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Film-viewing in Turkish and Moroccan diasporic families: a gender and place perspective

Kevin Smets, Sofie Van Bauwel, Philippe Meers & Roel Vande Winkel

Gender, Place & Culture

This article explores the relation between gender identities and spatial aspects of audience reception by means of a case study on film-viewing in the Turkish and Moroccan diasporic communities in the Belgian city of Antwerp. Drawing on feminist and gender approaches to audience reception on the one hand, and research into the spatial dynamics underlying audience reception on the other, we look at film-viewing as a socially and spatially meaningful practice that is relevant for the understanding of gender identities in diasporic families. This article is based on the results of a four-year project on diasporic film cultures in Antwerp that investigated how film-viewing practices relate to social and cultural dynamics within the Turkish and Moroccan communities. The data that are discussed include participant observations, in-depth interviews and group interviews with a varied sample of people with Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds. The results show that although film-viewing, especially in the public space of the film theatre, can be mobilized by women as an emancipating social practice, gendered power structures often prevail. Also in the domestic contexts, a more traditional gender division is articulated by the respondent concerning family viewing. We conclude that the space of the film theatre and film-going serve the continuity and stability of gendered family relations, rather than subverting them.

Keywords: film-viewing; diaspora; power; family; public and private space; media reception

1. Introduction

The work of various audience and reception scholars has demonstrated that film-viewing is about much more than viewers' responses to film 'texts'. The linking of audience studies with insights from cultural geography (Jancovich and Faire 2003) and cultural studies (Staiger 2005) has revealed how film-viewing is not only about making sense of texts and images, but also about being involved in activities of great social and spatial significance. In this article, we explore how gender identities are sustained by the activities of media audiences, more particular of film viewers. Our outline reveals that hitherto few studies have addressed film-viewing at the intersection of gender and ethnicity, or the social and spatial construction of gender identities through these practices. Our case study of filmviewing among Turkish and Moroccan diasporic communities demonstrates how the relations between gender, place and film culture can be understood among diasporic groups. When tackling gender identities here, we are mainly interested in the social constructions of feminine and masculine roles within family environments, rather than sexual orientations and differences, as these questions were beyond the scope of our study of diaspora film cultures.

In her overview of gender and media studies, Gill (2010, 17) describes how, since the 1980s, audience studies have been profoundly influenced by feminist critique. She distinguishes three recent audience studies traditions in which gender and feminist approaches are insightful. First, within the encoding/decoding tradition (Hall [1992]1973) scholars like Morley (1980) seek to link people's different modes of interpretation of media messages to their social and cultural memberships and competencies. As Gill (2010, 18) shows, the influence of this tradition is noticeable in the work of feminist media

scholars such as Andrea Press's analysis (1991) of generation and class differences in women's responses to television programmes. Second, Gill (2010, 18) distinguishes a tradition that is concerned with 'fictional forms of understanding women's pleasures', best exemplified by Radway's media ethnographic study (1984) on female romance readers. Radway's study marks feminist media studies' shift to the everyday life context and shows how the women she studied 'use popular cultural forms to make do with their social situation, how they actively react to and shape their own pleasures and desires,' as van Zoonen (1994, 113) puts it. Third, a number of scholars mobilize audience studies to debate feminist cultural criticism, that is, the discussion about feminist researchers' relationships to media texts and its audiences as shifting between hegemonic and more critical research positions (see Brunson 1993). Writing from a post-modern perspective, Hermes (2003) traces the critical role of feminism and gender in the field of audience research, and reception research in particular. For Hermes, the value of feminist reception analyses lies in the new theoretical insights into the construction of gender, as well as in the insights offered into 'the vast range of possibilities offered by texts that are actualized in audience practice and thus to how social subjectivity is produced' (2003, 382). Yet, such understandings of media subjectivity are sometimes criticized for being heavily theorybased (Seiter 1998). Feminist-inspired audience research tends to tackle the paternalist conceptions of audiences in order to give way to more critical and substantial considerations of identity, agency and power. In a close dialogue with psychoanalysis, feminist cinema studies are instrumental in reflecting on the position of spectators and the importance of the 'gaze' (hooks 1992). While these reflections are often on a more abstract level, we prefer to focus on concrete audiences in specific situations, thus responding to the call for more empirical studies on gender identities and audiences.

Feminist and gender approaches to audiences have contributed to the way in which academics today think about sense-making processes and its relations to social reality. Although thus far we have mainly cited studies focusing on television fiction in domestic environments, the literature on gender performativity (as used in feminist philosophy, see Butler 1990) and interaction in online media environments (see e.g. Kendall 2002; Soukup 1999) is of critical importance too, showing how gender identities are constructed through mediated interaction. Some key scholars within (feminist) film studies have focused on gender identities among film audiences. Hansen's work (1991) on the concept of film spectatorship and how it is historically entangled with ethnic, sexual and social differentiation, along with Stacey's (1987) critical approach to 'masculine' and 'feminine' viewing positions are vital to understand the complex relationship between gender identities and meaning-making practices of audiences. Moreover, the key works on film reception by Staiger (2000, 2005) offer great insight into the way in which gender identities matter for film reception alongside class, racial and other identities. Still, we know little about the tensions between public and private viewing contexts when it comes to meaning-making practices and gender identities. This is also one of the conclusions of Hermes (2003, 394– 395) when she discusses McCarthy's analysis (2001) of television reception outside the boundaries of the home. In her book, McCarthy spurs scholars to address how community construction and belonging can be understood from a spatial perspective.

Audience and media studies concentrating on the intersections between gender and ethnicity are particularly helpful to show how gender and ethnicity interconnect within the construction of social and cultural identities. Bobo's (1995) study on black women's meaning-making of film texts crucially brings together critical questions of race, ethnicity and gender (see also Brooks and Herbert 2006). Similarly, Gigi Durham's research (1999, 2004) on South Asian-American adolescent girls demonstrates that articulations of gender identities are related in complex ways to ethnic positions. More recently, the work done by Adriaens (2010) and Tuncel and Ferentinou (2011), among others, shows that an

intersectional perspective on media audiences may result in stimulating findings, encouraging us to look deeper into gender identities among diasporic film viewers. The central question this article deals with is how these identities come into play in relation to the different contexts of film-viewing. We argue that within different spatial viewing contexts, diverse social boundaries are constructed and negotiated. Before discussing our particular case study among Turkish and Moroccan diasporic film audiences, we focus on the significance of place in relation to film-viewing practices and gender identities in particular.

2. Gender, place and film-viewing practices

Thinking about place with regard to media-related practices is increasingly important when we consider the experience and impact of media in everyday life contexts (Moore 2012). Viewing practices should be understood within their social contexts, bearing in mind that social life is organized spatially and that spatial relations are crucial to 'politics in the broadest sense' (Massey 1994). Several authors (Jancovich and Faire 2003, Snelson and Jancovich 2011; Stacey 1994) have attempted to understand the spatial organization of film-viewing as a social activity in relation to gender identities. Interestingly, most studies deal with historical film audiences in film theatres.

On the one hand, studies on historical film audiences demonstrate how film theatres provide a fascinating gateway for investigating the social significance of spectatorship, amusement and film-going. Gender identities are often discussed as one of the key social dynamics in this respect. Snelson and Jancovich (2011) for instance describe how in the 1930s and 1940s the masculine space of the Rialto cinema on New York's Times Square was used by women to explore new modes of non-domestic femininity. In Jancovich and Faire's study (2003, 41–43) on the cultural geographies of film consumption, gender is treated as a core notion through which we may comprehend the social significance of film-viewing. Throughout its history, cinema and the space of the film theatre have been at the centre of discussions about social reform, safety, the regulation of public space, consumerism and changing gender roles, much in the same way as pre-cinema theatres had been in the nineteenth century (see Butsch 2000, 76–80). Some of these issues are echoed in more contemporary studies, for instance in Srinivas' study (2002) about social relations and the experience of film-going in India, where he describes class and gender as important dynamics within the process of community-generation that takes place through the consumption of mass media in the film theatre. More recently, Athique and Hill (2010) have been able to link changes in the Indian film exhibition landscape to changing cultural, economic and material aspects of social life, including gender identities.

On the other hand, a handful of studies have focused on the meaning of cinema for women, again mostly from a historical perspective. For Stacey in her work on female spectatorship and Hollywood cinema in the 1940s and 1950s (1994, 99), the 'space of the cinema provided a transitional space between everyday life outside the cinema and the fantasy world of the Hollywood film (...)', the film theatre was the dream palace where women escaped their daily lives (see also Dyer 1992, on the related concept of utopian sensibility). Dickey (1995) raises similar issues in her study of viewing experiences in Tamil Nadu (India), where cinema represents a utopian escape from reality and monotony. Rabinovitz (1998) analyzed female identities in relation to film-going in turn-of-the-century Chicago. Rabinovitz describes cinema-going as a vital part of urban commercial culture, and linked to *flânerie* as a way to experience modern cities, female subjectivity and (the disciplining of) desire. All these studies are deeply rooted in intellectual considerations of the city, public space and modernity. However, insightful for the broader genealogy of film-viewing and gender, these (historical) studies leave us wondering about contemporary film-viewing in relation to gender identities, at a moment when viewing

possibilities in both private and public contexts have been maximized.

To tackle this topic, and aiming to grasp the intersections between gender and ethnicity, our article looks into film-viewing in different viewing contexts among the Turkish and Moroccan diaspora in Antwerp (Belgium). Our study does not set out from an exclusive focus on a male or female film-viewing like many previous studies, nor does it solely focus on one media environment such as the family environment or the film theatre. Instead, a variety of perspectives have been investigated and identified by talking to a wide range of people in both diasporic communities and by scrutinizing film consumption in private as well as public settings. The Turkish and Moroccan communities are among the largest non-EU groups in Antwerp, as in many other West European cities. They have thus become a symbol of on-going discussions about the state of multiculturalism and diversity, not only in Antwerp or Belgium, but also throughout Europe. Moreover, both groups have often been discussed in terms of their homeland-oriented media use, in particular with regard to the rise of satellite television since the 1990s (Hargreaves and Mahdjoub 1997; Ogan 2001; Karanfil 2009).

3. Studying gender and film-viewing in the diaspora

The results of this article are derived from a four-year project on diasporic film cultures in the city of Antwerp, the second largest city of Belgium and one of Europe's largest ports. The goal of the project was to identify and map different diasporic film cultures in terms of their visibility, material and economic impact and to investigate how diasporic communities engage with cinema. The study tried to capture diasporic film cultures from a wide range of perspectives, and gender was one of them. Thus, questions about gender were included alongside questions of ethnicity, politics, ideology and social class. The focus here is on the Turkish and Moroccan communities, the two largest groups of non-EU origin. Like in many urban and industrial areas in North-Western Europe, both groups constitute the largest ethnic minorities, the first generation of which migrated as labour migrants in the 1960s.

Different methods were combined in this project: we did expert interviews with distributors and exhibitors of Turkish and Moroccan films, participant observations during film screenings as well as audience surveys and in-depth interviews among members of the communities. Here, we mainly discuss results from the in-depth interviews as these provide a good insight into the ways in which film cultures are experienced among the diaspora and how practices of gendered meaning-making develop according to participants. To an extent, the Turkish and Moroccan diasporas groups share some characteristics such as their migration history (labour migration started in the mid-1960s and was followed by family and marriage migration in the subsequent decades), religious background (predominantly Sunni Islam, see Clycq 2011; Gu"ngo"r, Fleischmann, and Phalet 2011) and socio-economic position (a growing middle class, but with significant difficulties in terms of education, discrimination and employment). Their specificities are situated at the level of different paths of 'integration and assimilation' (Reniers 1999, 695 –696) and socio-cultural variables such as region of origin (Kesteloot and Cortie 1998) and positions towards a 'homeland' (the Turkish diaspora is regarded to be more homeland-oriented). The Turkish diaspora generally displays a much stronger attachment to its country of origin while coming across as a more 'closed' community (Lesthaeghe 2000). To this, we add that both groups are characterized by ethnical and linguistic divides, such as different Amazigh and Arab groups among the Moroccan diaspora (Merolla 2002) and Kurdish, Alevi and Assyrian minorities among the Turkish diaspora.

As we have described elsewhere, there are some particularities to the Turkish and Moroccan film cultures in Antwerp, in the sense that both are situated within different socio-cultural fields (Smets 2012a, 2012b, 2013). While mainstream Turkish films are an essential part of popular culture among the Turkish community, the scope of Moroccan (and more broadly North African) cinema is mostly limited to the art-house and film

festival circuits, which are seldom or not frequented by the Moroccan community. For instance, mainstream Turkish films have been screened on a regular basis at the local multiplex theatre ever since 2004, there have been several Turkish video shops and Turkish films are accessed through satellite television and internet. Similar Turkish media practices may be observed elsewhere in Europe where mainstream Turkish films are screened, such as in Germany (Halle 2012). In contrast, Moroccan – and by extension, North African – films are rarely screened at popular venues. DVD copies of these films are difficult to find and Moroccan respondents tend much less to view these films through satellite and internet than the respondents with a Turkish background. In general, the status and appeal of Moroccan films among the diasporic community is much lower. Several local and international elements are at the basis of these differences, such as different levels of film production, export and distribution, and the composition of the Moroccan community in Antwerp (where the majority has Amazigh roots and is thus less drawn to Arabic media, including films, see also Smets 2012a, 2012b). Although there are clear differences in the circulation of Turkish and Moroccan films, there are some intersections when it comes to film culture within the Turkish and Moroccan communities. Bollywood and Hollywood productions seem to have the broadest cross-cultural appeal. Bollywood films are particularly popular among Turkish and Moroccan women (as we describe below), while watching mainstream Hollywood productions is very common among the second and third generations of both communities. However, there is hardly any overlap between viewing practices: it is rather unusual that people with a Turkish background watch Moroccan or North African films, or the other way around (although adaptations of Turkish soaps are gaining popularity among Arab audiences, see Yanardag^oglu and Karam 2013).

Due to the differences in film circulation we were unable to study both film cultures and communities in exactly the same way. For instance, the fieldwork among the Turkish community had a more public character (e.g. screenings at the film theatre) whilst the fieldwork among the Moroccan community concentrated more on organizations and households. Over a four-year period, about 50 moments of participant observations were conducted, such as participating in film screenings in different viewing settings (film theatre, households, cultural and social organizations), giving us insight into the various film-viewing practices in both communities. In addition, a range of interviews was conducted among a maximum variation sample of people of Moroccan (1 group interview N = 4; 20 individual interviews) and Turkish origin (3 group interviews N = 3, 3, 4; 1 double interview; 18 individual interviews). The sample included an equal amount of men and women, of ages ranging from 15 to 71 years with different social, ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds. While most respondents agreed to be interviewed individually, there were some who preferred talking about our research in a group, which prompted us to also include group interviews. The choice to be interviewed in a group rather than individually did not seem to be related to gender, but rather to social barriers that had to do with education and language knowledge. There was also one mother who preferred conducting the interview together with her daughter. Both mother and daughter were avid film-viewers with an impressive film collection at home, and they turned out to be very ‘information-rich’ respondents.

Both individual and group interviews followed a similar structure, starting with warmup questions about memories of film-viewing as a child and favourite films, and leading to more specific questions about film-viewing habits and film-going. Towards the end of the research, we noticed that the interview structure became less rigid, and also more focused on the diversity within both communities, as our understanding of the field grew. The data mainly consisted of the transcribed interviews, which we coded and analysed using NVivo. We employed an axial coding strategy, combining interview sections that were coded under specific relevant categories such as the codes dealing with family life, identities, gender roles and film-viewing. In this process, we identified patterns with regard to how film-viewing is interrelated with gender identities and family life. In our discussion

of the results later, we focus first on the (semi)public viewing context of the film theatre, where gender differences prevail. Next, we look at the domestic context, describing how power dynamics in families relate to film-viewing practices in the home. As we show, there tends to be an overarching need to formulate and negotiate social boundaries, although the meaning of film-viewing is constructed differently across viewing contexts.

4. Going to the multiplex: gender and family

Since 2004, Antwerp's largest multiplex theatre Metropolis (a branch of the Belgian multinational exhibition group Kinopolis, recently renamed Kinopolis Antwerpen) regularly screens mainstream Turkish films. Taking place about once a month and benefiting from the flourishing of Turkey's media industry, these screenings have brought forth a vivid film culture among the Turkish diaspora. The fact that these films are screened in the large multiplex theatre is significant in itself: it is the penetration of Turkish popular culture within a space that is generally associated with mainstream Western/European entertainment rather than with popular culture of ethnic and cultural minority populations. As we have demonstrated elsewhere, the screenings have generated a sense of pride and ethno-cultural self-consciousness among the Turkish diaspora (Smets et al. 2013). Moreover, the success of the Turkish screenings, which are almost exclusively attended by audiences of Turkish origin, also relates to the specific social developments within the Turkish community. Through these screenings, the multiplex theatre contributes to the development of alternative public spheres (Habermas 1989, see also Cunningham 2001), redefining and expanding the setting in which familial formations are solidified.

The multiplex theatre, in essence a 'place of consumption' (Jancovich and Faire 2003, 198–200), is widely regarded as a 'modern' and luxurious place. Going to the multiplex theatre is a key part of what it means to belong to a growing middle class population. Respondents repeatedly mentioned that while in the first decades (1960s and 1970s) the Turkish community was mainly concerned with economic survival, there has been a gradual increase (post-1980s) in cultural and social activities such as film-viewing. Going to the theatre is also an expression of affluence. The film screenings were often packed with families. Notably, the affluence and 'modernism' that is related to cinema-going has a critical gender dimension since it is one of the practices that is mobilized to display the power of the father figure. Mahsun⁴, a second-generation male of Turkish origin, explained that in the Turkish diaspora,

the head of the household, i.e. the father figure, is willing to pay the price of a night out to the cinema. They have a drink, buy popcorn. The man feels good because he has done something with his family. For us, there are very few things to do with the whole family.

He then moved on to explain that married men and women in the Turkish community often spend their free time in separate social and physical environments. Very often a woman stays home with the children while a man's free time is often spent outside the home, in mosques, organizations or tea houses. The film theatre, and the screenings of Turkish films in particular, bridge this socio-spatial gap that exists between men and women, offering social and spatial togetherness not only for men and women but also for families in general. Similarly, in his study of different axes of social and cultural differentiations in (sub)urban space in the Turkish capital Ankara, Ayata (2002) described how, in spite of their very different positions towards (sub)urbanity and domesticity, both men and women enjoy the activity of going to the newly opening suburban cinemas.

The activity of going to the cinema also connects with distinct negotiations of gender identities. One way in which these negotiations were revealed was in the choice of films.

In general, respondents subscribed to the notion of gender-specific genres, that is, the identification of film genres as distinct masculine or feminine genres (e.g. action films as a masculine genre, romantic films as a feminine genre). Although we found that men were slightly in the majority among the audience of action films such as *Kurtlar Vadisi Filistin* (2011, *Valley of the Wolves: Palestine*), there does not seem to be a clear-cut gender division in Turkish action films. Rather, women joined their husbands to these typical 'masculine films' to maintain a sense of togetherness, regardless of the film genre. The women joining their husbands did not do so because of the particular action film, but rather for the social experience and because they like 'anything Turkish'. Interestingly, the opposite – men joining their wives to 'feminine films' – was less commonplace and involved more negotiation and debate. When men join their wives, they see it as a compromise, for instance for special occasions like birthdays or Valentine's Day (when romantic and dramatic films are programmed). Thus, it seems that there are different expectations for men and women when it comes to joining their partners to films that they not necessarily want to see themselves.

Some film genres such as comedies or historical films are considered as 'gender neutral'. They are regarded as the most suitable choice for couples and families. This negotiation played a role particularly among married audience members, and much less among the younger people, who apparently felt less restricted in their cinema-going habits. Another, perhaps more distinctive way in which the Turkish film screenings matter to the negotiations of gender identities, is the role of film-going as an emancipating practice. Most of our female respondents of the second and third generation (who are roughly between 20 and 40 years old) were critical towards the traditional stay-at-home role of women, often referring to the position of their own mothers. Film-going was used as a key example to talk about a woman's right – and need – to spend their free time outside the house without men. Gu'1, a 31-year-old married stay-at-home mother of three, explained how she and her friends, sisters and cousins regularly planned visits to Turkish film screenings: 'We gather the girls, and the ladies with children put their children in bed. We choose a film and we have a girls' night. We go all together and the men stay at home, doing the dishes.' Some of the male respondents also contrasted the space of the theatre with daily routines and traditional gender identities in the private sphere. Ahmet, a 28-year-old married man of Turkish origin experienced film-going as a practice of resistance, stating that he often went to Turkish films with his male friends. After the film, they went for drinks, something that his wife normally does not appreciate because 'the lady wants her man in the house all the time.' He identified the theatre with a necessary escape from his domestic, married life, which is unusual given the obvious male-dominated context of the diasporic families that were interviewed. For instance, it was stated by other male participants that they preferred their wives watching films at home, and not going to the cinema without the company of a man (e.g. a male family member). Indeed film-going and the place of the film theatre were also associated with dressing up and 'getting noticed' by others in the Turkish community (mostly men) – some men even suspected that young women tried to find their future husbands at the crowded premieres of Turkish films. In his ethnography of men's film-going in India, Derne' (2000) found similar support for the controlling gaze of men at women in the film theatre. Interestingly however, he also found that men find themselves being the object of controlling looks. This theatre thus becomes a space in which viewing and being viewed is part of the experience.

5. The appropriateness of viewing in domestic spaces

While the space of the film theatre and the social practice of film-going mostly relates to the tensions of gender identities within public spaces, other negotiations come into play when concentrating on film-viewing in the domestic space. A significant portion of research on media use and reception has dealt with domestic and family environments (Ang 1996; Livingstone 2002; Moores 1996; Morley 1986) and it is indeed essential to

grasp film culture among the diaspora. As Silverstone (1999, 95) writes, 'we study the media in its domesticity because of our general concern with boundaries that surround domesticity, and the particular threats that the screen, the electronic threshold, pose [...].'

With regard to the home environment and domestic film consumption, respondents mostly talked about the struggles they experienced in terms of the appropriateness of viewing (certain) films. More precisely, film-viewing in shared domestic spaces entails several risks of embarrassment. Film culture in the domestic environment comes down to a fairly universal principle: films with nudity, sexually explicit or romantic scenes should be avoided in cross-gender and cross-generation settings. While it is clear that this moral standard is culturally defined, it is also accounted for as an integral part of religious traditions and morals, especially among Sunni Muslims in the Moroccan community. Often, parents and older siblings were responsible for guarding the values in relation to film consumption. In each family, this led to specific rules and understandings of the appropriateness and to different actions ranging from strict house rules to hierarchies in the control over the TV remote. Evidently, what was appropriate in one family was off-limits in another. All families did share a need to define their own 'filmic safety zones', i.e. films that are safe to watch under all circumstances and in every company. Respondents consistently positioned American and European films outside of the safety zone.

Mohammed's (a 30-year-old man of Moroccan origin) account on American films illustrates this: 'Today American films all they show are ... pretty girls and good-looking guys. There is always a love scene. Every [American] film should have at least one love scene.' Thus, 18-year-old female student Imane concludes, 'there is a lot of doubt about Western films. One can always doubt and expect that something can happen and you should be careful to watch it with your family.' Moreover, respondents noted that such films are only becoming more extreme. As opposed to 'Western' films, Arab and Turkish media and films were deemed more appropriate for the domestic environment. Imane for instance noted that when relatives are visiting her family, whichever Arab channel is always switched on, 'just to avoid embarrassing moments'. In contrast, when people are alone, these boundaries become less strict and respondents were less rigid about which films are safe and which are not. It is important to note here that these struggles with the appropriateness of viewing certain media content are also observed in other studies on family viewing, for instance by Buckingham and Bragg (2004) and Adriaens (2012, 12), in relation to gender and media content. What is interesting is that the respondents explained this phenomenon from a religious (Islamic) perspective. When they were asked to elaborate on this religious specificity, they often said that Turkish and Moroccan families were more traditional or conservative, thus linking religiosity with tradition.

Besides 'homeland' media⁵, Indian films pose another interesting category of safe films, more specifically Hindi films produced in Mumbai, also referred to as Bollywood films. The case of Bollywood films forms an interesting starting point to elaborate on the relations between family and cultural values. The appeal of Bollywood films among the Turkish and Moroccan communities in Antwerp seems to be declining nowadays. Due to the rapid spread of satellite technologies, the increased offer of Arab and Middle Eastern media and the spectacular revival of the Turkish film industry, it has become somewhat less common to watch Bollywood films. Still they have not lost their status as well-made, attractive and 'appropriate' films. Their appeal lies in a mixture of production values such as the music, use of colours and cultural values. It has previously been observed that Bollywood boasts a high level of trans-cultural appeal (Kaur and Sinha 2005; Stadler 2005). A 42-year-old female respondent, Merve, talked about the cultural proximity of the films: '(...) their culture is different, but the behaviour is similar to ours, such as respect for the elder, family values... It's actually the same as in our culture.' Twenty-year-old Meryem made a similar comment among the Moroccan respondents: '(...) you often see similarities with Moroccan culture, but it's slightly different ... In the Indian community you probably also have many taboos.' Respect, taboos and the centrality of family values are seen as crucial in Bollywood films, and thus provide an excellent filmic safety zone in

which borders are not likely to be crossed. As Imane stated:

For us, Indian films are accessible ... I think that this is the main reason why Moroccans choose those films. It never crosses the limit, you know what I mean? I don't know if you have ever watched such a film [laughs], but one always notices that the limit is always strictly avoided. That is why many Moroccan girls watch those films, and Moroccans in general, I believe.

In the last sentence of this quote, Meryem already points at the particular popularity of Bollywood films among girls in the diaspora. Gigi Durham (2004, 152 –154) has vividly described how South Asian girls embrace Bollywood and the related pop culture (dance, music) as a source of cultural identification. Similar identifications seem to be at work among girls and women in the Turkish and Moroccan diasporas in Antwerp. Dance classes, film nights and parties related to Bollywood have a broad appeal among girls from the Turkish and Moroccan diaspora. During the research we encountered several respondents, all of them women, with hundreds of Indian DVDs. These women usually emphasized the splendour and 'feel good' factor of these films. The male respondents, on the other hand, were less fond of Bollywood. While all of them recognized the professionalism of the films and the relevance of their themes, they constructed them as romantic/dramatic films, that is, qualities that they regard as feminine. These films are seen as a feminine genre. When female movie nights were organized among groups of friends or in families, they were often centred around contemporary Bollywood films, and particularly women from the Moroccan diaspora were avid attendees of public Bollywood film screenings and related events such as fashion shows and dance performances. Inherent to the discourses about gender and film culture in the domestic space are beliefs about the distinct character and roles of men and women. In particular, the role that women play in diasporic households was mentioned to be crucial to understand their engagements with films. Some women, especially those with children, rejected the idea of watching films for 'pure relaxation, to turn off one's mind' (26-year-old Naima), as most men in their environments seemed to do. Echoing Radway's (1984) account of female readers of romantic novels, the women in our study were confronted with feelings of guilt in their home environments, as Souad, a 32-year-old woman of Moroccan origin, notes: I notice that he [her husband] can watch television to relax and ... I have to force myself to watch television and relax. [...] I have to make time, sit on the couch, stop thinking and just watch. It's a real obligation for me.

In a similar vein, Ghita, a 31-year-old woman of Moroccan origin, talked about how for the women in her environment, film-viewing is connected with guilt, which is inherent to their roles as mothers and wives:

When I look at the women that I know [...], they are not interested in films. When a film starts, it is often like this: men on the couch, women in the kitchen. I have never seen them calmly, watching a film with us [...]

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

My father's wife and my father's sister too ... they seem to feel guilty when a film is switched on they feel lazy when they are on the couch [...]. And they are constantly baking and making tea, because, when you watch a film you have to make tea. And it's not just tea, there should be biscuits too, and so they keep going.

A possible reason for Ghita's observation is her somewhat difficult relation towards her Moroccan background due to a family conflict, making her particularly critical of traditions and gender roles. This quote is a good illustration of what we observed throughout the study: women in the Turkish and Moroccan diaspora were not inclined to enjoy film-viewing at home when others (i.e. family members) were present. Interestingly, some of the male respondents also noticed that their wives sometimes showed little interest in films in the domestic context, associating it with a place to work rather than to relax.

Again this is linked to the control of their husbands, as appears from the following quote by Abdelhamid: 'I think they take advantage of the little freedom they can get, they use it for that. [...] I think they all secretly watch films when their husbands are absent.' This indeed aligns with the accounts of some of these women, who said they preferred watching soaps or films during the daytime when they had the house for themselves. These constraints and the different moral patterns vis-a`-vis the appropriateness of film-viewing in the domestic context again connects with the emancipating role that cinema-going may have.

6. Conclusion

We have described a wide array of dynamics with regard to film culture and gender identities in diasporic families, ranging from very public to more individual film-viewing practices and touching upon diverse social boundaries, particularly the one between gender identity roles. Family viewing is imbued with complex inter-generational negotiations and feelings of control and embarrassment, while the domestic space is indeed a retreat albeit one with serious constraints, in which gendered family roles interfere. What seems particular about the case of the Turkish and Moroccan diasporic communities is that respondents understand these dynamics in terms of ethnic and religious positions. There is great consciousness about viewing habits and boundaries, which are often compared to 'Western' viewing practices. There is an underlying urge to define boundaries and maintain socially distinct zones of cultural praxis. While some activities and film categories and genres are reserved for consumption in a family or couple setting, others are the exclusive domains of specific gender groups. While couples and families seem to be the main target audience of film screenings in the diaspora, a limited number of films address either men or women. Each exclusive zone implies a matching neutral, inclusive zone. The striking parallel that runs through our findings with regard to family and gender identities in the diaspora is that respondents always managed to maintain clear neutral zones in which values and traditions are sustained and learned. We argue that these filmic zones of negotiation and compromise are essential for the way in which diasporic families seek continuity and stability. Indeed, in the diasporic context, when cultural belongings of different generations tend to evolve intensely, there seems to be an urge to conserve the gendered family environment. The genderedness of film viewing is diverse in its articulation amongst the respondents of the Turkish and Moroccan diasporic communities in Antwerp. First, the public space of the film theatre and especially the decision of going to the movies in family context is often gendered by means of the role of the father as head of the family who takes his family out. Second, the public space of the theatre is also a bridging space between genders. Not only do families go together as a common leisure activity but it is also a place where the traditional gender division in leisure activities is less present or renegotiated. Sometimes the theatre is also articulated as a place where the controlling gaze of the community can be present. Respondents also have clear views on genres and often refer to them as male and female genres. The genre characteristics are often related to gender and also have gendered audiences. However, women are more inclined to join their husbands to 'masculine films' as a social activity. An example of a clearly gendered genre is the preference of diaspora girls to watch Bollywood films, a romantic genre whose success also can be explained by the cultural proximity as it can be seen as an example of the intersection of culture and gender.

Inherent to the discourses about gender and film culture in the domestic space are beliefs about the distinct character and roles of men and women. The role of women in diasporic households was particularly mentioned as crucial to understand their engagements with films. Some women, especially those with children, rejected the idea of watching films as escapism. The definition of the home as a place of leisure is not articulated by the women. They see this private place rather as a 'work place' and often

feel guilty when 'just' watching a movie. The way in which respondents talked about filmGender, viewing and cinema-going practices demonstrated that these practices matter to the maintenance of family life, not only from a cross-generational perspective but also a gender perspective. We argue that, although film-viewing is a practice that may be employed by women as an emancipating practice, traditional power structures within the family often prevail. This is especially the case for our female interviewees between the age of 20 and 40. Film-viewing thus serves the stability and continuity of these structures rather than subverting them. The multiple spatial configurations (in public and private spaces) of film-viewing contribute to the construction of gender identities – and differences. The study has demonstrated that gender identities and the spatial experiences of film cultures are highly interrelated.

Finally, we want to consider what can be learned from this study for future research on gender and film culture from a spatial perspective. We believe that such studies can gain depth by adopting a (1) broad, bottom-up and (2) comparative approach. First, we did not focus on specific demographic segments or limit our observations to either domestic or public environments. By adopting a broader scope we managed to obtain a richer picture of the film practices and their meanings to the different people that are involved. It may thus be worthwhile in future research to consider the links between those public and private contexts and the significance of the mutual discourses that male and female audience members construct about film-viewing. This way, family and inter-generational dynamics can also be understood more easily. Second, we want to lay emphasis on the gains of comparative approach. The Turkish and Moroccan diasporic communities that were studied here share a number of socio-demographic features and certain cultural and religious values and practices. Despite the radically different organization of film culture in both communities some elements were strikingly similar, such as the need for filmic safety zones in the family context, the gendering of film genres and the guilt that women associated with watching films at home. There are however important differences in filmgoing practices, since the local multiplex offers a significant amount of mainstream Turkish films, while hardly any Moroccan or Arab films are screened in the city. Going to the Turkish film screenings has become a key family activity, while a comparable practice seems to lack in the Moroccan community, where leisure activities tend to take place in more gender/generation exclusive settings. By comparing both film cultures we were better equipped to assess the actual role that film practices play in diasporic families. This study is therefore also an invitation to explore the film-viewing practices of diasporic families in new comparative fields.

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1. Email: sofie.vanbauwel@ugent.be
2. Email: philippe.meers@uantwerpen.be
3. Email: roel.vandewinkel@soc.kuleuven.be
4. Self-selected pseudonyms are used to guarantee the privacy of respondents.
5. The term homeland is employed here in a very broad sense to refer to the localities and areas of origins that people identify with, and not to existing countries per se. For instance among the Moroccan diaspora, feelings of belonging and origin are often more linked to sub-national or

supra-national entities (e.g. Berberity, Arab world), as was argued elsewhere (Smets 2012a).

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