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Deterritorialized Cinema, Dislocated Spaces and Disembodied Characters in Bogdan Mirică's *Câini*

Abstract: The main assumption of this paper is that the Romanian film industry and the film directors themselves are going through a process of aesthetic and narrative transformation, mostly due to the impact of post-national cinema-making practices. Some of the recent works in Romanian cinema are following the logic of another stylistic, that of a *delocalized* cinema, a cinema that is both *deterritorialized* and *non-specific* nationally. This is explicit in the way the directors are defining the national space, the territorial identity and, finally, the way in which they project social and collective representations. Using as a case study Bogdan Mirică's first feature film, *Câini* (*Dogs*, 2016), the author argues that his cinematic practices indicate a conscious abandoning of the national specificity.

Keywords: Romanian Cinema; National Identity; Bogdan Mirică; Post-national Cinema; Thriller and Western Genres; Deleuze and Guattari; Deterritorialization; Reterritorialization.

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Bogdan Mirică was hailed by many as an innovator of the Romanian contemporary filmmaking, a “new sensation” (Prouvêze 2016) of the cinema “made in Eastern Europe.” *Dogs* (*Câini*, 2016), his feature film debut was considered to be nothing less than a “revelation,” which made again the Romanian cinema to “shine bright” (Bissuel 2016). Just like his predecessors (Puiu, Porumboiu), Mirică was awarded a notable FIPRESCI in the “Un certain regard” section at Cannes, and immediately afterwards was offered the Transylvania Film Festival award (as it was the case Muntean or Mungiu). Clearly his career took the path of international success and the director was quickly introduced in the ever growing shortlist of the so flexible “new Romanian cinema.”

This young director clearly brings a different approach to filmmaking in the contemporary Romanian film industry, first and foremost since his training was different from that of his older colleagues like Puiu, Porumboiu or Mungiu. He first studied journalism and began his career as copywriter for several Bucharest based international advertising companies. Only



later he got interested in studying screenwriting and film production, so he went to Westminster University in London. Returning home with a degree in screenwriting, he began writing screenplays for MediaPro Pictures (*Ho Ho Ho*, 2009) and the pilot of a comedy sitcom (*Las Fierbinți* 2012). Later he worked for HBO Romania, where he wrote and directed the first installments of a series called *Umbre* (*Shadows*, 2014-2015). Obviously Mirică grew as an artist in an international environment, where using existing formats and working with the constraints of genres was normal.

Considering this particular evolution, his much ovated work is not a “surprise” – almost all the tools of his trade and most of the cinema-making practices that he uses in *Dogs* were developed in this internationalized workspace that is the Romanian film industry today. The purpose of the following interpretation is to describe the internal mechanisms of this new stylistics that belongs to a *delocalized* cinema, based on a filmmaking aesthetics that is no longer specific to a national identity and culture.

Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization in Imagined Spaces

As I pointed out in another study, the Romanian film industry as a whole is definitely transformed by the logic and the rules of transnational cinema (Pop 2014). The most distinct changes are the abandoning local narratives and the settings that were connected with a clear national specificity. Unlike Mungiu or Puiu before him, who constructed cinematic realities that were anchored in the Romanian

everyday life, Mirică places his story in a space that lacks specific localization and is based on dislocated narratives, with characters that share a displaced identity. This is why the following analysis would focus on these three elements: *the deterritorialization of narratives, the displacing of characters and the dislocation of spatial identities* in order to demonstrate how the process of de-localization and re-localization takes place. In order to methodologically substantiate the interpretation the insights of Deleuze and Guattari are considered extremely relevant, thus their dialectical concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari 10) will be used as explanatory terms.

In their influential analysis of the rhizomatic nature of our contemporary culture, Deleuze and Guattari conceive a re-interpretation the classical Peircean triad: sign, object, significations. Devising a new conceptualization of the notions of coding and decoding, linked to the idea of territorialization, the two French philosophers state that we must discuss the territorialization of signs, understanding indexes as *territorial signs*, symbols as *deterritorialized signs*, while and icons are reterritorializations of the two (Deleuze and Guattari 65). Using the metaphor of the orchid and the bee, who are caught in a similar dialectical movement, one deterritorializing the other, while subsequently reterritorializing each other, the two authors explain the production of cultural signs. After a deterritorialization of signification is in place, a movement of reterritorialization is put into action, transforming the elements of meaning.

Simplifying these seminal arguments for the use of this interpretation, when can



say that, when we territorialize our reality through cinema, this happens through a typical coding process. Moviemakers and spectators create a reality as a projection of their shared needs, desires and ideals. After a while, another movement happens when a de-coding takes place, and this has as a result the deterritorialization of our representations. Last but not least, a third meaning will be generated by overcoding, which produces a reterritorialization of meanings. All forms of cultural production have territorial expressions – we have political territories, literary territories, artistic territories and cinematic territories. And, since all social signs follow this logic, cinematic signs are also interpretable through this paradigm.

The Deleuzian terminology is an interpretative method that provides an insight into the representation mechanisms of art in general, and here into particular film making strategies regarding the formation of their spatial identity. As pointed out by Ronald Bogue, in his essay about the relationship between art and territory, all artistic productions operate in a similar way, best compared with the territorial activities of animals (Bogue 94). All species, and in this particular case dogs, insert meaning into their living spaces (through scent and other physical displays) and do not allow other animals to reconfigure that meaning. Such an ethological explanation would help us to understand how territorial determinacy and indeterminacy become suggestive for the transformation of a cultural product.

Nation, Territory, Identity and Representation

The larger form of territorial representation happens in history, and the best example is that of the Romanian nation-state. The formation of the Romanian national territory, as it is the case with all the nations of the world, is an illustration of how territorialization is a meaning formation, which operates in politics and in culture. In order to generate self-identity, all nations must define their spatial determinacy, finally to territorialize their imagined collective self. In the Balkans this has been so much more problematic since often the significant territory of one nation or ethnic group overlapped that of other neighbors. In this part of the world territorial disputes and the forceful occupation of lands have been for centuries malignant sources of cultural offensives, armed conflicts and, even more tragically, ethnic extermination. Since every nation has its own imagined projection of their “national territory,” and because such territorial structures are associated with the bloody competition between ethnically distinct groups, almost all forms of territorialization in this part of the world had a tragic and bloody outcome.

Contemporary Romania was a result of a long process of territorial determination, through several political and military gestures of force. First created as a modern state in 1859, Romania (at that time called the “United Principalities”) was composed of dismembered parts of Moldova and Walachia. Only half of the historical Moldova was composing this new state on the map of Europe, with large portions of the ethnic Romanians still living in the



neighboring empires. The Russian empire held on the Eastern part of Moldova, today part of the Republic of Moldova. In the West, the Romanians were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and their homeland, Transylvania, was excluded from the political project. Only the south of Bessarabia was briefly included, then exchanged for Dobrogea, a strip of land connecting Walachia with the Black Sea. Naturally, a major ideal for the Romanians was to create a “larger Romania,” one which would re-integrate the dismembered parts of the imagined national territory. During WWI Romania was once again broken and parts of it were split. It was only after the war, due to the unexpected victory of the Triple Entente, of which Romania was a late member, and due the international policies of Woodrow Wilson, that the national borders were redrawn. By 1919 it seemed that the dream of a “Great Romania” was finally accomplished, when the national territory more than doubled. Still for some nationalists this was not enough, since the truly “national space” was supposed to reach “from the Dniester to the Tisza,” as Mihai Eminescu the “national poet” of Romanians defined it.

As Lucian Boia, one of the critical historians of the Romanian imaginary, has properly described the creation of Romania, our national identity was founded on the “myth of permanent unity” (Boia 72). More importantly, I would add, Romanian history was driven by the social phantasm of the unaccomplished “Union.” The Romanians were haunted for centuries by the trauma of their “dismembered” nation, that of an ethnic group that was living in separated territories, with the three major “Romanian” spaces (Walachia, Moldova,

Transylvania) and several other (Bukovina, Dobrogea) gravitating around them. The anguish of territorial dismemberment not only existed for millennia, it was also repeatedly happened during the modern history. Once again, another important break-up was the loss of major parts of the “Greater Romania” after the end of WWII.

Why is this relevant for the interpretation of cinematic representations? First it must be underlined that the film industry played a major role in the formation of the imagined identity of the Romanian collective psyche. As it was the case with many other national cinemas, from the very beginning the Romanian films dealt with historical topics, in a systematic effort to reconstruct the past. The so called “Romanian national epic” (*epopeea națională*) perpetuated consciously the heroic struggle for sovereignty and often promoted the myth of “national unity.” During the communist regime this process became even more propagandistic, with the historical films used to generate the nationalist mythology serving the interests of the Ceaușescu regime.

For the purpose of the national territorialization, the figure of Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave), the first “unifier of the Romanians,” was the best carrier of significations. No wonder that two movies were dedicated to this medieval ruler, the most important being *Mihai Viteazul* (1971), directed by Sergiu Nicolaescu, which was followed by *Buzduganul cu trei peceți* (1977) by Constantin Vaeni. In fact, as eloquently argued by Choi, these movies fulfilled some of the main purposes of any *national cinema* – and more importantly they provided the nation formation with a “territorial account” (Choi 2006, 310-311). These films were an expression of territorial



representation of the national ideal, projecting the spatial definition of the nation state, even if the political idea did not exist during medieval times.

Mihai Viteazul is presented as driven by a deep desire (“pohta ce-am pohtit”), that is the very idea of unifying all the three provinces populated by Romanians. Without going too far into a historical debate, it is enough to say that the purposes of the Wallachian ruler were at least uncertain. Once more Lucian Boia articulates clearly the fact that the actions of this military leader could not have been determined by a national consciousness, but rather by political interests (Boia 2001, 133-134). Nevertheless, in these grandiose historical films, the Romanians are described as protectors of the West, altruistic defenders of civilization and fierce fighters for their territories.

For the argument developed here, it becomes relevant that this fake mythology, which was built by the national epic, Dobrogea was also presented as an integral part of the “unified” national space, part of the “body of Romania.” As illustrated by another relevant example from the movies made by Sergiu Nicolaescu, it was not only Mihai Viteazul who wanted to “unify all the Romanian,” but all the “nationally conscious” medieval leaders had this ideal in mind. Nicolaescu, who distributed himself in *Mircea* (1989), made another heroic movie about a ruler of Wallachia from the early 15th century, who apparently planned to “unify” these territories. King Mircea, after a violent tale of nation building, is described in the final scene of the movie, discussing with his nephew (the future Vlad the Impaler) about the importance of national “inheritance,” as he claims that the country “between the rivers, up to the

Great Sea” (Marea cea Mare) is his natural dominion.

Dismembered National Territories and Spatial Uncertainty in Representations

Dogs takes place in this space “between the Danube and the Black Sea,” a semi-deserting piece of land called Dobrogea. On one hand, there is a dramatic dimension of this wasteland, allowing some critics to call Mirică’s production a “neo-western” (Prouvèze 2016). The bleak backdrops and the barren lands are visually similar to those in the classical genre.

I would argue that, more importantly, this landscape is radically opposed to the picturesque representations of the national geography. In stark contrast with the postcard views representing Romanianness (as a land of plenty, with mountains, fields of green and blue rivers), we have in the movie an empty and dry landscape, with no identification marks, no specific trait. There is nothing that could localize the cinematic space within the “national space.” Almost all elements of authenticity are missing, and this universe depicted in the movie becomes a symbol of the dismembered national territory.

As Melbye’s well documented study on the landscapes in world cinema compellingly proves how the relationship between cinematic locations and the storytelling creates a correlation with larger signification making processes, the spatiality in *Dogs* is not only a frame for the protagonist and his storyline. The geography, as argued by Melbye, provides the landscape with allegory functions, for the inner development of the psychological dimensions of



the heroes. Also, in what Melbye calls the “spiritual wasteland films” (74), the natural settings is not just enhancing the visual and aesthetic dimension of the narrative, it also creates deeper connections.

Here, contrasting with the ideal projected by the national epic, where the Romanian national space was a homogeneous reality, the landscape is uncertain and unstable. This is also true for the cultural identities of the people inhabiting these spaces. Dobrogea is once more a relevant showcase for this indeterminacy of territorial identity and of national character.

Historically this territory that stretches in the narrow space between the Danube and the Black Sea was occupied only for a couple of years by Mircea, from 1404 to 1420, then returned to Ottomans. Only three centuries later Dobrogea was integrated by the Romanian state, in 1877 after the Russian-Turkish war. Then again in 1916, this piece of land connecting Romania to the Black Sea, was totally occupied by Bulgaria and then returned to Romania, only to be halved at the end of WWII and split between the two countries. These territorial disputes generated radical population changes. By 1878, little more than 220.000 inhabitants occupied this 15.500 square kilometers territory, and more than half of them were Muslims, with about 47.000 Romanians. By 1905 the Romanian population was about 47% of the total population (Limona 2009), mostly due to massive colonizations. In historical terms, Dobrogea is clearly a socially constructed national space, the result of a long political process of territorialization and deterritorialization.

It is in this sense that it becomes relevant why many recent Romanian films

are placed in Dobrogea – from Mitulescu’s *Loverboy* (2011), to the mythical-magical film of Ruxandra Zenide, *Miracle of Tekir* (2015). We need to explore why Romanian cinema-makers are exploring the potential of this problematic space. One obvious explanation is that this space is cinematographically impressive, with open spaces, wide fields of sand dunes or beautiful seascapes. Another interpretation must follow the allegorical dimension, and the fact that Dobrogea itself is a deterritorialized land, both politically, culturally and symbolically. As a problematic component of the imagined national space, Dobrogea remains a part of the Romanian nation state that expresses an inhomogeneous identity and provides a backdrop for narratives that deal with unstable relationships and social dynamics.

In the classical theories about the function of cinematic places and locations, the treatment of spatial identity has profound symbolic meaning. Space is a constructed reality that has semiotic function in all arts, and it is more so in cinema, where all spatial determinations are a result of visual choices, with the director building cinematographically the scenes as controlled environments for the development of a story and the characters within a narrative. As Conley suggestively argued, there is a close relation between the *cinematographic* and the *cartographic*, that is films often provide the viewers with an imagined map of reality. In this understanding movies are “topographic projection” that orient spectators within the perceived world (Conley 2007).

This is the case with Bogdan Mirică’s geographical projection – the director invents a space and place that have no



connections with the actual social realities of Romania. Although at some point there are some hints about the actual space of narration, when Roman, the main character, is about to go to Tulcea, for a public notary, the cinematic landscape in which the camera moves is trans-spatial. That is to say that the pro-filmic space, the selected space captured on camera, is seldom based on geographically determined locations. Unlike his predecessors belonging to the New Wave stylistics, who place their productions in particular environments – with authors like Mungiu or Porumboiu connecting their cinematic narratives to very specific places in Romania: an orthodox monastery, a particular town easily recognizable – Mirică constructs a non-existing Romania. In his movie the “Real” space exists only in the cinematic imaginary, and the localized territory has lost its determinacy.

The viewer cannot identify any specific traits in the open spaces presented on screen and there is no localization in terms of the architecture of the buildings. This is a land a result of deterritorializing reality, an almost unreal no-man’s land, a nowhere place, without identifiable qualities. There are multiple reasons why *Dogs* is de-localized and non-specified. One possible comparison would be with the Latin American magic realism, both in literature and in cinema, where the non-configuration of the geographies allow a reconfiguration of inner worlds. As in the cinema of Alexandru Jodorowsky, especially in movies like *El Topo* (1970) or *The Holy Mountain* (1974), the intended indeterminacy of spatial identity produces a psychological unfamiliarity.

In contemporary art representations, as Georges Didi-Huberman elaborates in

his explanation of Claudio Parmiggiani’s works, the process of delocalization becomes a manifestation of the profound indeterminacy of artistic expression. For the French art historian this “non-spatial spatialization,” the creation of a paradoxical “here and elsewhere” (34-35), represents the power of delocalization. Didi-Huberman underlines that delocalization, or rather delocation (after *Delocazione*, the term of Parmiggiani), is not the absence of space but rather a force that gives consistency to spatiality, through the “matter of absence” (55).

The operation by which a place is invested with “nothingness,” allows the formation of a non-space. This *cinematic nonplace* is not an impossible place, nor an improbable location, but rather an expression what Gorfinkel called the “universally particular” (2011). In Mirică’s film this undetermined localization creates an un-real “Eastern wasteland,” an impersonal space that has no national identity, a deterritorialized zone with no spatial stability, no identifiable elements that would allow us to define its specificity. And if territorial organization is a process by which we are assigning signification, by providing demarcation lines, deterritorialization allows uncertainty to build up. More so, while territorialization institutes order and stability, deterritorialization is opened to chaos and ambiguity. This is the case with Roman, the urbanite who comes to the countryside to appraise the inheritance left behind by his deceased grandfather. When trying to find out where is located the property estimated to an improbable 550 hectares of land, the young man can get no straight answer. There are no fences, no demarcation lines, not signposts, everything is undetermined and unclear. And while the “Romanianness”



of the movies made before was obvious and often excessive, in this type of indefinite spatial setting the national character vanishes and is replaced by precarious social conditions. The movie takes place in a borderland not only because the physical frontier adds to the problematic nature of representation, but because it develops a mode of existence that is problematic. A space of dust and sand is a direct reference to the fleeting nature of humanity.

Urban vs. Rural Cinema Spaces

Apparently *Dogs* takes place in a rural community, yet there is no community, there are no institutions (except the uncertain local police), no determined spaces of rural life. Before moving forward with the arguments, we need to open the references to a larger social and political reality, that of the imbalance between rural and urban in demographic distribution in Romania. For a very long time Romania was predominantly a rural society, with almost 80 percent of the population living in rural area during the 1930s, then 70% by 1965, and more recently 46 percent living in the countryside – according to the latest census in 2011. It was the communist regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu who forcibly coerced the Romanian people to move from the countryside to the new urban areas created by the state. In a desperate effort to urbanize the nation, a much detested program called “systematization of rural areas” was elaborated and, according to some provisional data, in only a decade 2 million people were relocated. Although we do not know exactly how many houses were destroyed, Ceaușescu was speaking about eliminating approximately 7.000

of the 13.000 villages in Romania, and by 1988 the communist Leader was proposing the destruction of over 3.000. And even if there are no facts concerning the actual number of villages that were destroyed or simply provided from growing, the declared purpose of “eliminating the difference between villages and cities” was a public policy in Ceaușescu’s Romania.

Actually we cannot understand Romanian cinema without understanding the historical split between urban and rural, since we can distinguish between those movie-makers that are urban and those who are rural. Using Fowler and Helfied’s distinction between “rural cinema” and “urban cinema,” we can identify two different types of filmmakers in the history of the national cinema – for example Cristi Puiu, the prodigy of the new generation is placing his film in exclusively urban spaces. There are many distinctions between the two approaches, yet among many other traits the most important for our discussion here is the emphasis on location and the connection with the past (Fowler and Helfied 10). If recent Romanian cinema is clearly confined to urban existence, with most of the successful movies of the new generation of directors located exclusively in cityscapes and dealing with the present, we also have a couple of relevant examples of Romanian films taking place in the countryside – most of them made during Communism.

Unlike the more famous movies made before *Dogs*, Mirică builds his narrative with a clear negative spatial differentiation from the typical settings of the “New Wave” films. One of the best counter-example is *Sieranevada* (2016), the most recent movie by Cristi Puiu, which provides a radically different mise-en-scene, mostly



interiors of a crammed apartment block of flats, with conversational interactions about specific problems connected to Romanian society. The movies of other film directors of the same generation, like Corneliu Porumboiu or Radu Muntean, are following a similar path. The Romanian recent cinema was most of the times filmed indoors, in kitchens and narrow corridors, with the directors developing an intimate space.

Mirică places most of the action in his film takes outdoors, with an overt disdain for interiors. Even the scenes that are taking place in the derelict house belonging to the deceased grandfather do not provide the viewer with too many localization clues. Even the “farm” administered by the gang of Uncle Alecu is lacking any specificity. This allows the development up of the conflict between the two world apart – that of the urban couple of Roman and his girlfriend, and the rural cop who fights the peasant-like gangsters, lead by the psychopathic Samir. In a highly confrontational scene between Samir and Roman, the rural gangster clearly states this dichotomy, central for the intentions of the director: “In the countryside even the killings are just another act of boredom,” the gangster tells the “outsider” who enters his territory. In this a rural world, with unwritten rules, without laws and lacking identifiable characteristics, everything is indeterminate, even death.

Nonetheless, the characters in Mirică’s cinematic universe are nothing like the peasants of other cultural narratives. A brief cultural contextualization is necessary, since one of the direct references is to a classical “peasant” novel *Ion*, by Liviu Rebreanu. If the central topic of this masterpiece of Romanian literature is similar to

that in *Dogs* – the gratuitous conflicts over land ownership – the way in which the space is described looses all connections to a particular, national territory. Once again, the argument is that Mirică’s movie is deterritorialized in the sense that it is in-between. It is neither urban, nor rural, fundamentally constructing a transient reality, one that is not attached to an identity that can be placed.

This is helped by breakup of the “realist pact,” is clearly visible when Mirică places the story in a rural area where there are almost no people and the only actual building is the old manor of Uncle Alecu, in itself derelict and lacking any architectural specificity. In fact *Dogs* presents no community, the space is simply populated by isolated individuals who have almost no social connections, moving around in this territory as if they would be detached from any links with reality. Compared with the “national epic,” or any of the historical movies of the past, in this film the very fabric of reality is no longer determined by a national character.

This film is no longer a “documented” reality, as it was with the movies of the New Wave stylistics, it is taking place in a *subjective reality*, one that exists only in the imagination of the director. Focusing on actions and the development of emotions, as the logic of the thriller would recommend, sometimes Mirică lets his experience as a screenwriter for Hollywood style movies and TV series to transform his turns his own writing into a pastiche. This is the case with the comedic style borrowed from the sitcom *Las fierbinți*, when the local peasant brings to the rural police station the boot he found in the pond. Although comical, the conversations that takes place in an



inauthentic context, a constructed image about the a localization that functions only within the rules of the genre.

Another important element that adds to the deterritorialized dimension of this film is the unspecific nature of its visual identity. The visual vocabulary used by the director and his cinematographer, Andrei Butică, is dominated by the dry yellow fields of desolate lands, punctuated by derelict fences and crossed by dirt roads that lead to nowhere. This earth-like sensation provided by the visual development might seem “rural,” but it is closer to the “western” genre than to a “Romanian” geography. The remarkable cinematographer builds an atmospheric space, one that is not traceable in photographic reality.

In this sense *Dogs* is an aesthetically de-localized film, effacing any visible trace linking it to a particular place. Its codes of landscapes, devoid of references, and lacking physical boundaries creates a territoriality that is imaginary. The space in *Dogs* is not only dis-placed, its indeterminate nature makes it an ambiguous landscape in terms of significations, that are non-specific for the national territory. This is accentuated by the vast expansions of a deserted land, making this dusty and barren terrain, with the abandoned property in its center and its borderland status, a non-national space. Obviously it allows the director to project a similar interior, psychological desolation, but it is also an indication this movie-making style to what Marquerite Danan described as the “post-national” cinema (Danan 172). Erasing the traits of the national imagery and replacing it with an indeterminate territory, the postnational film is digestible for a global audience and simultaneously relevant for

the local public. This is when the movie becomes *glocal*, practiced as a dis-placed form of cinema-making, one that does not belong to any given social reality, that has no historical determination and that could easily be translated into another culture, albeit maintaining the appearances of a determined spatial affiliation.

Displaced Genres, Disembodied Characters

Just like the spaces, the characters appearing in *Dogs* are lacking any specificity, they are devoid of any “Romanianess,” and, more profoundly, of any humanity. These deterritorialized characters are also transient beings, they do not have any determination or definite identity – Roman’s best friend or his girlfriend have no history, the mobsters are lacking distinguishing traits, and all the secondary characters kept as unfamiliar individuals. Quite often the young director places unremarkable ironies towards several of the Romanian New Wave tropes – the rabid dog is called “Police” (Poliția), which makes an indirect reference to *Police, adjective*; the long shot with the local policeman, Hogaș (played masterfully by George Visu), who takes his time analyzing a rotting foot, is an irony of the “table scenes” in recent Romania cinema. The movie is punctuated with ethereal music, another flagrant breaking of the rules of the New Wave, with the atmosphere created in a similar to that of the classical western or thriller genres.

Once again, Mirică expresses a clear intention to break with the tradition of his predecessors, yet this lack of specificity is also a result of the formation of the young director. Conceived like a typical policier,



the movie follows to the letter the structure of a crime thriller, having a similar atmosphere with “Small Time Gangster,” the Australian TV series “imported” in Romania by HBO, for which Mirică worked as writer and director. As pointed out by other critics (Debruge 2016), and acknowledged by the director himself (Mirică interview 2016), there are many international influences in his moviemaking, most notably from the Coen brothers, both in terms of narratives, cinematography and character building. In this respect Mirică’s cinema is closer to *No Country for Old Men* or *Fargo* than to *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu*.

While *Dogs* is apparently respecting the rules of the typical detective story – there is an unsolved mystery/ crime, a hard to put off investigator who solves the problem or the riddle that ensues, much to the pleasure of the viewers who are involved in the process – unfortunately we need to underline the fact Mirică also confirms the male stereotypes in the detective movies genre. His film is one of the most sexist perspectives about the world of men in recent Romanian cinema, with women almost absent, or lacking any power of representation, described as victims or objects of the male aggression.

As explained by Philippa Gates (2006), this male-centered view of the world, illustrates the transcultural nature of the cultural imperialism of Hollywood cinema. By respecting the rules of the genre, the storyline in Mirică’s production is in fact an expression of male domination and of the simplistic binary opposition law versus crime, specific to capitalism (Gates 7-8). This, in turn, generates a displacement of the characters within the overall narrative. The national identity of the characters,

although apparently explained during their development, is actually based on an indeterminacy of their national identity. Mirică’s characters have odd names – with the Protagonist called Roman (a strange surname for a Romanian) and the Antagonist called Samir (also rather peculiar for the given context). Using limited references to localization and brief and inconclusive depictions of their identity, the people that appear in the film sharing no particular identity.

Boyd van Hoeij (2016) observed already that there are several elements that lacking motivation in the narrative build-up, and was questioning the ability of the director to tell a story coherently. Indeed, characters appear and disappear without any justifications – this is the case with Roman’s best friend who vanishes without a trace, then later his girlfriend comes into the story without plot-line development, and often the secondary characters then are left out the picture with no apparent reason. It is my contention that this approach is intrinsic to the logic of deterritorialization and dis-location.

A similar displacement happens in the second plot of the story, which has in its center the local policeman, Hogaș. He is an elderly man, dying of cancer, who is investigating the series of deaths in his “precinct.” Played with extreme force by one of the most experienced Romanian film actors of the previous generation, George Visu, this is a meticulous and cynical officer who thoroughly and methodically tries to build a net around the leader of a local gang. For an international public this would be an easily recognizable plot, yet for the specific Romanian context the premise is totally unrealistic. The local



police (in this case they are even called the “rural police”) do not have any investigating powers and abilities. No crime can be investigated in Romania without the involvement of the representatives of county or even national law enforcement institutions. Hogaș is obviously a displaced character, a rural cop who looks and moves like the drunkard and heavy smoking cop in international policier genre (like Backstrom or Columbo before hand) is no longer connected to a nationality and a factual reality. The dialogue between the rural policeman, who acts as if he is Sherlock Holmes, and a credulous informant, that takes place at the edge of a pond is relevant for this discussion. Two schematic characters that belong to the logic of an international genre interact in a space that has no identity. At any given time their dialogue could be translated in another language and the scene would make sense for any non-specific movie spectator.

Also the entire conflict between Samir, the self appointed gang leader and Hogaș, the dying police officer has nothing to do with local identities, as it is an expression of the *deterritorialization of narratives*. As pointed out, the policeman himself is built as a character inspired from the popular Nordic police movies, like *Wallander* (which in turn are following the novels of Henning Mankell) or *Backstrom*, based on the books of Leif G.W. Persson. Although symbolically relevant, the local policeman walking around with one foot in a plastic bag, is not functional outside the logic of this deterritorialized type of storytelling. And although the foot itself is symbolically relevant – with a clear reference to van Gogh’s famous shoes, and the more famous debate between Derrida

and Heidegger about the edges of art – it remains an expression of the disembodied nature of Mirică’s characters. Just like the foot carried around pointlessly, a body part with no connection to a real person, the entire cast in *Dogs* is wandering in the visual field without a territorial determinacy.

Another deterritorialized character is the fictional Grandfather Alecu who, we are told during the backstory, owned 550 hectares of land at the border of what we suppose to be the Romanian part of Dobrogea. This might serve the development of the plot-line, but it is a completely displaced reference, since nobody could own that much land in communist Romania, let alone in a region that was near the border. Once again this raises the question of Mirică’s localized view, and if this could indeed be about the “real” Romania, or even about a determined rural space. Clearly the image depicted by the movie is that of an urban director, who has only a cultural experience with the village existence, one that founded in international imaginary projection.

Even more importantly, the negative character of Samir (also brilliantly depicted by Vlad Ivanov, maybe one of the most powerful actors of the new generation) follows a genre mechanics that allows no precise delimitation. On one hand this is the typical Antagonist, a schematic and stereotypical psychopathic murderer, who reveals his true nature only at the end of the movie. The nationality of the character, his background history and even his motivations remain unclear and his entire presence on screen is based on uncertainty.

Last, but not least, an important component of this imaginary uncertainty is the anthropomorphic and symbolic connection



between humans and dogs. The reference to dogs and the presence of the wild guard dog in the movie is relevant at a certain level for the mythological dimensions and its connection to death. The direct link is with Cerberus, the monstrous being guarding the gates of Hades, thus the house of Uncle Alecu functions as a gate between normalcy and infernal atrocity. Here the allegorical connection with the dogs becomes suggestive for the character build-up. As pointed out by many authors, dogs are often used in movies as “disguised humans” (McLean 16), be it in fables, allegories or in advertising and fiction films – one of the most recent example of the allegorical use of animals, and specially dogs as portrayals of humans, we have in *Life of Pets* (2012). In Mirică’s movie the metaphor of the dog is explicitly used to attribute “canine traits” to these wild characters living in the wilderness of Dobrogea – these are undomesticated and aggressive beings. From another perspective, dogs are also expressions of the symbolically un-free men. Just as it happens in Iñárritu’s *Amores Perros* (2000), where the dogs are projected as symbol of loyalty and disloyalty, the relationship with the dog in Mirică’s movie becomes relevant for the behavior of men with other human beings. In the final scene of *Dogs* this direct metonymy is visually relevant – the brutal killing of the guard dog by Samir only represents his final act of brutality on Roman and his girlfriend.

If we are to take a deeper look, at a more profound level, we must use the explanations provided by Deleuze and Guattari to explain how these reference to dogs function. The very idea of “becoming-animal” is in fact a manifestation of the *in-between* nature of artistic and

cultural products (with Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* being one of the best examples). The transformation of humans almost into mad dogs is an expression of their deterritorialization and their implicit abandoning of identity. Just like a dog, Samir is only defending his territory, and by this he is losing his humanity. In fact this territorial dispute is repetitive in Mirică’s storytelling, one of the most illustrative is the scene in *Dogs* in which they gang hunts wild boars, roaming around a property that is not even their own.

Deterritorialization is accompanied by dehumanization, both filtered through the connection with the aggressive dog that guards the house where the main character lives – while the human characters in the movie slowly lose their humanity and abandon their ground, the dog is transformed from the initial violence into a domesticated being. When the humans are being transformed into animals, the animal gets the traits of normality and everything is thrown into chaos by this profound loss of identity.

Towards a Glocal Cinema

The fact that *Dogs* was produced as an international co-production – managed by EZ Films, founded by Elie Meirovitz, with the help of Bulgarian producer Katya Trichova from Argo, distributed by the French company Bac Films – makes it a global cultural object. Also, in terms of its content, the story was developed within several international workshops for which the director got financial support. Yet, as argued before, this is not simply a transnational movie, because its aesthetics and its relationship with the cinematic space is



ambiguous. While mingling elements of western films, the classical police and thriller genres, *Dogs* does not belong anymore to a clear national identity, and does not share the traits of the movies made by his compatriots. Nor does he explicitly abandon the local features. This indeterminacy, explicit both at the level of narrative and the cinematic development of this production, ends up reterritorializing the story, the characters and the space. Adding to the argument about the deterritorialization

of narratives and landscapes we can draw the conclusion that, within the overall process of post-national cinemas, Mirică's approach illustrates the way in which the *glocal cinema* replaces "older" forms of movie-making practices. As it has been noted by other film researchers (Vincendeau 339), the *glocal cinema* is the result of a mixture between localized narratives that are deterritorialized in a manner that make them part of a global culture, rather than belonging to a national identity.

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