3. *We found love in a hopeless place:* Exilic agency and translingual practice in Jonas Carpignano's *Mediterranea*

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Abstract Jonas Carpignano's film *Mediterranea* is a complex and nuanced portrait of contemporary transnational migration, with a focus on exilic agency. Translingual practice is an essential part of the biographical narration of the film, which centres on the protagonist, Ayiva. This chapter proposes a reading of translingual practice in *Mediterranea* through the lens of recent sociolinguistic theory, which focuses on the interaction of agency, spatial setting and material context. The analyses indicate that Ayiva's translingual practice is crucial to the representation of his agency, as well as to the critical potential of the film.

Keywords Mediterranea | translingual practice | semiotic assemblage | exilic agency

INTRODUCTION

Mediterranea is the first feature-length film of the American-Italian filmmaker Jonas Carpignano (2015). Inspired by the real-life experiences of the main actor, Koudous Seihon, as well as the immigrant protests in Rosarno, Italy in 2010, it tells the story of two young men, Ayiva and Abbas. The film describes their journey from their home in Burkina Faso via the Algerian desert, through Libya, and across the Mediterranean Sea to Italy. Following their arrival in the Calabria region of Southern Italy, Ayiva and Abbas experience a difficult and precarious life as seasonal workers. While the film represents the difficult and sometimes deadly reality of contemporary migration across the Mediterranean, it also describes an emerging solidarity in their encounters with other exiles, as well as with the local popu-

lation in Rosarno. In particular, *Mediterranea* stands out through its focus on exilic agency, as it represents the emotions and desires of Ayiva and Abbas, as well as the communities they are a part of. Premiering amidst the so-called refugee crisis of 2015, *Mediterranea* was shown at the Cannes Film Festival that same year to critical acclaim, and it was widely praised as a nuanced portrait of contemporary migration (Appel, 2015; Schulz, 2016).

Shot in a naturalistic style, *Mediterranea* represents and problematises the experience of migration through the medium of biographical narration. The film exemplifies the role of transnational narratives in contemporary discourses on migration and exile, highlighting their potential for providing a more nuanced account of these phenomena, as they allow for the representation of exiles' agency in its complexity. In this chapter, I argue that the representation of exiles' agency, closely linked to their multilingual communicative repertoires, reveals *Mediterranea*'s critical potential. In this, I follow Giuliani (2017), who considers *Mediterranea* as part of a larger body of work consisting of recent films where the biographical narrative form allows for the articulation of critiques of contemporary regimes of mobility: "the biographical narration of a collective dramatic phenomenon […] becomes […] a place of 'identification' through a shared experience […] of contestation, resistance, and subversion" (p. 13).

In this perspective, the representation of the transnational journey, mediated in the form of biographical narration, has a critical potential, as it allows for the empathetic and critical representation of migration, and the lived experience of migrants and refugees. In *Mediterranea,* the biographical narration is focused on the representation of Ayiva, the protagonist. A crucial device in his representation is communicative practice, and more specifically code-switching or translingual practice, as he constantly moves through multilingual spaces during his journey and his life in Italy, as well as continually shifting between different languages himself. The translingual practice in *Mediterranea* is shaped by situational constraints, including social interaction with friends, family and other connections, spatial setting, be it actual or imagined (home, away, spaces of transit), and the material context (mobile phones, housing, food, etc.). These factors all enter into situation-specific communicative configurations which Pennycook (2017) terms *semiotic assemblages*, and which, I argue, are a crucial part of the richness and the critical potential of the film.

These kinds of linguistic practices, or communicative configurations, have received considerable scholarly attention over the recent years (see e.g., Blackledge & Creese, 2017; Canagarajah, 2017; García & Wei, 2021; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010), and in this chapter I will analyse code-switching in *Mediterranea* through the lens of this theoretical orientation. In brief, this field of research focuses on lan-

guage use in the form of *spatial repertoires*, where linguistic and other semiotic resources are deployed and adapted to spatial context and communicative purpose, and where language users switch between languages, dialects and other linguistic systems, as well as drawing on other sign systems, such as fashion, visual imagery and artefacts in their communicative practice. As such, this theoretical orientation is well suited to the analysis of the role of language practice in transnational narratives, as it privileges agency, spatiality and material context. However, this strand of research has also come under criticism recently, related to a perceived lack of attention to the problematic ideological underpinnings of this framework. In their introduction to a recent issue of the journal *Langage et société* entitled "Pratiques langagières et expériences migratoires", Cécile Canut and Mariem Guellouz (2018) observe several pitfalls and difficulties related to these recent approaches to the analysis of language and mobility, and their observations are urgent reminders for research on this topic. First, they state that while recent approaches to linguistic heterogeneity (translingual practice, translanguaging, metrolingualism, etc.) are useful and illuminating, they may also be somewhat reductive. Linguistic heterogeneity is not exceptional, or unique to what has traditionally been perceived as multilingual settings, be they national or transnational. In fact, heterogeneity is at the basis of all linguistic practice, even in what has been traditionally conceived of as monolingual settings. Thus, the notion of linguistic heterogeneity cannot be restricted to phenomena traditionally conceived of as multilingual in a more limited sense. As a consequence, linguistic heterogeneity in transnational narratives on migration and exile should not be reified, romanticised or treated as an exceptional phenomenon, since the linguistic heterogeneity embodied by the translingual practice in transnational narratives is indeed constitutive of most instances of language use.

Second, commenting on the recent wave of work on translingual practice, metrolingualism and translanguaging, Canut and Guellouz (2018) note a relative absence of critique of the underlying power structures that potentially affect language use. They emphasise that translingual practice is always subject to existing power structures, and therefore cannot be analysed in isolation from these. As stated by these authors, while the observation of translingual practice may tempt us to excessively focus on the role of hybridity and heterogeneity, we should bear in mind that these linguistic processes are to a high degree the result of power relations inherent in the phenomena of migration and exile. As a consequence, these power relations should neither be ignored nor underestimated in the analysis of such linguistic practices. Thus, Canut and Guellouz (2018) suggest that language and migration should be analysed together as a practice that is at the same time lin-

guistic and migratory, and that this practice should also be studied in relation to the socio-political stakes that structure it (p. 17).

Bearing in mind the critique of Canut and Guellouz (2018), my aim in this chapter is to analyse Ayiva's translingual practice, and specifically its contribution to "the biographical narration of a collective dramatic phenomenon" (Giuliani, 2017, p. 13), which is at the core of the film's representation of exilic agency. I will do this by studying a selection of important scenes from the film as semiotic assemblages, where linguistic heterogeneity, in the form of translingual practice, is shaped by material context and social networks, and is brought together by Ayiva's agency.

MEDITERRANEA AND EXILIC AGENCY

Contemporary cinema is an important outlet for the representation and transmission of transnational narratives, and an interesting site for the development of new imaginaries related to migration and exile (Loshitzky, 2006; Hagener, 2018). Furthermore, as stated by Ponzanesi (2016) in an analysis of other recent films that thematise contemporary border crossings, they may "subvert conventional representations of the 'other' by offering new possible cosmopolitan outlooks that resignify Europe from a location of marginality and hope" (p. 165). However, while this medium sheds important light on the transnational situation, it may struggle to go beyond existing stereotypes of migration, and to portray the agency of migrants and refugees in a more complex and realistic way (Köksal & Çelik-Rappas, 2019). *Mediterranea* has been cited as an exception to this, as its representation of exilic agency is considered to be more nuanced than in other films on the topic (Köksal & Çelik-Rappas, 2019). In this chapter, I will, in line with previous research (e.g., Ahern, 1999; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) understand agency as social action, as fundamentally constrained and dynamic: "[A]ctions are always already socially, culturally, and linguistically constrained. Agency is emergent in sociocultural and linguistic practices" (Ahern 1999, p. 13). Moreover, agency will be considered as not necessarily intentional or individual, but rather as the action that results from the interaction of actors and constraints:

> Such a definition of agency does not require that social action be intentional, but it allows for that possibility; habitual actions accomplished below the level of conscious awareness act upon the world no less than those carried out deliberately. Likewise, agency may be the result of individual action, but it may also be distributed among several social actors and hence intersubjective. (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 606)

While acknowledging the increasing turn toward the model of distributed agency in recent work in sociolinguistics, that is, agency "as distributed beyond any supposed human centre" (Pennycook, 2017, p. 278), I will use the term *exilic agency* in this chapter as a tool to understand the narrative representation of exiles' identities and subjectivities. Applying the notion of agency in the context of narratives on migration and exile, I seek to investigate how the representation of agency through the narrative works as "a metaphor […] for 'coming to voice'" (Mardorossian, 2002, p. 25; see also Canut, in this book; and Skalle, in this book). Specifically, I take the mode of biographical narration as an important site to study the representation of exilic agency.

As mentioned previously, Giuliani (2017) sees biographical narration as a means of questioning dominating discourses on migration, and it is also a tool for representing the exile in a more complex and nuanced way than merely as either a victim or a villain. In *Mediterranea*, biographical narrative is primarily the result of the representation and portrayal of the main protagonist, Ayiva, as well as the performance of the main actor, Koudous Seihon, as the film recounts his journey across the Mediterranean. Yet the film is not a direct portrayal of Seihon's life, it is a fictionalised account inspired by his experiences, while remaining generalisable to the wider phenomena of transnational migration. According to Paynter (2017), the complex status of biographical narrative in the film also adds to its value as a transnational narrative that articulates the agency of the exiles:

> By positioning itself as both a collective autobiographical film for its characters/actors, a point amplified through paratextual media narratives, and a historical fiction creating characters distinct from the migrants who portray them, the film challenges viewers to think critically about the generic parameters of cinematic life narrative by and about precarious subjects. (p. 662)

Although the representation of Ayiva is complex and cannot be reduced to a single feature, the communicative practices he participates in play an important role. Ayiva has a complex and extensive linguistic repertoire, speaking French, Italian, English, Mossi, Bissa and Asante as he navigates the journey from Burkina Faso to Rosarno. Thus, translingual practice acts as a vehicle both for the fictionalised biographical narration, as well as for the overall aesthetic strategy of the film. Following Duncan (2016), I will argue that in *Mediterranea*, translingual practice adds to the complex plurisemioticity, and thus to the aesthetics, of the film: "The representation of linguistic diversity adds further layers to the visual and narrative figuration of subjectivity characteristic of postcolonial cinema" (p. 198).

To sum up, as in numerous other transnational narratives on migration and exile, translanguaging, or translingual practice, is a crucial feature of the cinematic representation of the transnational subject in *Mediterranea*. It is part of a complex plurisemiotic system and contributes to the representation of agency, to the overall aesthetic strategy of the film, as well as contributing to the film's critical potential.

TRANSLINGUAL PRACTICE IN TRANSNATIONAL NARRATIVES

As mentioned previously, translingual practice is the theoretical lens through which I will interpret the representation of linguistic heterogeneity in *Mediterranea*. In order to prepare for the analysis of translingual practice in *Mediterranea*, I will therefore now go on to a brief presentation of the notion of *translingual practice* (Canagarajah, 2017), which gives a general model for this kind of multilingual practice, as well as the notion of *semiotic assemblage* (Pennycook, 2017), which further incorporates the material context and situatedness of communicative practice into the analysis of multilingualism. This section will form the basis for the analysis of instances of translingual practice in the film that will be presented later in this chapter.

The phenomenon of translingual practice has recently received increased attention in sociolinguistics, as well as in foreign language didactics. In fact, the phenomenon of switching between different linguistic codes, previously often described as multilingualism or code-switching, has come under intense scholarly scrutiny, and a wealth of new concepts have been introduced to account for this phenomenon, such as *metrolingualism* (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010) and *translanguaging* (García & Wei, 2021; Blackledge & Creese, 2017). Broadly speaking, these approaches share an interest in the agency of the speaking subject, and Blackledge and Creese (2017) argue that the advantage of this perspective, is that it "leads us away from a focus on 'languages' as distinct codes to a focus on the agency of individuals engaged in using, creating and interpreting signs for communication". The prefix *trans-* signals how the process of translanguaging is conceived to go beyond a narrow conception of multilingualism that considers the interaction of different languages as a distinct and mechanistic shift between neatly distinguishable codes. Instead, this theoretical orientation emphasises the role of agency in the processes of translanguaging, so that linguistic resources take the form of repertoires that speakers draw upon in situated practice.

Moreover, recent research also emphasises that linguistic practices such as translanguaging cannot be considered in isolation from the social, spatial and material context that this practice is embedded in. This is evident in the perspec-

tive on language practices that has been further developed and broadened by Suresh Canagarajah (2017) under the term *translingual practice*, which he defines in the following manner:

> [L]anguage works with an assemblage of semiotic resources, artifacts, and environmental affordances in specific settings to facilitate communicative success. To accommodate these configurations of communicative resources that go together in particular activities, some scholars have adopted the term 'spatial repertoires'. […] I would expand the repertoires beyond the linguistic to include all possible semioticized resources. I would also spatialize these repertoires more completely by treating them as embedded in the material ecology and facilitated by social networks. (pp. 36-37)

For the analysis of transnational narratives, Canagarajah's model has the advantage of simultaneously emphasising the language user's agency, the social setting, as well as the materiality of translingual language practices. In addition, this approach underlines the *spatial* dimension of such language practice, considering it as part of a *spatial repertoire* which is adapted to the situation. Lastly, it demonstrates the contribution of other semiotic resources to this practice, such as music, fashion, images and various artefacts that may be present in the material surroundings. Together, these items enter into configurations that are conditioned by the activity they are embedded in, as well as by the situational setting and the practice in which they take place. Thus, this is a much broader approach to multilingualism than traditional conceptualisations that often remain restricted to the purely linguistic level, and that may only to a more limited extent take into account the social, material and situational context. This perspective is further developed by Pennycook (2017), who proposes the notion of *semiotic assemblage* in order to account for the interaction of translingual practice with other semiotic modes, as well as with the spatial, material and social context. Building on the notion of spatial repertoire, Pennycook further relativizes the role of the linguistic code, as language enters into a dynamic interaction with the material and spatial surroundings. For Pennycook, the notion of semiotic assemblage is also intrinsically linked to the collective, social aspects of translingual practice, rather than being considered as evidence of the individual language user's competence or isolated practice. This perspective thus underlines the contribution of social interaction and material surroundings to translingual practice:

> Rather than considering linguistic repertoires as internalised individual competence or as the property of an imagined community, the notion of a semiotic

> assemblage expands the semiotic inventory and relocates repertoires in the dynamic relations among objects, places and linguistic resources, an emergent property deriving from the interactions between people, artefacts and space. (Pennycook, 2017, p. 279)

In short, the focus is increasingly directed to the situational context, and to how the speaking subject interacts with this context. Moreover, context is understood in a social and material sense, including affordances such as technology and other artefacts. In this sense, Pennycook's approach adds a much-needed focus on material objects to the analysis of language use (Ros i Solé, 2020). It is thus a perspective that lends itself well to the analysis of the kind of translingual practice that Ayiva carries out in *Mediterranea*, as will be further examined in the analyses presented later in this chapter.

In addition to the studies described above, that are sociolinguistic in nature, this theoretical orientation has recently also been applied to the study of aesthetic mediums such as film. In a study of translingual practice, or translanguaging, in contemporary Italian cinema, Duncan (2016) finds that the representation of translanguaging is a crucial device both for the representation of subjectivity as well as for the overall aesthetics of the films. Since translanguaging is so intimately connected with the context, this means that the translingual protagonist is represented, not as an abstract entity, but in the form of a situated, materially embedded practice: "a subjectivity constructed not by language in the abstract, but by languages in their material location and difference" (Duncan, 2016, p. 197).

In addition, translingual practice in film has a wider, critical potential, as it questions the conflation of language, territory and nation. As stated by Duncan, translingual practice signals "a dislocation between language and territory, a key feature of a narrowly construed national film culture" (p. 200). The dislocation of territory and language opens up for a critical reflection on contemporary discourses on transnational migration through a questioning of the relationship between linguistic practices, nationhood and citizenship, and in *Mediterranea*, this dislocation takes place through the representation of Ayiva's translingual agency.

TRANSLINGUAL PRACTICE AS EXILIC AGENCY IN *MEDITERRANEA*

In order to examine the interaction of language, material objects and spatial setting, as materialised in the form of semiotic assemblages, we will now examine some scenes from *Mediterranea* where translingual practice plays out, and speci-

fically analyse their contribution to the representation of exilic agency in the film. The scenes have been selected because they illuminate the representation of Ayiva's agency, and the contribution of the semiotic assemblages to the biographical narration.

In *Mediterranea*, translingual practice is present throughout the film, and it is visible from the initial scenes when Ayiva and Abbas are undertaking the journey to Europe. During the early stages of their journey, Ayiva and Abbas have to spend some time in Algeria to organise their passage to Libya (07:40–08:42). While there, they sleep in a makeshift dormitory together with a group of people of different genders and ages, who appear to be in the same situation as Ayiva and Abbas. Ayiva has just successfully made arrangements for their passage to Libya, and is happy that he is in control of the situation, joyfully and loudly repeating *Je gère, je gère* 'I've got it all under control' in French. As everyone is settling down to sleep, the two friends joyfully and confidently discuss their upcoming journey to Europe in French. An older woman asks them in English to be quiet, as people are about to go to sleep. Ayiva and Abbas agree to keep quiet, but suddenly the piercing sound of Ayiva's mobile phone breaks the silence, and he answers in a Burkina language, as it is likely someone from home trying to reach him. Again, the older woman asks him to be quiet, in English. In this brief scene of about a minute, Ayiva and Abbas seamlessly switch between three languages; French in the private conversation between the two friends, English to speak to the woman who complains about them making noise, and a Burkina language to answer the phone. This scene is an example of semiotic assemblage, as Ayiva's linguistic repertoire is embedded in the social setting of transnational migration, characterised both by intimate relationships in the form of his friendship with Abbas and the friends or family calling him on the phone, as well as the more uneasy and temporary relationship with the other travellers. The nuances of and differences in these relations are also expressed in the shifting of linguistic codes. In addition, in this scene, translingual practice is conditioned by the material context, which is present in the form of the mobile phone and the precarious and uncomfortable sleeping arrangements. Thus, the scene illustrates how translingual practice is contextually adapted and constrained, and how linguistic practice enters into spatial repertoires together with other semiotic resources. The scene also demonstrates the role of technology in semiotic assemblages, as Ayiva's mobile phone acts as a mediator and affordance for translingual practice, both virtually in the conversation with the person calling, and in the immediate physical surroundings, as the phone call triggers reactions from the other exiles. Thus, the scene illustrates how technology impacts and interacts with language practice and the spatial and social setting in the construc-

tion of a semiotic assemblage as defined by Pennycook (2017). Technology is an important part of the material context, an affordance which conditions translingual practice, and which allows for communication and the enactment of family ties across geographical distance. Moreover, the scene also illustrates how Ayiva's agency is represented through the close connection between language, intimacy, and language use, as his linguistic resources are deployed as a function of the various relationships he is part of: his friendship with Abbas, the uneasy and temporary relationships with other travellers, and the intimate connections with people back home. Examples such as this – which illustrate semiotic assemblages constructed through interaction with technology, translingual practice, and the enactment of intimacy in the form of family ties – are numerous in the film, and include the use of Skype, MP3 players, tablets, and as in this case, mobile phones. Throughout, these semiotic assemblages allow for the complex representation of subjectivity in its different facets, be it joy and resourcefulness as in this scene, or sadness and alienation later in the film.

While this scene illustrates the empowering aspects of translingual practice – the different linguistic codes signal both friendship and family ties, intimacy, as well as the managing of practical relations with other exiles, – translingual practice may also signal uneasy power relationships. In *Mediterranea*, this is the case when Ayiva and Abbas arrive in Italy. At their arrival in Rosarno, Ayiva and Abbas become part of a community of exiles. The community is largely organised around the practical needs for work and housing, but also takes the form of partying at a squat in Rosarno. In a scene set at this squat (44:30–48:01), Ayiva joins a party with friends, both male and female. Ayiva speaks French with his male friends, and in English with the young women who are present, joking with them and asking for a Peroni. The woman who is hosting the party offers him a drink, while Rihanna's track "S&M" is blasting from a TV in the background. Ayiva continues talking to the woman in English, they flirt and tease each other, and he jokingly picks her up and carries her around the room. The scene comes to a sudden end when two Italian men arrive, whistling to one of the girls and telling her to hurry up in Italian. Two of the girls have to leave the party to follow the men. Shortly after, Ayiva, Abbas and a male, francophone friend say their goodbyes and leave. In this scene, translingual practice is part of a semiotic assemblage consisting not only of the languages used, but of all the signs and symbols that are universal signifiers of the carefree parties of the young: the sexualised pop music, the Peroni bottle Abbas is sipping from, the dancing and the smartphones that are passed around. English and French are the shared languages that enable this cosmopolitan community of exiles and adventurers, yet the languages are represented as somehow gendered, as

the men speak French among themselves and English with the women. The brief lines spoken in Italian at the end of the scene kill the party and drive a wedge between the women and the men who are present. In this sense, the scene also represents the precariousness and exposure to violence that are associated with the situation of the exiles; everything can change with the snap of a finger, or in this case, the shifting of the linguistic code.

However, in *Mediterranea*, linguistic heterogeneity is not restricted to the communication among the exiles, linguistic diversity or heterogeneity is also visible in the opposition between the Calabrian dialect and standard Italian, illustrating Canut & Guelloz's statement about the constitutive heterogeneity of all language practice, as mentioned in the Introduction. This is demonstrated in a scene where Ayiva is invited to an evening meal at his boss's home (01:11:25). The boss is an ambiguous character, while he clearly profits from the difficult working conditions and cheap labour of the exile workers, he also invites Ayiva into his home and family life at various occasions. At the dinner, the boss, his wife, daughter and mother are present, as well as Ayiva and another labourer. The mother of the family serves the lasagne and pours the wine. The TV is playing in the background, while the mother and the grandmother complain about the distressing nature of the news. The employer's daughter, Marta, plays with a tablet during the meal, although her mother asks her to put it away. Marta is viewing a video from an unspecified African country, which she then shows to Ayiva. The scenes that they watch on the tablet leads to a conversation about Ayiva's background. Marta asks him about his country and his family, and he tells her about his daughter Zeina, who is about the same age as her. However, the primary focus of translingual practice in the scene is not related to any perceived differences between the exiles and the Italian family, but rather it is related to the interaction of standard Italian and the Calabrian dialect, which is spoken by the grandmother. While Ayiva and his colleague speak Italian, Marta remarks to her grandmother that they do not understand her when she speaks in the Calabrian dialect. The scene is an example of semiotic assemblage, as the translingual practice is situated in the familiar setting of the dinner table, interacting with the material presence of different communication technologies – the TV and the tablet – which shape and direct the conversation and interaction of the dinner guests. As the technologies mediate sound and images from other places, bringing global news on current affairs to the centre of the family gathering, they also contribute to the dislocative effect of communicative practices described by Duncan (2016, p. 200), as mentioned earlier. The translingual practice also reveals the contrasts and differences between the dinner guests, not only between the Italian family and the workers, but also between the Italian-speaking

Marta, a child of the contemporary Calabria heavily influenced by contemporary migration, and her grandmother, speaking in Calabrian dialect and with another understanding of the context.

The final scene that I will examine is a conversation between Ayiva, his sister, and his young daughter Zeina via Skype. The conversation takes place after the riots in Rosarno, and after his friend Abbas has been seriously hurt and hospitalised as a result of the violent confrontation. Ayiva has decided to go back home to Burkina Faso, although it has been made clear that Abbas will have the right to stay legally in Italy. In this scene, the semiotic assemblage is constructed through the interaction of languages, material objects in the form of communication technology, and the visual representation of emotion in the characters' facial expressions. In the Skype conversation, which takes place in a Burkina language, Ayiva's daughter dances and sings to a Rihanna track, "We Found Love", playing from an MP3-player that Ayiva has gifted her. The MP3 player is a recurrent object throughout the film, as Ayiva initially steals it on a train, sells it and then buys it back to give it to his daughter. In this process, the MP3 player also acts as a catalyst for translingual practice, and as part of semiotic assemblages, as Ayiva speaks Arabic, French and Italian with the street vendors who buy and sell it back to him. The conversation between Ayiva and his family is also constrained by the format of the communication technology, with the familiar sounds of Skype connecting, and the interruption of communication due to poor internet connection. As he watches his daughter dance, the failing internet connection interrupts the conversation, and Ayiva starts to cry. When Skype reconnects, he covers his camera, pretending it is out of order, yet he is still able to watch his sister and his daughter.

In this scene, the semiotic assemblage is constrained by the communication technology, which facilitates the enactment of emotional attachment between the father and the daughter. The linguistic heterogeneity is represented by Rihanna's lyrics in English, singing "We found love in a hopeless place" (Harris, 2011), and the lyrics add further emotional depth to the scene, echoing back to the Rihanna track of the happy and carefree party scene described earlier. The facial expressions of the family on the computer screens, smiling as they watch Zeina dancing also contribute to the assemblage, and the impact of Ayiva's tears at the end of the scene is amplified as he hides his face from the camera. The resulting semiotic assemblage contributes to the representation of Ayiva as a father, which is a crucial part of the motivation for his transnational journey, and an important part of the biographical narration of *Mediterranea*. Through the complex representation of Ayiva's emotional reaction to the conversation, the semiotic assemblage in this scene also allows for a more nuanced representation of exile, and specifically its

relation to masculinity and fatherhood. This connects with previous research on masculinity in a global context, which sees it as a discursive practice (Connell, 2005), as well as with analyses of translingual practice in transnational narratives, which suggest that shifting between linguistic codes may also be associated with the enactment of masculinity, and with the switching between different models or conceptualisations of masculinity (Skalle & Gjesdal, 2019). The relationship between masculinity and translingual practice is also reflected in the semiotic assemblages in *Mediterranea*, in the sense that different facets of masculinity are foregrounded by Ayiva's translingual repertoire. In the party scene mentioned above, Ayiva's translingual practice contributes to the representation of a playful, flirting masculinity, while the present scene illustrates the emotional labour of fatherhood, which in sum allows for a complex biographical narration.

The representation of fatherhood in this scene also points to the contribution of material objects, in the form of communication technology, to the semiotic assemblage, and to the representation of exilic agency. The geographical distance makes it hard to stay in touch with family (Svašek, 2008), and the relations are embedded in socio-political settings that place strict restrictions on the possibility for travel and thus for enacting family bonds (Skrbiš, 2008, p. 231). In this context, modern communication technology allows for regular and almost continuous communication with friends and family back home, but a conversation on Skype cannot replace the direct encounter, as illustrated by Ayiva's disrupted conversation with his family. Thus, the scene illustrates the burden of the emotional labour of parenting (Skrbiš, 2008) that Ayiva experiences in his transnational journey, and the use of the home language amplifies the emotional content of the scene.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As previously mentioned, *Mediterranea* is marked by a high degree of linguistic heterogeneity and translingual practice, and this is an important aesthetic strategy in the film, as well as a key device in the representation of the film's protagonist, Ayiva. As such, translingual practice is a key component of the film's biographical narration of contemporary transnational migration, and a crucial contribution to the film's critical potential in relation to dominating discourses on migration and exile (Giuliani, 2017, p. 13).

In this chapter, I have considered translingual practice in the film *Mediterranea* as an example of semiotic assemblage, that is, as "the dynamic relations among objects, places and linguistic resources, an emergent property deriving from the interactions between people, artefacts and space" (Pennycook, 2017, p. 279). In the form of semi-

otic assemblage, translingual practice is considered in its interaction with spatial and socio-political settings, as well as the material context. To what extent can we observe translingual practice in the form of semiotic assemblage in *Mediterranea*?

In the film, the semiotic assemblages encompass several languages, which play out in the social-political setting of migration across the Mediterranean, and the spatial context of Rosarno, as well as the other sites of passage during Ayiva and Abbas's journey from Burkina Faso. The translingual practice is conditioned by the socio-political setting related to migratory patterns from Burkina Faso to Italy, colonial history in the form of the presence of French in Burkina Faso, as well as the structures of the labour market in Italy and of the diasporic communities. Thus, translingual practice in *Mediterranea* reflects the existing power relations related to migration in the Mediterranean region, as well as language ideology related to the status of the different languages which are used in migratory and exilic contexts in this particular geographical area. In this sense, the dimension of the semiotic assemblage that is related to social context may be understood through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) notions of *heteroglossia* and *unitary language*. Heteroglossia can be seen as the constitutive heterogeneity of language practice, while unitary language is the impetus towards linguistic homogenisation. For Bakhtin, the notions of unitary language and heteroglossia are closely linked to the ideological status of language varieties, and their relationship to the socio-political patterning of the world:

> A common unitary language is a system of linguistic norms. But these norms do not constitute an abstract imperative; they are rather the generative forces of linguistic life, forces that struggle to overcome the heteroglossia of language [...].

> We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life. Thus a unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 270–271)

The tension between heteroglossia and unitary language, between homogenisation and heterogeneity, is visible throughout the film through the interaction of colonial languages and other African languages, as well as through the tension between standard Italian and the Calabrian dialect.

The analyses also find the material context to be crucial to the semiotic assemblage of *Mediterranea*. With regards to material objects, the film represents translingual practice as heavily influenced by the presence of various artefacts, specifically in the shape of communication technology (tablets, mobile phones and Skype). Communication technology plays a crucial role in facilitating and constraining language use, and is especially important in relation to the enactment of family ties and bonds to the home country. The technology enables the integration of, and shifting between, different languages, and suspends the geographical distance between the protagonist and his family that has stayed back home. When technology facilitates translingual practice in *Mediterranea*, this takes place primarily in situations of interaction with friends and family back home via mobile phones or Skype, as in the scene where Ayiva talks to his daughter via Skype on a computer. As a result, the film represents translingual practice in the form of semiotic assemblages, as the product of the interaction of the material objects of communication technology, the complex social networks with family, friends, employers and NGOs, as well as the places of transnational migration (home, away, and spaces of transit).

Translingual practice is, as we have seen in this chapter, a key feature of the portrayal of Ayiva, and thus in the biographical narration of *Mediterranea.* Translingual practice is an essential part of Ayiva's negotiation of his surroundings during his journey from Burkina Faso, as well as in his life in Italy, and is integral to the film's portrayal of exilic agency. This is visible through the contribution of translingual practice to Ayiva's navigation of the journey, as illustrated by the early scene set in Algeria, but also in his meeting with the labour market and informal exilic economy in Rosarno, as well as for the navigation of different emotional attachments and social connections. These include his relations with his employer, with the NGOs in Rosarno, with other exiles, and with his family back home in Burkina Faso. Each relation depends on a specific configuration of semiotic resources, including expressions of Ayiva's emotional reactions to the situation. The emotional reactions are accentuated in situations where Ayiva's precarious situation and vulnerability are made visible, such as the party scene and the conversation with his daughter. This also allows for a nuanced representation of Ayiva's agency as contextually constrained, and in a broader sense it contributes to a complex portrayal of masculinity in exilic settings. Indeed, emotions and social ties are so strongly emphasised that they should be considered as inseparable from the overall semiotic assemblage.

To conclude, translingual practice in the form of semiotic assemblage is a recurrent feature of *Mediterranea*, and it plays an essential role in the biographical nar-

ration which is a crucial part of the film's aesthetic strategy. Through the nuanced portrayal of the exiles, in which translingual practice and the representation of exilic agency play an essential role, *Mediterranea* may contribute to a broadening of the perspectives on migration in the complex context of the present-day Mediterranean.

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