: every individual has a “inner voice” identified as the dictate of conscience and/or the voice granting him awareness of his actions – exactly in the place where the gaze failed: the voice is what calls people to awake (86). Moreover, Laub notes that “testimony is the narrative’s address to hearing; for only when the survivor knows he is being heard, will he stop to hear and listen to himself” (71). Thus, in the process of articulating the unspeakable, the listener plays a crucial role by sharing the agony of the past. Hartman uses Maurice Halbwachs’s notion of an “affective community” to characterize this “supportive group ready to be a ‘witness to the witness’” (“Memory.com” 4). Caruth argues that “Trauma opens up and challenges us to a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, of impossibility” (10). Shoshana Felman sees the act of documentation as an artistic form intended to rescue the possibility of speech. For her a film is a creative act that leads us to the unsayable but which must be heard. A documentary can rescue and keep alive the possibilities for speech and expression and return the voice through art, transcending the twin maladies of silence and violence (204-83).

Ideological and Political Significance of the Voice

“We lost our language.” (Arendt)

The film’s use of the voice carries ideological and political implications. Raya Morag sees the voice without a body as reflecting object-subject relations: what is the significance that it lacks a body that under torture, hunger, and forced labour one becomes incorporeal, what is the significance of having a voice, or having your voice silenced? (“Encounter” 105-6). In his book *Accented Cinema*, Hamid Naficy speaks of exile cinema created by directors who migrated from their countries of origin, a cinema that emphasizes the voice. While Scheffner is not an exiled director, his film positions refugees and migrants at its center, and its diasporic and exilic subjects are accented. Naficy also connects the use of the voice with the fragility of the body:

In traumatic forms of expulsion and exile, especially when they are coupled with racism and hostility in the new country, [...] The body’s integrity [...] is threatened, as a result of which it may be felt to be separated; collapsed, fractured, eviscerated, or pitched (28).

Hence, the bodiless voices in *Havarie*’s express the vast tragedy of thousands of refugees and migrants aspiring to reach the West, many of whom die on the way. But this is not the only trauma, and even the lucky ones who manage to reach a safe haven remain in that pending status of refugees or migrants. Hannah Arendt’s essay “War Refugees” (1943) describes the situation of Jews in the nations to which they had fled from the Nazis:

... we actually live in a world in which human beings as such, have ceased to exist for quite a while, since society has discovered discrimination as the great social weapon by which one may kill men without any bloodshed; since passports or birth certificates, and sometimes even income tax receipts, are no longer formal papers but matters of social distinction. (118)

The words *visa*, *papers*, and *documents* constantly recur in *Havarie* and many of the phone calls to the country of origin concern dependence on the documents given by the “host” state and anxiety about deportation back home. Hannah Arendt adds:

We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. *We lost our language*, which means the naturalness of the reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings (my *emphasis*). (110)

Naficy uses the term “mulatta texts” – which characterize black texts: they are texts that speak in the standard languages but with a resonant black accent which signifies: “vernacular literary traditions, which are still being written down” (Henri Louis Gates Jr. (1988, xxiii) qtd. in Naficy 22). Accented films are also “mulatta texts” – films structured from unique

narrative methods, which subvert the realistic treatment of time, space, and causality and thus create resistance to classical forms of narrative structures. Naficy describes their style as: “fragmented, multilingual, epistolary, self-reflexive, and critically juxtaposed narrative structure” (22). A similar notion is the concept of “minor cinemas” that originates in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s influential term “minority literature”⁴ and has been widely used in cinema studies during the last two decades (James qtd. in Anderson and Sundholm 230). Deleuze and Guattari define as “minority literature” the sort of literature that – although written in the major language – challenges its boundaries (18). The term “*minorité/minority*” does not necessarily attest to the numerical proportion of each group, but to a group excluded from positions of power. Minority literature uses a technique of flight – *ligne de fuite*; from a fresh perspective, it poses critical questions about accepted means of representation and unravels the stylistic boundaries that are common practice in syntax and grammar. Another characteristic of minority literature is deterritorialization of the language, which becomes disrupted and fragmented. Hence, the radical modes of expression in *Havarie* can be regarded as subversive modes that express the muted voices of marginalized and minority groups, in this case migrants and refugees.

Naficy shows that exile cinema emphasizes the voice, different languages and accents. Frequently the voice is emphasized by a-synchronicity with the picture. Emphasis on the voice, he believes, undermines the hegemony of the picture and modernity, and moves towards the acoustics of exile that mixes the pre-modern and post-modern. The speaker’s accent is also a powerful signifier that identifies his origin, and creates his identity (5). He adds that the multi-linguistic polyphony creates a diverse gaze (heteroglossia 25, 38) and while on the one hand films become local, on the other they are transformed into texts of a different culture and time: the style “forces” cinema to speak in the dialect of minorities. The same is true in *Havarie* where the voice is asynchronous, and we hear a huge number of languages and accents. Many in the film speak French mixed with Arabic, the majority are living in France with the status of migrants or refugees. The human traffickers in the boat speak and sing in Arabic, the sailors speak an international mixture of languages: Russian, Tagalog and English. English is also the language of communication between the cruise vessel and the Spanish coastguard ship; it can be perceived as a language representing globalism, but here it becomes a formal language, lacking humanness, a language in which one is prohibited from approaching the refugees. Similarly the exact coordinates of the boat’s location that are constantly repeated by the cruise ship’s communications system – 27 28.6.N 000 3.8’E – is an artificial matrix imposed globally by the west, whereas the unique image of the film is a tiny boat lost in an endless sea. Naficy adds that exile cinema emphasizes questions of identity and the sentiment of uprooting and diaspora through places of passage, travelling, different means of transportation, and liminal border zones that create a sense of deterritorialization. *Havarie* maximizes that sense by using a fragmented and displaced image of the boat stuck forever in a loop of time.

The abyss that opens between voice and image in the film can be connected to Jean-François Lyotard's concept of *Le Différend* as analyzed in his book: *The Differend, Phrases in Dispute* (1988). The difference reflects the gap between the language of the powerful who write the law in their own terms and language, and the different language of the victims, the powerless and silenced. It relates to languages that do not encounter each other and are untranslatable.⁵ A disagreement is created when each side clings to a discourse that doesn't accord with the other side's discourse; a situation in which one way of thinking cannot be translated into another way of thinking:

23: In the different, something "asks" to be put in phrases, and suffers from the wrong of not being able to be put into phrases right away. This is when the human beings who thought they could use language as an instrument of communication learn through feeling of pain what accompanies silence [...], that they are summoned by language, not to augment to their profit the quantity of information communicable through existing idioms, but to recognize that what remains to be phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase, and that they must be allowed to institute idioms that do not yet exist. (13)

Lyotard comments that "the perfect crime" does not happen by killing the victim or other witnesses, but by enforcing silence, or relating to testimonies as inconsistent or unbalanced.

The Ethical Face of the Voice

"To see each other" (*Havarie*)

In *Havarie*, a Philippine seaman sings a karaoke song which was a hit in his homeland – The Prodigal Son – (its melody is heard again as if it is played by the cruise ship's orchestra). The lyrics tell of a long-lost son, standing at the entrance to his home, seeking forgiveness from his father. The sailor connects the song with spirits that roam the oceans:

Most Filipinos like this song, It's very famous, Prodigal Son. For me it symbolizes myself because sometimes I'm a prodigal. Yes that's why I like it, because I relate myself to the song – *lost souls, some spirits roaming around in the wilderness...* I heard these people from Libya going to Italy. They died of hypothermia. But I don't know, *maybe their spirits are still roaming around*. Let's sing it again. Play it again. (my emphasis)

In his book *Specters of Marx* (1994), Jacques Derrida speaks of the specters that haunt Europe: among the ten plagues of the capitalist or global system he lists the deportation of immigrants. He discusses the ethical significance of ghosts that haunt us. Derrida refers to Marx's work as "hauntology" an ontology in which we are pursued by ghosts from the past, spirits whose evasive presence cannot be controlled, because by their very nature they are simultaneously present and absent, they exist and do not exist, are visible and invisible, alive

and dead. Derrida adds that the ghosts claim justice for the “Other,” and our very experience implies being pursued by the “Other” who cannot be silenced. For Derrida it is not a call that regards the past alone, for it contains the future, he speaks of ethical history that bears responsibility not just for the dead, but for those who are not yet born:

If I am getting ready to speak at length about ghosts, inheritance, and generations, generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain *others* who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us, it is in the name of *justice*. [...] It is necessary to speak *of the ghost*, indeed *to the ghost* and *with it*, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and *just* that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet *there*, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born. (xix).

And so the Philippine crewman in the film summons up the spirits of those who drowned at sea: Scheffner wants us to be haunted by their presence.

The encounter with the faceless diegetic world of *Havarie* conjures another ethical term – it echoes the Jewish term of “*hester panim*,” a commonly used term in the “Torah” world. Literally, “*hester panim*” is correctly translated as “the concealed face of God” meaning that God has hidden his “face” from his people as a moral punishment; however the meaning is often rendered as “forsaking” or “abandonment” as we can see in the following verses:

I will become very angry at them on that day, and *I will abandon them and hide My face from them*. They will be devoured, and plagued by many evils that will distress them, and will say, ‘Do we not suffer because God has left us?’ (Deuteronomy 31:17, my emphasis)

My God, my God – why have You forsaken me, remaining far from saving me [and from] the words I shout.” (Psalms 22:2)

The difference is not merely a matter of grammar or semantics but of significant theological and spiritual importance. In the wake of the Holocaust, “*hester panim*” has taken a new meaning, radically different from that given to Jewish suffering, persecution, and exile over the long course of Jewish history. The question: “Where was God in the Holocaust?” some might be tempted to answer that he had forsaken the world of mankind, or that he had waived his control: a new version of “*hester panim*” (Tamari 252). Thus, the film can be interpreted as an encounter with an empty godless world that erases human face and identity; but at the same time, it makes one listen to the human voices that reaffirm the essence of humanity after the attempts to erase it (Hartman, “Public Memory” 446-451).

The discussion of the absence of face and its ethical implications leads to the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, who seeks to establish an ethics acknowledging the difference of others and aimed at regarding the face of the Other and “preserving his otherness” (*Totality* 50).

Many scholars have tried to award the vague concept of *le visage* a concrete significance of encountering faces in the cinema (Saxton, "Blindness" 104). Notably, Levinas emphasizes that the term "the face of the other" is not intended to visually represent a face, but is a metaphor for how people reveal their very presence in front of the subject. Levinas makes a connection between face and speech, between the "the saying" – *le dire* – and "the said" – *le dit* – between language's openness to meaning, through the movement of otherness which breaks through the boundaries of the self, and the closing of the comprehensible through the permanent framing of language – which links speech to meaning. It is our position as we stand before the faces of others. We can also identify the connection that Levinas proposes between face and language in the way he seeks to illuminate the very existence of language as possessing a face. Language has a face, and the ability to listen to it depends on our capacity to see it ("The Said" 5-7).

One of the voices in the film says: "You always wait, it's a game of waiting." For 93 minutes we wait for a helicopter that will come and rescue the thirteen men on the little boat. Every second, that is, with every change of frame, we hear a click that measures time like a clock. Scheffner leaves the spectators waiting, and offers no redemption. Are we in an empty, alienated world like the one in Beckett's absurd drama *Waiting for Godot* (1953) – forever trapped in a loop of time? *Havarie*'s repetitive, remote and processed picture creates a distance from the signified – suggesting a post-traumatic cinematic language. The film creates a faceless diegetic world where the voice roams without a place, signifying trauma, wound and death. The abyss between the image and the voice creates unstable world with unidentified territories. The separate channels of image and voice challenge the spectator and pose reflexively ethical and philosophical questions regarding the possibility of authentic representations of distress, pain, and a traumatic geopolitical condition.

Throughout the film, we don't hear the direct voices of those in the boat. Then in the film's final moments Scheffner places the spectator under another test, and for the first and only time we can hear the cries for help from the people in the boat. Do the isolated voices floating over the water create a different kind of attentiveness and change the spectator's perspective? Can a film without faces manage to reveal the features of the Other through the unique cinematic language that Scheffner chose? The film seems to suggest a dual answer, summed up in the words of the ship's captain. In his first part of his monologue his words are quite cynical and patronizing:

We stopped the ship, we kept the ship in position next to it. Everyone gathered on the left, on the port side, taking pictures and videos, wondering many how many times you are going to end up on YouTube? How many headlines you might end up? And you don't if you should smile or wave like the Queen, or you should just keep your face serious going down.

The captain followed the orders of the coast-guard and did not pick up the thirteen men, but he did make the effort to stop his vessel and give them water. The second part of his monologue sounds more human:

... and we went down, proceeding towards them, gave them water, *communicated with them*. They were quite calm when we got there, I cannot remember any faces, I know that they were young people, they seemed to be around my age [...]. Funny enough it was that small boat, in the middle of the sea out of no where, how this can happen? There are a lot of ships out there, how many of them passed them by, cargo ships, how many days they saw no one at all, and on that day, at that time, we managed to *see each other out of nowhere*. So I don't know if we were a symbol of hope or... (my emphasis)

One sentence makes a significant difference: “We managed to see each other” – and although he probably means that they managed to see the little boat, the phrase can be interpreted as describing an equal reciprocal gaze. Not a downward gaze from the cruise ship, but at eye-level.

End Notes

1. A few (out of many) other examples of “essay films” that deal with trauma and the same time question its representation, are *Natureza Morta-Visages d'une dictature [Still Life]* and *48* by Susana de Sousa Dias (Portugal, 2005, 2009). Both films are based on mugshots of political prisoners during the Portuguese dictatorship, and the soundtrack is music in the first, and prisoners' testimonies in the second. Rado Juda in *Țara moartă [The Dead Nation]* (Romania, 2017) contrasts studio photographs of Romanian civilians taken in WW2 with a reading from the diary of a Jewish doctor who describes the incarceration and deportation of the Jews. These films bring to life hidden and silenced collective trauma by using alternative cinematic language.
2. The closing titles of the film note that Terry Diamond filmed the video from the cruise ship on 14 September 2012 between 15:00 and 16:30.
3. “Das Unheimlich” – a Freudian term that describes incidents where a familiar thing or event is encountered in an unsettling, eerie, or taboo context. Raya Morag refers here to Israeli cinema's reaction to the terror attacks during the Second Intifada.
4. Deleuze and Guattari are writing about Kafka as a model of minor literature.
5. “Le differend” is Lyotard's answer to the revisionist historian Robert Faurisson who became known for Holocaust denial. Faurisson only accepts proof of the existence of gas chambers from eyewitnesses who were themselves victims of the gas chambers. His demand for proof, whereas the few survivors prefer to remain silent, show how the “differend” operates as a double bind.

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