

Vilnius university
INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND POLITICAL
SCIENCE

ARQUS JOINT MASTER'S PROGRAMME IN EUROPEAN STUDIES

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**DEPICTING EXPULSION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
MIGRANT RETURNS IN EUROPEAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE
AND CINEMA 2020-2025**

MASTER'S THESIS

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Vilnius, 2026

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENT WORK

I hereby confirm that the Master's thesis submitted, "Depicting Expulsion: A Comparative Analysis of Migrant Returns in European Political Discourse and Cinema 2020-2025" is:

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2. Has not been used at any other Institute/University in Lithuania or abroad;
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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ENTRY

Rakauskaitė, Roberta: Depicting expulsion: A Comparative Analysis of Migrant Returns in European Political Discourse and Cinema 2020-2025. Master in European studies program, Master thesis / Vilnius University Institute of International Relations and Political Science; tutor: Dr. Vainius Bartasevičius Vilnius, 2026. – 127 pages

Key words: deportability; expulsion; Critical Discourse Analysis; European Commission; European cinema; migration governance.

Summary (maximum: 700 characters)

Neither "expulsion" nor "deportation" appears in five years of European Commission discourse on migration; removal is consistently described as "return". This thesis examines how the deportable migrant is constructed in that discourse and in European cinema between 2020 and 2025, applying Critical Discourse Analysis to speeches by four Commission actors and to four European films. It finds that expulsion is constructed as a functioning system in the political discourse and a personal difficulty in the films, and that each field largely remains within its own terms.

Table of Contents

Introduction	7
Literature review	10
1.1. Producing deportability through discourse.....	10
1.1.1. Securitisation and the production of illegality.....	11
1.1.2. The humanitarian frame and its limits	12
1.2. Performance of deportability.....	13
1.3. Political discourse on asylum seekers and deportations	16
1.4. Cinema discourse on deportations	17
2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis.....	19
3. Method – Critical Discourse Analysis.....	22
3.1. Corpus justification	24
3.2. Time period.....	25
3.3. Analytical procedure.....	25
3.3.1. Political corpus.....	25
3.3.2. Film corpus	26
3.4. The coding procedure	30
3.5. Limitations.....	31
4. From Directive to Regulation: The Evolution of EU Returns Policy 2008-2026.....	32
5. The Deportable Migrant in EU Political Discourse	34
5.1. Naming and constructing the migrant as social actor (van Leeuwen)	34
5.2. The argumentative construction of expulsion (topoi).....	37
5.3. Mitigation: how "return" softens "expulsion" (Reisigl & Wodak's mitigation strategy).....	42
5.4. The trajectory and the institutional production of deportability	45
6. The Deportable Migrant in European Cinema.....	46
6.1. Tori and Lokita	47
6.2. Souleymane's Story.....	51
6.3. To a Land Unknown	56
6.4. Limbo	60
6.5. Cross-film synthesis	65
7. Comparative Analysis	67

7.1.	Social actor construction compared	67
7.2.	Topoi compared.....	68
7.3.	Mitigation vs intensification: expulsion, return, deportation	69
7.4.	Answering the research question	70
	Conclusions	71
	Bibliography.....	77
	Annexes.....	82
	Annex 1. Film selection.....	82
	Annex 2. Political discourse corpus: selected speeches.	87
	Annex 3. Film visual analysis grid.	94
	Annex 4. Film corpus: transcribed dialogue from the scenes analysed	100

Introduction

Undocumented migration has become a central and, in some respects, an essential part of immigration politics in receiving states over recent decades. One practical effect, among many, is that expulsion has come to appear as the natural policy response. In other words, the obvious thing a state does when a person has no right to remain, while, in fact, it is one response among several to ‘irregular’ or ‘unauthorised’ migration.¹ Expulsion is also where the two commitments of the liberal democratic state come into direct conflict or paradox. The capacity to determine who may enter and remain is fundamental to a state’s claim to sovereignty, and enforcing that determination requires the exercise of full state power. At the same time, states are committed to rights that endure regardless of their status.² This tension makes the language in which expulsion is described consequential rather than incidental. How a state describes what it does to those it removes bears on whether the tension between its commitments is visible or resolved, and what remains available for discussion.

The scholarship on this discourse has developed considerably. Studies have traced the salience of returns across three decades of European Commission communication³ and analysed how assisted voluntary return is presented as a more humane, cost-effective and sustainable alternative.⁴ Less attention has been paid to how that discourse compares with how the same condition is described elsewhere. Returns discourse is studied within the institutional texts that produce it, where the Commission’s own vocabulary is usually the one present. The comparison of political and artistic discourse has been proposed as a model⁵ but rarely carried out. This gap is what the present thesis addresses.

The period this thesis covers is one in which the EU returns policy changed considerably. The 2020 Pact on Migration and Asylum linked asylum processing, solidarity between Member States and returns into a single framework, with accelerated border procedures and a new safe-country list. In March 2025 the Commission proposed a Return Regulation to replace the 2008 Returns Directive, and political

¹ Nathalie Peutz and Nicholas De Genova, introduction to *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*, ed. Nicholas De Genova and Nathalie Peutz (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 1.

² Matthew J. Gibney and Randall Hansen, *Deportation and the Liberal State: The Forcible Return of Asylum Seekers and Unlawful Migrants in Canada, Germany and the United Kingdom*, New Issues in Refugee Research Working Paper no. 77 (Geneva: UNHCR, 2003), 1–2.

³ Paula Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik and Philipp Stutz, "Changing Norms in EU Return Policy? A Longitudinal Analysis of Commission Documents on Return," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2026): 1–21.

⁴ Valon Junuzi, "Managerializing Expulsion: Examining the Discursive Critique of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Policy," *Migration Studies* 14, no. 2 (2026): mnag016.

⁵ Florian Lippert, "Public Self-Reflection in the Context of the European Migrant Crisis: Towards a New Transdisciplinary Model of Discourse Analysis in Politics, Media and the Arts," *Journal of European Studies* 49, nos. 3–4 (2019): 336–353.

agreement was reached in June 2026. The shift from directive to regulation removes national discretion, and the instrument allows detention for up to thirty months, expanded entry bans, and the establishment of return hubs in third countries.

The **object** of this research is the discursive construction of expulsion: how expulsion is constructed in European Commission discourse and in European cinema between 2020 and 2025. The study **aims** not only to analyse each construction independently but also to compare them, thereby identifying insights that are not apparent when each field is considered in isolation. Four **objectives** follow from this:

1. To analyse how the deportable migrant is constructed as a social actor in European Commission discourse, on what grounds expulsion is argued for, and how it is softened in the telling.
2. To analyse how the same figure is constructed in four European films of the same period, applying the same analytical categories.
3. To compare the two constructions and identify their convergences and divergences.
4. To establish what the relationship between them reveals about the meaning attached to expulsion.

Research question: How do EU political actors and European filmmakers construct the figure of the deportable migrant in the period 2020–2025, and what does the relationship between these constructions reveal about the meaning attached to expulsion?

At the outset, it is important to clarify **three terms**: expulsion, return, and deportation. Expulsion is used here as the broad, generic term for the practice of removing undocumented migrants from a territory. This follows recent scholarship that treats expulsion as the overarching field within which different discourses of removal operate.⁶ Within this field, return and deportations are treated as two discursive constructions of the same underlying practice. Return is the term predominantly used in EU institutional discourse, and it carries connotations of order, procedure, and (particularly in the context of voluntary return and reintegration) voluntariness, dignity. Deportation, by contrast, foregrounds coercion and force, tends to appear in discourses that emphasise the involuntary, punitive dimensions of removal.⁷ One objection should be addressed here. ‘Return’ and ‘voluntary return’ also function as technical-legal

⁶ Valon Junuzi, "Managerializing Expulsion: Examining the Discursive Critique of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Policy," *Migration Studies* 14, no. 2 (2026): mnag016, 3.

⁷ Junuzi, "Managerializing Expulsion: Examining the Discursive Critique of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Policy," 3.

categories in EU law. However, this thesis is concerned specifically with how these terms operate discursively – what they connote, what they foreground, and what they obscure.

Why analyse **films alongside political speeches**? The two are obviously different fields, produced under different conditions and for different purposes, and reading them together requires justification. The core idea of this thesis – setting political discourse alongside cinematic representation makes visible something that neither shows on its own. The thesis argues that deportability is produced discursively rather than found in the people subject to it, and that the two fields analysed here produce it differently. In the political corpus, expulsion is argued for from the standpoint of the Union – its borders, its resources, its credibility, its citizens. It is also softened in the telling. Expulsion is never named as such. Instead, terms such as procedure and voluntariness are used, and migration appears as something managed. In the films, the same condition is shown from the position of those living under it, and what the political discourse softens is intensified. The divergence is not total, however, and what the two fields share is more interesting than what separates them. The empirical analysis draws on two corpora: speeches and statements by four European Commission actors, and four European films from the same period. The institutional framework of EU migration governance provides the policy context within which both operate, and is treated here as a necessary background rather than as a primary object of analysis.

The analysis applies **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**, drawing principally on the discourse-historical approach (DHA) developed by Reisigl and Wodak. Three sets of categories are applied to both corpora: van Leeuwen’s social actor categories, which identify how migrants are named, positioned, and represented as agents or as objects of action; topoi, which identify the argumentation bridges; and the strategies of mitigation and intensification, which identify how the force of what is said is softened or heightened. Two substantive concepts frame what these constructions produce: deservingness and deportability. The visual dimension of the film corpus, which has no counterpart in the political material, is analysed through Kress and van Leeuwen’s account of visual grammar.

The political corpus comprises **speeches and statements on migration and returns by four European Commission actors** from 2020 to 2025: Ursula von der Leyen, Margaritis Schinas, Ylva Johansson, and Magnus Brunner. The film corpus comprises **four European feature films** of the same period, selected from the Migration Movies Database: “Limbo”, “Tori and Lokita”, “Souleymane’s Story” and “To a Land Unknown”. Coding was carried out in MAXQDA for the political corpus and the transcribed dialogue of the films; the visual analysis was recorded separately in a grid (see Annex 2).

Three outcomes were possible. Convergence would suggest that cinema reproduces dominant political narratives. Divergence would suggest that it functions as a site of counter-narrative. Partial overlap would indicate a more complex relationship between the two fields. The framework was designed to accommodate any of the three.

This thesis is **structured** as follows. It starts with the literature review, the theoretical framework, and the methodology. The analysis then begins with the institutional framework of EU migration governance, which provides the policy context rather than serving as an object of analysis in itself. This is followed by the analysis of the political corpus, then of the cinematic corpus, and then by the comparison of the two. The thesis closes with the conclusions reached.

Literature review

Migration governance in Europe is closely related to the question of removal – who can be made to leave, on what grounds, and through what justifications – which have become increasingly politically and morally contested questions in contemporary European politics. These questions are not settled by policy alone; they are actively produced through political and cultural discourse. The literature review maps the existing scholarship across the political and sociological literature on deportability and returns, and the scholarly literature on migration and European cinema.

The literature review proceeds in four steps. It begins with the brief definition of what a frame is. Then continues to overview frames through which migrants are constructed as removable, then examines whether the humanitarian frame offers a counterweight to them or operates within the same logic. Continuously, it turns to scholarship treating expulsion as a political performance rather than an administrative procedure, and to the condition this produces. Finally, it reviews the literature on political discourse about deportation specifically, and on migration in European cinema, in order to identify the gap this thesis addresses.

1.1. Producing deportability through discourse

Before turning to the frames themselves, a brief definition is useful. Entman describes framing as the process of selecting certain elements of a perceived reality and assembling them into a narrative that highlights the connections between them, so as to promote a particular interpretation. Fully developed frames, on his account, perform four functions: they define a problem, identify its causes, make a moral judgment, and recommend a remedy. Taken broadly, frames alter the salience of particular elements. Some are made more visible and others less, and therefore a certain interpretation appears. A frame,

therefore, does not describe a situation so much as establish what kind of situation it is, and consequently what would count as an appropriate response.⁸ This section focuses on frames because they establish what kind of problem migration is taken to be, and therefore what counts as a legitimate response to it. Applied to this thesis, expulsion appears as a necessary remedy only under certain constructions of migration as a problem.

1.1.1. Securitisation and the production of illegality

The dominant frame through which migration has been constructed in much of European political discourse is security. Huysmans argues that securitisation requires three elements: a threat, an object being threatened, and the active maintenance of that object's identity. Migration becomes securitised when the presence of migrants is framed not merely as a policy challenge but as a potential danger to collective identity (community's way of life). In such a case, the community is understood as something coherent and complete that external factors threaten to destabilise.⁹ To put it into a practical example, Khosravi, drawing on interviews with police officers, staff and Swedish detention centres and deportation escorts conducted in Sweden between 2004 and 2006, found that asylum seekers were often described by terms such as "devious," "irresponsible," and "immoral" - language that constructs migrants as a moral as well as a cultural threat.¹⁰ Such framing, Huysmans suggests, positions collective identity as something created not only inside the community but also from the interaction of one unit with other units.¹¹ Therefore, external pressures or perceived threats, such as migration, put pressure on collective identity. Bigo develops a related but distinct argument, shifting attention from political rhetoric to institutional and bureaucratic practices through which security concerns about migration are produced and maintained. For Bigo, insecurity is primarily produced through the everyday practices of security professionals, border agencies, and administrative systems. These include population profiling, risk assessment, and statistical calculation, which together constitute migration as a security object.¹²

The categorisation of migrants operates through legal distinctions (e.g., refugee, asylum seeker, economic migrant) and through less formalised criteria of cultural proximity and behaviour (e.g., how similar to "us" a migrant is taken to be). Crawley and Skleparis argue that dominant categories (e.g.,

⁸ Robert M. Entman, "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power," *Journal of Communication* 57, no. 1 (2007): 164.

⁹ Jef Huysmans, "Migrants as a Security Problem: Dangers of 'Securitizing' Societal Issues," in *Migration and European Integration: The Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion*, ed. Robert Miles and Dietrich Thränhardt (London: Pinter, 1995), 52-57.

¹⁰ Shahram Khosravi, "Sweden: Detention and Deportation of Asylum Seekers," *Race & Class* 50, no. 4 (2009): 49.

¹¹ Huysmans, "Migrants as a Security Problem: Dangers of 'Securitizing' Societal Issues," 7.

¹² Didier Bigo, "Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease," *Alternatives* 27, no. 1_suppl (2002): 63-64.

refugees, migrants) while officially presented as neutral legal distinctions, are politicised constructs that fail to capture the complex and overlapping realities of people's decision to move. During the European 'migration crisis' of 2015, authors suggest, the insistence on distinguishing refugees from economic migrants largely served political functions that had little to do with the actual circumstances of displacement. The privileging of refugee status created a hierarchy in which only those able to demonstrate the right kind of suffering in the right institutional setting could access protection.¹³ Such a dynamic, therefore, rendered others irregular and potentially removable regardless of the dangers they had fled.

It is important to note that the securitisation lens is not without its critics. Boswell, taking the aftermath of 9/11 in Europe as an example, argues that the relationship between security framing and migration policy is more variable than critical security scholars suggest. To be more precise, security discourse does not straightforwardly translate into restrictive policy outcomes. While critical literature often assumes that political discourse drives securitisation, in reality, administrative practices can precede it, and resistance within institutions can also shape or constrain political discourse.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the securitisation literature provides an important analytical lens for understanding how certain migrant populations come to be constructed as potentially removable. The legal categories (e.g., 'irregular' status) are not natural or objective conditions but are actually produced. De Haas et al. observes that modern migration policies function primarily as instruments of selection – determining who may enter and who may remain.¹⁵

If securitisation constructs migrants as a threat to be managed, a humanitarian frame appears to do the opposite. The literature on humanitarianism, however, suggests that the two are less opposed than they seem.

1.1.2. The humanitarian frame and its limits

A second significant frame in European migration discourse is humanitarianism – the recognition of migrant suffering and the moral imperative to respond to it. Where securitisation constructs migrants primarily as a governance challenge or potential threat, the humanitarian frame constructs certain

¹³ Heaven Crawley and Dimitris Skleparis, "Refugees, Migrants, Neither, Both: Categorical Fetishism and the Politics of Bounding in Europe's 'Migration Crisis'," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, no. 1 (2018): 48–64.

¹⁴ Christina Boswell, "Migration Control in Europe after 9/11: Explaining the Absence of Securitization," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 45, no. 3 (2007): 589–610.

¹⁵ Hein de Haas et al., "International Migration: Trends, Determinants, and Policy Effects," *Population and Development Review* 45, no. 4 (2019): 905.

migrants as vulnerable subjects deserving of compassion and protection. Some scholars have questioned whether the opposition between humanitarian and securitisation frames is as clear-cut as it appears.

Fassin argues that expressing sympathy for the asylum seeker “holds fewer benefits for that figure than it has for us, as we show how humane we finally are.” Compassion, on this account, is not extended universally but distributed selectively according to politically constructed criteria of suffering.¹⁶ Ticktin develops a related argument through analysis of the French immigration system, showing how policies nominally designed to protect vulnerable migrants, such as the 1998 French law granting residence permits to migrants requiring medical treatment unavailable in their home country¹⁷, extended protection to a narrow category of suffering people, while leaving broader structural conditions unaddressed. In Ticktin's account, such “regimes of care” simultaneously offer protection to some and reinforce the removability of others.¹⁸

These critical readings of humanitarianism are themselves contested. Some scholars working within international refugee law and policy frameworks argue that humanitarian protections have materially benefited many displaced people. Hathaway strongly supports this position by arguing that both human rights law and refugee law have real value. As an example, he names supervisory bodies regularly refining the Refugee Convention to respond to contemporary realities, and argues that because of the Refugee Convention, states have limited power to deny rights to refugees.¹⁹ Despite being an imperfect and incomplete legal regime of protection, it does ascribe legal consequences for states and entails responsibility to protect refugees.²⁰

The literature mentioned so far concerns how migrants are described. The literature considered next asks what expulsion itself does. In other words, what kind of act it is, and what condition it produces for those subject to it.

1.2. Performance of deportability

An extensive part of the scholarly literature challenges the assumption that expulsion is primarily an administrative procedure – a technical mechanism enforcing migration law. Rather, it is argued that

¹⁶ Didier Fassin, “Compassion and Repression: The Moral Economy of Immigration Policies in France,” *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 3 (2005): 382.

¹⁷ Miriam Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 2.

¹⁸ Ticktin, *Casualties of Care*, 4.

¹⁹ James C. Hathaway, *The Rights of Refugees under International Law*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 173–75.

²⁰ Guy S. Goodwin-Gill, Jane McAdam, and Emma Dunlop, *The Refugee in International Law*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 1–4.

expulsion carries significant political and symbolic dimensions. Walters offers a formulation of such an argument, arguing that deportation functions as a performance of state sovereignty (a visible demonstration of the state's capacity to control its territory and population).²¹

Such an approach to deportation as a sovereignty performance has reached prominence, but the European Commission itself, when communicating on the Returns Directive and the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, emphasises the returns system to be legally governed and rights-respecting, including the principle of non-refoulement, the right of access to asylum, the prohibition of collective expulsion, and that return decisions are based on individual cases.²²

Scholarly literature finds that returns are often institutionally framed in humanitarian terms. Khosravi describes the system in Sweden as built on 'hostile hospitality', defining it as "partly caring, partly punitive", partly endangering, partly saving.²³ Webber develops a related critique, questioning how genuinely voluntary "voluntary return" can be when departure is influenced by detention, withdrawal of support, and other factors.²⁴ Together, these positions offer a foundational critique of humanitarian language used for legal framing of expulsion.

These institutional and humanitarian framings stand in tension with how deportability is experienced by those who are subject to it. De Genova offered a concept of deportability – a condition of being potentially removable, which is not a natural or objective status but one produced through policy and discourse.²⁵ Certain migrants are rendered deportable not because of what they do but because of how they are categorized and spoken about. De Genova and Peutz frame deportability as a general condition of contemporary state power, examined across national contexts: the US-Mexico border, the EU, Bahrain, Canada, Libya, and more other countries – which grounds its use in this thesis beyond the specifically American case in which De Genova first developed the concept in detail.²⁶ As it shows, configuration of migrant "illegality" is historically specific, produced by a particular nation-state's

²¹ William Walters, "Deportation, Expulsion, and the International Police of Aliens," *Citizenship Studies* 6, no. 3 (2002): 277.

²² European Commission, "An Effective, Firm and Fair EU Return and Readmission Policy," Migration and Home Affairs, June 11, 2026, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/irregular-migration-and-return/effective-firm-and-fair-eu-return-and-readmission-policy_en.

²³ Khosravi, "Sweden: Detention and Deportation of Asylum Seekers," 53.

²⁴ Frances Webber, "How Voluntary Are Voluntary Returns?," *Race & Class* 52, no. 4 (2011): 98–107.

²⁵ Nicholas P. De Genova, "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 431–32, 439.

²⁶ Nathalie Peutz and Nicholas De Genova, introduction to *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*, ed. Nicholas De Genova and Nathalie Peutz (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

immigration legislation – in the US case, a distinction first developed to control Mexican migrant labour through much of the twentieth century.

If deportability names the condition, deservingness names the criteria by which it is assigned. Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas argue that irregular status functions as a handicap within a continuum of probationary citizenship. Migrants without status accumulate semi-official proofs of presence. For instance, evidence of employment and tax records. This is done in the hope of reduced deportability, in view of future legalisation. Deservingness in this account is established through conduct and contribution, not so much through legal entitlement. The authors expand the location of deservingness from a humanitarian register (compassion, illness, and the suffering body) to employment, fiscal record and everyday conduct. Worth in this case is established not only by being pitied but by being useful. The distinction here is between those whose presence is rendered morally acceptable and those whose removal is justified.²⁷

Hannah Arendt, writing from her own experience, explores the everyday experience of a refugee, an attempt in everyday life to prove being ordinary immigrants – “after four weeks in France or six weeks in America, we pretended to be Frenchmen or Americans”. During the day, Arendt points out, refugees are considered only “technically” enemy aliens, but at night, when curfew restrictions confine them to their homes, that legal label becomes a lived reality, revealing how what is dismissed as mere technicality can, in practice, impose very real constraints and reshape one’s sense of belonging.²⁸ This account illustrates De Genova’s broader argument that legal status produces constant vulnerability, independent of whether deportation itself ever occurs.²⁹

Central to De Genova’s argument is that it is deportability, not deportation itself, that does the disciplinary work: state enforcement capacity was never sufficient to remove more than a fraction of the undocumented population, and some are deported precisely so that most may remain – *un-deported*, but permanently removable.³⁰ The EU return rate shows a comparable gap. It has remained around 20 per cent in recent years, meaning the large majority of those issued a return decision are never removed. This figure is discussed in more detail in section 5.2, since the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) has critiqued the methodology used to calculate it.

²⁷ Sébastien Chauvin and Blanca Garcés-Mascreñas, “Beyond Informal Citizenship: The New Moral Economy of Migrant Illegality,” *International Political Sociology* 6, no. 3 (2012): 241–59.

²⁸ Hannah Arendt, “We Refugees,” in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 255–56.

²⁹ De Genova, “Migrant ‘Illegality’ and Deportability in Everyday Life,” 438–439.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

1.3. Political discourse on asylum seekers and deportations

Consterdine finds that mass media frame immigrants predominantly through the lens of security threat, and identifies a shift in coverage of the 2015 'migration crisis' from an initial humanitarian and more empathetic framing to a more suspicious and hostile one. Similarly, political discourse also shifted from an initial humanitarian framing to a more security-focused later on.³¹ Interestingly, the variations among countries suggest that the framing of a crisis was more so formed in nationally rather than in the EU level, with each case producing its own version of the crisis.³²

Krzyżanowski et al reach similar conclusions. Media and political discourses around the 2015 refugee crisis rested on pre-existing national narratives about migration and otherness.³³ Additionally, Krzyżanowski et al. findings add to the debate by analysing the effects of politicisation of migration, which they argue have two negative consequences: 1) an imbalance of power, in which the power of the state increases, while individual agency decreases; 2) the ideologization of prevailing debates. These two eventually create an open space for hegemonic narratives dominating contemporary discourses.³⁴

Beyond broader research on migration and refugee crisis framing, the scholarly literature also examines political and institutional discourse on expulsion. Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik et al. provide a comprehensive longitudinal account of Commission return discourse, analysing a corpus of 701 documents (252 EUR-Lex documents and 449 press releases), issued between 1999 and 2020.³⁵ Two of their findings are relevant here. The first is that there is no significant post-2015 effect on the prominence of return. The topic has occupied a broadly stable share of Commission communication since the 2010s. The second is that the external dimension, while increasing in importance, has been prominent since the early 2000s and dominates public communication. The authors read this as a form of politicisation management, in which the Commission depoliticises the internal aspects of return while making its external aspects salient in relations with non-EU countries. They also note that establishing how norms are actively promoted would require different methods from those they themselves employ.³⁶ This is the

³¹ Erica Consterdine, "State-of-the-Art Report on Public Attitudes, Political Discourses and Media Coverage on the Arrival of Refugees," CEASEVAL Research on the Common European Asylum System 2 (2018), 10–11, <http://ceaseval.eu/publications>.

³² Consterdine, "State-of-the-Art Report," 24.

³³ Michał Krzyżanowski, Anna Triandafyllidou, and Ruth Wodak, "The Mediatization and the Politicization of the 'Refugee Crisis' in Europe," *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 16, nos. 1–2 (2018): 2.

³⁴ Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, and Wodak, "The Mediatization and the Politicization of the 'Refugee Crisis,'" 4–5.

³⁵ Paula Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik and Philipp Stutz, "Changing Norms in EU Return Policy? A Longitudinal Analysis of Commission Documents on Return," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2026): 8.

³⁶ Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik and Stutz, "Changing Norms in EU Return Policy?," 12, 16.

limit of an approach based on counting and clustering: it can establish what the Commission talks about and how the emphasis shifts, but not how the Commission argues or what warrants it relies on.

Junuzi focuses on AVRR as producing specific knowledge of expulsion, highlighting that migration management discourse is used by AVRR actors to position the programs as humane, cost-effective, and more sustainable than deportation.³⁷ However, the catch, according to the author, is that although the concerns of the parties involved are said to be accommodated, in reality, expulsion is cast primarily in terms of competing “interests” to be balanced. Framing expulsions as a balance of interests makes it a technical question. It leaves little room for asking whether removal is legitimate.³⁸

This literature has established the salience of return in Commission discourse and analysed how it is constructed in policy documents. It has not examined how the Commission actors argue for return addressing publics and parliamentary audiences. Nor set that discourse against accounts of the same condition given from elsewhere.

1.4. Cinema discourse on deportations

Trifonova identifies two prominent current approaches in scholarship of audiovisual representation of migration: phenomenological approach and autonomy-of-migration (AoM) approach. The first one tends to focus on institutional practices and administrative mechanisms that govern and regulate ‘migrant bodies’, drawing attention to the ways migrants are ‘contained’ or ‘blocked’ spatially, psychologically and emotionally. The second approach instead foregrounds migrant agency and autonomy. As author notices, migrants are often predominantly portrayed as victims, even in those cases where agency is emphasized. In Trifonova’s account, this is the primary lens through which migrants are made visible in contemporary European cinema.³⁹

Piccoli identifies several important findings in his analysis of migration representation in movies from 1940 to 2024. First, he notes that research on the representation of cross-border movements remains fragmented, with existing studies tending to focus more on specific national contexts or cinema genres. Second, he finds that migration cinema disproportionately focuses on the stories set in the Global North, despite the fact that the majority of global migration occurs within and between countries of the Global South (such a pattern is called ‘North-bound bias’). Eventually, he finds that cinema tends to focus on

³⁷ Valon Junuzi, "Managerializing Expulsion: Examining the Discursive Critique of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Policy," *Migration Studies* 14, no. 2 (2026): mnag016, 1.

³⁸ Junuzi, "Managerializing Expulsion," 17-18.

³⁹ Temenuga Trifonova, *The Figure of the Migrant in Contemporary European Cinema* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 61–63.

the topics of undocumented migration and forced displacement, while the more common experiences of regular migration remain eclipsed. The author names such phenomena “the spectacle of human mobility” and raises a question of whose stories are seen to be worthy of cinematic spectacle. Such tendency, as a result, adds up to shaping the view of migration as something that is irregular, dangerous and crisis-driven.⁴⁰

The comparison of political and cinematic discourse has been argued for but rarely carried out. Lippert proposes a transdisciplinary model for analysing political, media and artistic discourses together, on the grounds that they can be compared along shared dimensions. The scholar identifies an imbalance in how the migrant crisis has been discussed. In political and media discourse, the arrival of migrants is depicted as the external cause of internal European conflicts, while flaws in Europe’s own policies go largely unrecognised. His concern is with self-reflexivity – with whether a discourse is able to criticise its own role.⁴¹ The scholar’s contribution is programmatic, outlining desiderata and a terminology rather than conducting the analysis. The logic of his comparison is nonetheless close to the one adopted here. He uses a second field, in which the property under examination is well established, in order to make visible what the first field lacks. The present thesis proceeds similarly, though on a different dimension. This thesis asks not how much each field reflects on itself but how each constructs the figure of the migrant subject to removal, and it carries out the analysis on a defined corpus.

Migration cinema has been studied extensively as representation and as pattern, and the comparison with political discourse has been proposed as a model. It does not appear to have been applied to EU returns discourse, or with a single set of analytical categories held constant across both corpora. That is what this thesis undertakes.

2. Theoretical framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides the method to examine how the deportable migrant is constructed in EU political discourse and European cinema. Within it, three sets of tools are used – van Leeuwen’s social actor categories, topoi, and the strategies of mitigation and intensification. Two substantive concepts identify what such meaning-making does. Deservingness, developed by Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas, names the distinction the discourse produces between those whose presence is acceptable and those whose removal is justified. Deportability, developed by De Genova, names the

⁴⁰ Lorenzo Piccoli, "Migration Representation in Movies from 1940 to 2024: The Spectacle of Human Mobility and the North-Bound Bias," *Migration Studies* 14, no. 1 (2026): mnag003.

⁴¹ Florian Lippert, "Public Self-Reflection in the Context of the European Migrant Crisis: Towards a New Transdisciplinary Model of Discourse Analysis in Politics, Media and the Arts," *Journal of European Studies* 49, nos. 3–4 (2019): 337.

condition that results. A further distinction, drawn from Iyengar, is used descriptively to characterise a divergence between the two corpora.

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

A foundational assumption of this thesis is that language and visual discourse do not neutrally reflect social reality but actively construct it. Fairclough and Wodak identify this as one of the core tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis: discourse constitutes society and culture, and discourse is a form of social action.⁴² Concerning its effects, van Dijk defines CDA as research that studies primarily the way social power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated and resisted by text and talk, and notes that critical discourse analysts take an explicit position in wanting to understand, expose and ultimately challenge social inequality.⁴³ This thesis adopts the analytical apparatus of CDA while confining itself to describing how the constructions it identifies operate. It does not advance a normative argument about whether expulsion is justified, and where the analysis appears critical, it is critical of the relation between what the discourse says and what it does rather than of the policy itself.

This connects with Hall's insight that meaning is constructed through image as well as through language. 'Difference', in his account, is not a property that groups possess but the relation through which meaning and identity are produced. In other words, a category means something only in relation to what it is not, and a sense of self is formed in relation to an other outside it. This relation is ambivalent. It is necessary for meaning, for language and culture, and for identity, and it is at the same time "threatening, a site of danger, of negative feelings, of splitting, hostility and aggression towards the 'Other'."⁴⁴ Applied to the study of migration: the way migration is talked about and depicted is not a neutral description of a phenomenon, but an active construction of what migration means, who migrants are, and what responses to migration are legitimate. Political speeches and films are therefore not simply sources of information about deportation, but rather they are sites where the meaning of deportation and the figure of the deportable migrant are actively produced and contested.

Wodak argues that discursive practices (verbal, written, multimodal) construct and reshape the political and social order rather than simply describe it.⁴⁵ Topoi are content-related argumentative

⁴² Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis" (1997), cited in Teun A. van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton, and Deborah Schiffrin, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 467.

⁴³ Van Dijk, "Critical Discourse analysis," 466.

⁴⁴ Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the Other," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), 238.

⁴⁵ Ruth Wodak, "Discourse and European Integration," *KFG Working Paper Series*, no. 86 (Berlin, 2018) 6.

warrants, that Kienpointner defines as the logical bridges that connect arguments to conclusions, functioning as search formulas for finding arguments and guarantees for the transition from premise to claim.⁴⁶ Through topoi, negative and positive attributions are justified: certain social and political inclusion or exclusion is legitimised.⁴⁷ According to Richardson, topoi can also be understood as a generalised key idea from which specific arguments can be generated.⁴⁸

Wodak's work on discourse and discrimination has developed largely through the analysis of Austrian public and political discourse, initially on postwar antisemitism⁴⁹, including the Waldheim affair⁵⁰, and from the early 1990s on racism and immigration. The taxonomy of topoi employed in this thesis are set out "Discourse and Discrimination", written with Martin Reisigl, as a framework for analysing content-related argumentation schemes used in argumentation for and against discrimination.⁵¹ Its application specifically to migration makes this taxonomy suitable for the corpus of this thesis. The topos list is neither exhaustive nor always disjunctive.⁵² Coding proceeded deductively, applying a subset of the taxonomy comprising those topoi most relevant to discourse on migration and returns.

Van Leeuwen's account of social actors is a tool used within CDA. This framework addresses a foundational question for this thesis: how are social practices transformed into discourses about social practices?⁵³ Social practices are recurrent ways of acting, in this case, for instance, conducting an asylum interview or removing a person from a territory. The framework proceeds in two steps: identifying the social action (e.g. the action of immigrating) and recognizing how it and its participants are represented. In van Leeuwen's own example of a newspaper article on Australian immigration, immigration is objectivated, represented as a generalised and intangible phenomenon rather than as an action by specific social actors.⁵⁴ In broader terms, Van Leeuwen sketches a sociological 'grammar' of the representation of social action.⁵⁵ Van Leeuwen identifies a set of pan-semiotic categories, that describe how social

⁴⁶ Ruth Wodak, "Argumentation, Political," in *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 5.

⁴⁷ Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination*, 45.

⁴⁸ Igor Ž. Žagar, "Topoi in Critical Discourse Analysis," *Šolsko polje* 20, no. 5/6 (2009): 48.

⁴⁹ Ruth Wodak, "Turning the Tables: Antisemitic Discourse in Post-war Austria," *Discourse & Society* 2, no. 1 (1991): 65–83.

⁵⁰ Ruth Wodak, "The Waldheim Affair and Antisemitic Prejudice in Austrian Public Discourse," *Patterns of Prejudice* 24, nos. 2–4 (1990): 18–33.

⁵¹ Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism* (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁵² Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, 75.

⁵³ Theo van Leeuwen, "The Representation of Social Actors," in *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Malcolm Coulthard (London: Routledge, 1996), 35.

⁵⁴ Theo van Leeuwen, "Representing Social Action," *Discourse & Society* 6, no. 1 (1995): 81.

⁵⁵ Van Leeuwen, "Representing Social Action," 81–82.

actors are constructed in discourse verbally as well as visually.⁵⁶ Van Leeuwen's inventory is extensive, and, as KhosraviNik notes, not all of its categories will be relevant to any single study.⁵⁷ The subset applied here largely follows those that van Leeuwen's own analysis of immigration discourse found important. He reports that immigrants are assimilated or aggregated, that they are represented abstractly (a form of impersonalisation) and that where they are activated, it is almost always in relation to a single activity (immigrating), in other case, being acted upon by others.⁵⁸ The categories applied here are therefore relating to the question of how the migrant appears: personalised (represented as an individual with specific characteristics) or impersonalised (reduced to an abstraction, a category)⁵⁹; activated (represented as an agent who acts and decides) or passivated (represented as someone to whom things are done)⁶⁰; nominated (represented in their unique identity) or categorised (subsumed into a social type)⁶¹, the latter including aggregation. These categories apply equally to the grammar of political speech and to the narrative and visual grammar of film, which is what makes them valuable for a comparative thesis examining two very different communicative domains. Applying the same categories to both corpora enables systematic comparison of how the deportable migrant is constructed across the two fields. Backgrounding, genericization and association, which also feature in van Leeuwen's account of immigration discourse⁶², were not included in the coding frame.

The last strategy applied here is mitigation and intensification. Reisigl and Wodak discuss these strategies⁶³ alongside involvement and detachment, noting that involvement often, though not always, accompanies intensification, and that detachment is sometimes associated with mitigation⁶⁴. Reisigl and Wodak describe these as modifying the epistemic status of a proposition and its degree of certainty, by sharpening and utterance or toning it down.⁶⁵ The authors connect both to the speaker's involvement or detachment. Intensification is realized through expressive phonology, repetition (e.g., when using such markers as 'really', 'very', 'only'), as well as externalised through gestures and facial expressions.⁶⁶ Mitigation reduces the illocutionary force of an utterance.⁶⁷ It softens what is being said without altering

⁵⁶ Van Leeuwen, "The Representation of Social Actors," 34.

⁵⁷ Majid KhosraviNik, "The Representation of Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Immigrants in British Newspapers: A Critical Discourse Analysis," *Journal of Language and Politics* 8, no. 3 (2009): 7.

⁵⁸ Van Leeuwen, "The Representation of Social Actors," 68.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 59.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 43-44.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 52-53.

⁶² Van Leeuwen, "The Representation of Social Actors," 68.

⁶³ Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination*, 82.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 83.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 45.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 83.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 45.

it. The authors note that the analysis of mitigation can combine attention to mood, modality and speech act structure.⁶⁸

The analytical tools introduced above (van Leeuwen's social actor categories, topoi, and the strategies of mitigation and intensification) identify how meaning about migrants is made in specific texts. Nevertheless, these categories cannot show what such constructions accomplish. Therefore, the subsequent concepts are introduced. The concept of deservingness, developed by Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas, identifies what such meaning-making does in the specific context of migration governance: it produces and reproduces distinctions between those migrants whose presence is morally acceptable and those whose removal is justified.⁶⁹ If deservingness names the criteria by which removability is allocated, De Genova's concept of deportability names what it produces politically. Deportability does not refer to deportation as a singular administrative event but to the condition of being potentially removable. Deportability as a condition produced through policy (legislation) and discourse (terminology used) rather than through individual behaviour or any inherent characteristic of the migrants who bear it.⁷⁰

Alongside these, one further distinction is used descriptively rather than as a component of the framework. Iyengar (1990) terms thematic and episodic frames. Thematic frames present an issue through general trends and policy logics – the object of coverage is abstract and impersonal. Episodic frames present an issue through the lens of personal experience – a particular individual or case that makes an abstract phenomenon concrete and human.⁷¹ Iyengar demonstrates that these two modes of framing carry significant consequences for how audiences assign responsibility: thematic coverage tends to produce societal attributions of responsibility, while episodic coverage encourages audiences to locate responsibility in the individual.⁷²

3. Method – Critical Discourse Analysis

This thesis employs a qualitative comparative design, examining how migration and migrants are framed across two distinct but interrelated discursive fields: EU political discourse and European cinema. The study is guided by the question of how these two fields construct expulsion differently, and what

⁶⁸ Ibid, 83.

⁶⁹ Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas, "Beyond Informal Citizenship," 241–59.

⁷⁰ De Genova, "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability," 419–447.

⁷¹ Shanto Iyengar, "Framing Responsibility for Political Issues: The Case of Poverty," *Political Behavior* 12, no. 1 (1990): 22.

⁷² Iyengar, "Framing Responsibility for Political Issues," 22–23.

that divergence reveals about the broader picture of how expulsion is framed in European discourse. The comparative design is intended to generate analytical insights into the mechanisms by which meaning regarding expulsion is produced and contested in Europe today.

Both the political corpus and the film corpus are analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Fairclough and Wodak establish that discourse constitutes society and culture rather than merely reflecting them, and that it is itself a form of social action.⁷³ Wodak establishes that the Discourse-Historical Approach is explicitly problem-oriented and interdisciplinary, analysing oral, written, and visual language as complementary sources of data.⁷⁴ This multimodal scope justifies applying DHA to European cinema alongside political speeches – both are texts through which meaning about migration and returns is actively constructed, and both fall within the analytical range of the framework.⁷⁵

DHA is selected for three reasons specific to this thesis. First, it foregrounds the institutional context in which discourse is produced, which allows to see EU migration policy speeches not as isolated statements, but rather as part of a broader framework. For instance, in general terms, a speech by von der Leyen on returns policy means something different analytically when read in the context of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum than it would in isolation. Secondly, DHA provides analytical tools for examining how social actors are constructed linguistically (relevant in seeking to understand how migrants are named, categorised, and attributed particular qualities). Thirdly, DHA has already been extensively applied to migration discourse in European political contexts, therefore providing methodological precedent. Reisigl and Wodak established the foundational empirical application of DHA to migration and discrimination discourse in the Austrian context ⁷⁶, while Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou and Wodak extended this approach to the mediatization and politicization of the 2015 "refugee crisis" across multiple European national contexts, demonstrating discourse-oriented approaches to be useful in identifying context-specific and cross-national patterns.⁷⁷

⁷³ Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis" (1997), cited in Teun A. van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton, and Deborah Schiffrin, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 467.

⁷⁴ Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach," in *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*, ed. Karen Tracy, Cornelia Ilie, and Todd Sandel (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015).

⁷⁶ Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination*, 45.

⁷⁷ Michał Krzyżanowski, Anna Triandafyllidou, and Ruth Wodak, "The Mediatization and the Politicization of the 'Refugee Crisis' in Europe," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 16, nos. 1–2 (2018): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2017.1353189>.

This thesis does not apply the full DHA apparatus. Rather, it draws selectively on those of its analytical categories most productive for the specific research question: van Leeuwen's social actor categories, topoi analysis, mitigation and intensification.

3.1. Corpus justification

The selection of EU political discourse and European cinema as the two empirical domains requires an explanation of the rationale, since the comparison is not of an obvious nature. Both fields are sites, where meaning about migration and expulsion is publicly produced and circulated. Nevertheless, they operate through fundamentally different logics and different tools.

Political discourse carries institutional power. Speeches by EU political actors participate in producing migration governance; they have the power to legitimise particular responses to migration, and therefore to construct the explanation of who can be returned. As established in the theoretical framework, political discourse on migration tends to operate in the thematic register, making meaning-making of migrants to be managed to a big extent through statistics, categories, and policy mechanisms.

In the case of cinema, Loshitzky argues, film is one of the most public of arts, reaching broad audiences and participating in the formation of collective attitudes. European film is, in her terms, a key site for debating the relationship between identity, belonging, and exclusion.⁷⁸ Building on the theoretical framework, cinema tends to operate more in the episodic register, focusing on the experience of a specific individual, making it to be more personalised, activated, and nominated, compared to political discourse. Berghahn & Sternberg (2010) further argues that migrant and diasporic movies, as well as music, are most influential practices, addressing questions of identity, myths, historical narratives.⁷⁹ Therefore, the films in this thesis are treated as the evidence of how deportability is represented, as well as what subject positions are available to migrant figures in this cultural domain.

Comparing these two fields is analytically productive precisely because they operate through different registers. Following Iyengar, thematic and episodic framing are not simply different styles of operation; they produce different attributions of responsibility and different moral evaluations of the phenomenon they frame.⁸⁰ Examination of these two fields allows revealing whether the institutional

⁷⁸ Yosefa Loshitzky, *Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

⁷⁹ Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg, eds., *European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2.

⁸⁰ Iyengar, "Framing Responsibility for Political Issues," 22.

construction in political discourse and the cultural construction in cinema converge, diverge, or stand in productive tension with one another.

3.2. Time period

The period 2020–2025 was selected because it corresponds to the negotiation and adoption of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which is analytically productive for the questions this thesis asks. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum was proposed in September 2020, representing the most comprehensive reform of EU migration governance in recent years and, importantly for this thesis, explicitly positioning returns as a central governance mechanism. The legislative package was adopted in May 2024, and in March 2025 the Commission proposed a Return Regulation to replace the 2008 Returns Directive.

What makes this period suitable is that it captured the argumentation following the policy changes. A reform of this scale had to be justified and explained publicly and repeatedly, to Member States that disagreed with one another and to national publics, over a sustained period. The Commission therefore had to explain, defend and reformulate its position on returns more often and more explicitly. Discourse of this kind is at its most visible during the years the Pact was negotiated, adopted and then extended through the Return Regulation.

3.3. Analytical procedure

3.3.1. Political corpus

All political speeches and statements were retrieved from the European Commission's Press Corner⁸¹ using the keyword 'returns' and a chosen time frame. All speeches and statements concerning migrant returns were read, coded, and analysed. The keywords 'deportation' as well as 'expulsion' were also used in the search, but the search results showed only a few speeches/statements, in which the term 'deportation' was used, all in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Speeches and statements were chosen for this analysis, specifically leaving press releases aside. This decision was made in order to analyse the more personal and argumentative register of political communication, treating press releases as a distinct genre with different communicative conventions.

The analysis of political speeches begins with each speech read and contextualized within its institutional and historical setting. This is largely established in Chapter 3, which set out the policy

⁸¹ European Commission, "Press Corner," <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/home/en>.

developments of the period. Within the analysis itself, each passage is identified by speaker, date, and the timing is noted where it bears on the reading.

Political speeches and statements by four key representatives of the European Commission were selected for analysis: Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission (2019-present); Ylva Johansson, Commissioner for Home Affairs (2019-2024); Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President for Promoting our European Way of Life (2019-2024); Magnus Brunner, Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration (2024-present). Von der Leyen served as head of the European Commission throughout the entire period of analysis. Johansson was responsible for home affairs and played a central role in developing a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, implementing a reinforced European Border and Coast Guard Agency, and other migration-related questions. Schinas coordinated the Commission's work on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, and oversaw related policy areas. Brunner was included as the current Commissioner directly responsible for migration and internal affairs from 2024 onwards.

Commissioners are formally required to act independently of national and party interests. Their affiliations and countries of origin nonetheless form part of the context in which they speak and are noted here accordingly: von der Leyen (Germany), Schinas (Greece), and Brunner (Austria) are affiliated with the European People's Party; Johansson (Sweden) with the Party of European Socialists. This is treated as background rather than as an explanation of the discursive choices identified.

The in-corpus analysis follows thematic logic to avoid repeating the same findings – which would be the case if structured actor-by-actor or speech-by-speech. Therefore, the chapter is organised around three analytical lenses, followed by a section drawing them together to trace the trajectory across the period: naming and construction the migrant as social actor (van Leeuwen), the argumentative construction of expulsion (topoi), mitigation: how "return" softens "expulsion" (Reisigl & Wodak), and finally the trajectory and the institutional production of deportability.

3.3.2. Film corpus

The film corpus was constructed using the Migration Movies database, published by the Migration Policy Centre.⁸² In the search field main criteria data were chosen: released between 2020-2025, region – Europe, theme topics chosen: bureaucracy, border crossing and undocumented migration; type – movie (other possible selections were documentary or series). A total of 27 movies were filtered. The second round of careful selection, applying the following criteria: the film centres on the experience of a migrant

⁸² Lorenzo Piccoli, *Migration Movies Database* (Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute, 2026), <https://cadmus.eui.eu/entities/publication/1af61c84-3f27-41c2-aeaa-6c0b22ddeef3>.

subject to removal rather than on integration; it is set in the present; its protagonists are third-country nationals rather than Europeans moving within Europe; it is a feature-length film, short and animated films excluded for genre homogeneity. One film meeting the criteria, “Anywhere Anytime (2024), could not be included, as no version with English or French subtitles (languages used by the researcher) could be located. Therefore, without good knowledge of Italian, it was not possible to do the analysis.

Five films met the criteria, two of which were set outside the EU: “His House” (UK, England) and “Limbo” (UK, Scotland). Thought was given to the decision to include one of the movies based in the UK, and not in the EU. Despite the decision to define the film corpus as European cinema broadly constructed, only one film was retained, so that the majority of the corpus remains set within the EU, and the asymmetry with the political corpus is kept limited. “Limbo” was included because it covers a position within the condition of deportability that none of the other films addresses: the period of waiting itself, with no institutional encounter, and no turn to illegal work. “His House” was not included on two grounds. Its central concerns (the performance of deservingness under threat of removal, and the conditions imposed on those awaiting a decision) are already covered by *Tori and Lokita* and *Souleymane's Story*. This completed the construction of the film corpus. The films considered in the second round are listed in Annex 1.

- 1) **“Tori and Lokita”** (Luc Dardenne and Jean-Pierre Dardenne, 2022, Belgium/France). Lokita (a young woman) and Tori (a younger boy) from Benin, live in a children's home for unaccompanied minors. They claim to be siblings so that Lokita can obtain residence papers. Tori, recognised as a persecuted “child sorcerer,” already has status. When her claim is refused, Lokita takes work in a cannabis grow house for the man who supplies them with drugs to sell, in exchange for forged documents. No deportation occurs in the film. Rather, it depicts the conditions of removability itself and what that condition produces: illegal work, dependence on those who exploit it, and ultimately Lokita's death.
- 2) **“To a Land Unknown”** (Mahdi Fleifel, 2024, Palestine/UK/Ireland/France/Germany/Greece/Qatar/Saudi Arabia). Chatila and Reda, two Palestinian cousins who just arrived from a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, are now stuck in Athens. Their goal and dream – save up for forged passports to reach Germany, where they plan to open a café. In the meantime, they both commit petty crimes. The critical point in the movie is that, as Reda spends the saved-up money on his drug addiction, they themselves begin posing as smugglers. Deportability in this movie is shown not as a condition that passivates but rather as one that corrupts.

- 3) **"Souleymane's Story"** (Boris Lojkine, 2024, France). Souleymane, an undocumented Guinean man in Paris, works as a food delivery cyclist under a rented account while awaiting his asylum interview, for which he has bought and memorised a fabricated political-persecution narrative. The film follows deportability as a double bind: forbidden to work legally while his claim is pending, and required to perform a persecution he did not suffer in order to qualify.
- 4) **"Limbo"** (Ben Sharrock, 2020, UK). Omar, a Syrian musician, waits for a decision on his asylum claim on a remote Scottish island, housed with other men in the same position. Nothing really happens in this movie, and nothing really can: the men are forbidden to work and have no date for a decision. The film shows deportability as indefinite waiting – a life suspended, with no decision, no permission to work, and no date by which either might come.

For the film corpus, the same analytical categories are applied, with two qualifications: topoi appear far less frequently and are identified only where characters argue, and the visual dimension has no counterpart in the political material. In the first stage, each film is watched in full and situated in its context of production and release, drawing on festival and press releases. In the second stage, six to nine sequences (depending on each case) are selected from each film for detailed analysis. Key sequences are defined as those in which the migrant's subjectivity, agency, or moral status is most explicitly at stake. In the third stage, chosen dialogue sequences are analysed using the same categories applied to the political corpus. Van Leeuwen's social actor categories are applied to both the linguistic and visual dimensions of each sequence whether the migrant is named or categorised, shown as acting or acted upon, individualised or subsumed into a type, and whether they are present in the frame at all. Mitigation and intensification are traced both in dialogue and in the relation between what is said and what is shown. Topoi are identified where they occur, which in film corpus is considerably less often than in the political one, and almost always in exchanges where characters argue with one another. This asymmetry is treated as a finding and returned to in Chapter 7.

The visual analysis was carried out using the aspects Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) identified as important in the analysis of moving images. Framing and shot distance are set on a standard: close shot (head and shoulders), extreme close-up (anything nearer), medium close shot (cut approximately at the waist), medium shot (approximately at the knees), medium long shot (full figure), long shot (the figure occupying about half the frame height), and anything more than that – very long shot.⁸³ In essence, these distances suggest social relations between viewer and represented participants. At close distance, the

⁸³ Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 124.

character is shown partially, and the viewer is engaged with them; at middle distance, they are shown in full with little space around them, being within reach but not addressed, and at long distance, an invisible barrier is established between the viewer and characters.⁸⁴ For methodological clarity, it is important to address that, from the perspective of the film studies, this is not the first tool to use. Nevertheless, it was chosen for two specific reasons. Firstly, Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar is van Leeuwen's framework extended to images, so the linguistic and visual analysis in this thesis rests on the same theorist, the same constructivist logic, and the same vocabulary. And on this basis, both corpora can be analysed for how the migrant is positioned as a social actor on comparable dimensions (linguistically in the speeches, linguistically and visually in the films). To be aware, the real issue with such choice is that this visual grammar was developed for still images. Nevertheless, the authors themselves did acknowledge the possibility of using it for moving pictures as well. To mitigate the limitation, the framework is applied shot by shot, the dominant or sustained framing of each sequence is marked, and shifts within a sequence are treated as meaningful.

In addition to Kress and van Leeuwen's interactive dimensions (contact, social distance, vertical attitude, horizontal attitude), the analysis records camera movement and compositional arrangement. Camera movement (static vs handheld/mobile) is recorded and read in relation to the movement of the represented participants themselves. The grounds for treating this relation as analytically significant are drawn from Mosley's account of the Dardenne brothers' method, which relies to a great extent on camera mobility, long takes and tight framing, and in which camera and character move in tandem.⁸⁵ Mosley connects this to the brothers' focus on the expressiveness of the human body: they avoid psychological profiling of their characters, allowing character to develop instead through physical activity.⁸⁶ Camera movement is therefore recorded here as a dimension of how the represented participants are constructed.

The in-corpus analysis of the selected films, differs from the political corpus. Films are holistic, and fragmenting them thematically would lose their meaning. Each film therefore has a dedicated section, each organised around what that film foregrounds most. The same analytical categories used: social actor construction (van Leeuwen), argumentation/topoi, mitigation/intensification, and finally visual grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen). Patterns noticed across the films are drawn together in a cross-film synthesis.

⁸⁴ Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 124.

⁸⁵ Philip Mosley, *The Cinema of the Dardenne Brothers: Responsible Realism* (London: Wallflower Press, 2013), 7.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

3.4. The coding procedure

The coding procedure proceeded deductively, guided by Reisigl & Wodak's taxonomy of topoi in immigration discourse. 12 topoi were chosen. Brief definitions next to each topos – quotes from the same book.

1. Usefulness, advantage – “if an action under a specific relevant point of view will be useful, then one should perform it” (e.g. usefulness of ‘guest workers’ for a national economy).
2. Danger and threat – “if there are specific dangers and threats, one should do something against them.”
3. Humanitarianism – “if a political action or decision does or does not conform with human rights or humanitarian convictions and values, one should or should not perform or make it.”
4. Justice – “if persons/actions/situations are equal in specific respects, they should be treated/ dealt with in the same way.”
5. Responsibility – “because a state or a group of persons is responsible for the emergence of specific problems, it or they should act in order to find solutions of these problems.”
6. Burdening – “if a person, an institution or a ‘country’ is burdened by specific problems, one should act in order to diminish these burdens.”
7. Reality – “because reality is as it is, a specific action/decision should be performed/made.”
8. Numbers – “if the numbers prove a specific topos, a specific action should be performed/not be carried out.”
9. Law, right – “if a law or an otherwise codified norm prescribes or forbids a specific politico-administrative action, the action has to be performed or omitted.”
10. History – “because history teaches that specific actions have specific consequences, one should perform or omit a specific action in a specific situation (allegedly) comparable with the historical example referred to.”
11. Culture – “because the culture of a specific group of people is as it is, specific problems arise in specific situations.”
12. Abuse – “if a right or an offer for help is abused, the right should be changed or the help should be withdrawn or measures against the abuse should be taken.”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination*, 75-80.

Each coded segment was assessed against this frame to identify which argumentative pattern is present. Reisigl and Wodak treat the taxonomy as being broad and open, not set in stone, noting that further categories can be added or removed.⁸⁸

3.5. Limitations

One of the main limitations relates to the different nature of political speeches and films as objects of analysis. Political speeches are timely; they occur in the moment the topic is hot and requires attention. Films also occur when they are important, in a context that matters, but making a film requires significant time; meaning a film released in 2023 may have been conceived before the political events it appears to respond to. Nevertheless, cinema in this thesis is treated not as a direct response to events. Rather, as a tool through which meaning about those events is made. Therefore, this does not undermine the analysis.

Another thing to acknowledge is that cinematic representations at the end of the day cannot be equated with social reality.⁸⁹ The films chosen first and foremost reflect the perspectives of particular directors, producers, and funding bodies, and their relationship to broader public attitudes is not straightforward. This thesis therefore does not treat films as evidence of what expulsions are, what migrants experience, or what European public opinion holds. Nor does it seek to conduct cinematographic analysis or claim expertise in film studies as a discipline. Rather, films are treated a cultural domain that participated in broader social discourses about migration, examining them for the discursive choices they make.

A related limitation concerns translation. "To a Land Unknown" (2024, by Mahdi Fleifel) is largely in Arabic and Greek, and was analysed in this thesis relying on its English subtitles. Subtitling entails condensation and interpretive choices by the translator, acknowledging that some nuances may be missed as a result. The same holds for "Souleymane's Story", where in few instances characters speak Fula and Maninka. Nevertheless, the characters largely speak French, and so for this film reliance on subtitles is less of a limitation.

It must be as well noted that the Commission is not a monolithic actor – meaning that disagreements may, and usually do, exist among its different actors. This thesis focus exclusively on the views expressed by four key personalities (von der Leyen, Schinas, Johansson, and Brunner) in the migration debate in

⁸⁸ Ibid, 75.

⁸⁹ Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg, eds., *European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

the Commission during the period of 2020-2025. Differences may exist not only among the commissioners but also among civil servants, and these are not captured by the present corpus.

Methodological honesty also requires address the fact that the scope of the research as well as the method used is extensive, and could have not been addressed to a full extent. The method used was reduced to a degree that could be fulfilled in this thesis, therefore a further deeper and broader research should be conducted to get the aspects unaddressed in this thesis.

4. From Directive to Regulation: The Evolution of EU Returns Policy 2008-2026

The institutional development of EU migration governance can be situated within what Hollifield terms the liberal paradox – the tension between economic openness and the political pressure to restrict the movement of people (closure). Hollifield's account suggests that this tension is embedded in the competing economic and political logics of liberal states.⁹⁰ Therefore, the development of EU migration policy can be seen, at least in part, as a series of attempts to manage this tension – expanding legal migration channels while simultaneously developing mechanisms to control and reverse irregular migration.

The current EU returns framework rests on several interlocking legal and policy instruments. The first to mention is the Returns Directive (2008/115/EC), which established common standards and procedures for the return of irregularly staying third-country nationals, introducing the concept of voluntary departure as the preferred mechanism while providing a legal basis for detention and forced removal where voluntary compliance was not achieved.⁹¹ The Directive has been interpreted differently by different actors: European Commission has presented it as a framework that balances effective migration management with respect for fundamental rights⁹², while some critics have raised doubts. For instance, Webber questioned how genuinely “voluntary” voluntary returns actually are, highlighting several problematic aspects of return policies. The scholar argues that assistance provided to returnees is often short-term and piecemeal, while safety upon return is not guaranteed, as returnees are frequently met with suspicion in their countries of origin. Furthermore, repatriation cannot be considered truly

⁹⁰ James F. Hollifield, “The Emerging Migration State,” *International Migration Review* 38, no. 3 (2004): 885–912, 886–87, 903.

⁹¹ European Commission, “An Effective, Firm and Fair EU Return and Readmission Policy,” Migration and Home Affairs, June 11, 2026, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/irregular-migration-and-return/effective-firm-and-fair-eu-return-and-readmission-policy_en.

⁹² European Commission, “An Effective, Firm and Fair EU Return and Readmission Policy.”

“voluntary” when individuals are effectively compelled to return due to poverty, detention, withdrawal of support, separation from their children, or asylum systems that deny them adequate legal assistance.⁹³

The New Pact on Migration and Asylum (proposed in September 2020, adopted in 2024, and applicable from June 2026) sought to establish a more comprehensive and integrated governance framework, linking asylum processing, solidarity mechanisms between member states, and returns into a single system. Returns were an important pillar of the Pact's approach to migration management, including Mandatory Screening Regulation, the new 'safe countries' list and accelerated (digital) border procedures. While the Pact has been presented as a 'fresh start' by European Commission⁹⁴, critical scholars, such as Gambazza, point to the continuation of the past security-focused measures, not enough balanced with humanitarian aspects. The scholar points to the shortcomings of it, including inadequate protection of the rights of migrants awaiting asylum decisions.⁹⁵

Over the period under analysis, a new development emerged: the EU Return Regulation, proposed on 11 March 2025, and presented by the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration Magnus Brunner, to replace the 2008 Return Directive as a key pillar of the Pact on Migration and Asylum. The shift from a Directive to a Regulation is itself significant: whereas a directive sets minimum standards that member states transpose into national law, a regulation is directly binding and uniformly applicable across the EU, removing national discretion and mandating a common approach. As of the time of writing, the Council and the European Parliament reached a provisional agreement on the new regulation in June 2026. It reflects a growing emphasis on strengthening migration control measures and accelerating returns. Key elements include the formalised possibility of establishing “return hubs” in third countries, expanded use of entry bans, and detention for up to 30 months (compared to the previous 18-month limit in the Return Directive). The Commission welcomed the agreement, emphasising its role in making returns ‘more efficient, with swifter, simpler and more effective procedure across the EU, in full respect of fundamental rights’. Its central argument is that the current rate of effective returns (around 28% in 2025) is too low, and that the Regulation is intended to improve it.⁹⁶ The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) called the Regulation ‘one of the most punitive and dangerous migration instruments

⁹³ Frances Webber, “How Voluntary Are Voluntary Returns?,” *Race & Class* 52, no. 4 (2011): 101-104.

⁹⁴ European External Action Service, “A Fresh Start with a New Pact on Migration and Asylum,” September 25, 2020, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/fresh-start-new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en.

⁹⁵ Giuseppe Gambazza, “The EU New Pact on Migration and Asylum: Policies and Discourses for a ‘Fresh Start’,” *Space and Polity* 28, no. 2 (2024): 293.

⁹⁶ European Commission, “Commission Welcomes Political Agreement on Return Regulation,” Migration and Home Affairs, June 2, 2026, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-welcomes-political-agreement-return-regulation-2026-06-02_en.

in recent EU history', arguing that, in the name of 'efficiency', it opens the door to violations of fundamental rights.⁹⁷ The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) think tank added to this critique, noting that the Regulation permits the potentially indefinite detention of migrants and their removal to countries they have never been to before. Drawing on the examples of Italy's scheme in Albania and Australia's offshore model, CEPS questions the limited practical effectiveness of offshoring as a return mechanism.⁹⁸

The voting in the European Parliament regarding the Regulation is itself revealing. There is a clear divide between left- and right- leaning parties, the former voting predominantly against, while the latter – in favour. The version of the Regulation put forward by the EPP was supported by Patriots for Europe, the European Conservatives and Reformists, Europe of Sovereign Nations, and, in part, by Renew Europe.⁹⁹ This is an example of increasingly frequent alignment between EPP and the parliamentary right.

Taken together, the EU's legislation towards migration is moving towards a more security-focused dimension. The dominant framing on the EU Return Regulation is based on the premise to make returns more efficient, faster, having more effective procedures.

5. The Deportable Migrant in EU Political Discourse

5.1. Naming and constructing the migrant as social actor (van Leeuwen)

Across the four actors analysed, the dominant finding is that the discourse on returns is focused not on migrants themselves so much, but rather on the EU: its borders, its Member States, its safety, its credibility, the effectiveness of its migration managements. Migrants predominantly appear as impersonalised, passivated, categorised – acted upon, counted, referred to through the procedures they pass through. Personalisation occurs as a marked exception, and activation is reserved almost entirely for the EU and its Member States. The discursive strategies are discussed in turn below.

⁹⁷ European Council on Refugees and Exiles, "ECRE's Reaction to the Council and Parliament Agreement on the Return Regulation," June 2, 2026, <https://ecre.org/ecres-reaction-to-the-council-and-parliament-agreement-on-the-return-regulation/>.

⁹⁸ Davide Colombi, "Return Hubs Don't Return People, They Detain Them Out of Reach," CEPS, June 18, 2026, <https://www.ceps.eu/return-hubs-dont-return-people-they-detain-them-out-of-reach/>.

⁹⁹ "Common System for the Return of Third-Country Nationals Staying Illegally in the Union (Return Regulation): Vote Results," HowTheyVote.eu, June 17, 2026, <https://howtheyvote.eu/votes/194134>.

To begin with, the analysis showed that impersonalisation, passivation, categorisation and aggregation function as default strategies across all four actors whose speeches were analysed: von der Leyen, Schinas, Johansson, and Brunner. Each strategy is discussed in turn below.

Impersonalisation was among the most frequent strategies, appearing consistently across all four actors and across the full period, with no marked differences between the Commissioners. This suggests that the construction is institutional rather than individual. Impersonalisation was noticed to work in two distinct ways, the first one being categorisation. In this case, migrants are classified (not named), most often through formulations beginning "those who...": "those who come", "those who do not have a right to stay", "those who should leave". The second replaces the person altogether with the process they pass through. Passages proceed without migrants appearing at all, referring instead to "arrivals", "border crossings", "applications" or "secondary movements". People are rendered as the actions they perform or the documents they generate.

A related strategy became apparent in the course of coding: **aggregation**, in which migrants are represented as quantities. Two examples illustrate this:

"They [Cyprus] doubled their return rate and is now one of the Member States with the best return system in the European Union" (Johansson, 12 June 2024).

"Last year, we have returned 26% more people than we did in 2022 but overall, this is still a low return rate, only 19%. In the beginning of this year, the return rate is 25%, still too low, but we are on a steady way to make progress when it comes to returns and it is very important that this continues." (Johansson, 12 June 2024)

Passivation, too, is often present in political discourse, showcasing migrants as acted upon – either by the EU or smugglers, both cases taking away agency from the migrants. The question is where the responsibility is transferred to in the case of passivation. In the former case, migrants were named as returned, screened, channeled. Such framing presents removal as administrative procedure. In the example below:

"With the agreement, there will be a new and mandatory screening at all borders of all arrivals. In a second stage, all those unlikely to get asylum will have to go through mandatory, fast-tracked border procedures with streamlined procedures for dealing quickly with asylum claims and efficiently processing returns." (Schinas, 20 December 2023)

Smuggler-victim construction occurs relatively often within the discursive strategy of passivation. Migrants are largely named as being lured in, deceived, taken, and brought by smugglers. The migrant agency is largely dismissed. In this case, agency and responsibility is transferred to smuggler.

“They [irregular migrants] are often the victims of criminals, smugglers and traffickers who lure them with false promises of safe passage and extort money from them.” (von der Leyen, 20 December 2023)

Personalisation was noticed to be an exception, here differences between Commissioners emerged. Most clearly, in Johansson's speeches (especially when read in contrast with Schinas's speeches), personalisation is clearly present. In her speeches, migrants are often described in ways that humanise and personalise their experiences. Compared to the others, she used more personalised and activated phrasing. For instance, through phrases such as “falling in love” (Johansson, 23 September 2020).

Personalising language was not exclusive to Johansson. Von der Leyen also occasionally framed migration in such terms, for instance, describing people as pushed to move by circumstance:

"Every day, we see that conflict, climate change and instability are pushing people to seek refuge elsewhere." (von der Leyen, September 2023)

In one specific case, von der Leyen also provided biographical details:

“At the same time, the story of the company's co-founder and CEO made headlines. Uğur Şahin came to Germany from Turkey with his mother when he was four years old. He passed his high school exam in Köln and went on to study medicine. Together with his wife, Özlem Türeci, the daughter of another immigrant from Turkey, he later founded the German company that developed a coronavirus vaccine in record time.” (von der Leyen, 19 November 2020)

Nevertheless, such specific personalisation details were rarely met. More often (though still infrequently), personalisation was developed through victimisation or relational categorisation. And so, it does in the end of the day still circle around the Migration Pact as an argumentation in favour of it, emphasizing that it would ameliorate the situation for migrants themselves. The core argument – faster procedures will benefit not only Member States, but also migrants themselves; prolonged procedures burden not only Member States, but also migrants, who start creating connections, falling in love, start accommodating to living in a new country.

Schinas's speeches stand in clear contrast. They are markedly more control-focused, and migrants remain largely passive within them. Where personalisation occurs, it is as victims of smugglers:

“Smugglers continue to profit by exploiting migrants – endangering lives and selling false hope in blatant disregard for human dignity.” (Schinas, 23 September 2020)

In Brunner's speeches, personalisation was not identified as a significant strategy. This is not to say it was entirely absent, but it did not emerge as a discursively significant framing strategy in this analysis.

Activation was usually reserved for the EU and its Member States, whose efforts and concerns were foregrounded. The goal typically named was solidarity – easing the burden placed on Member States.

“They worry that the efforts needed to manage migration may exceed their capacities. They need the solidarity of others. And of course, we have to talk about those Member States that are concerned, that their own national systems for asylum or integration will not be able to cope in the event of large amounts of migrants.” (von der Leyen, 19 November 2020)

Where migrants are activated, it is usually in connection with wrongdoing. Across the corpus, migrant agency surfaces in verbs of transgression: to abscond, to overstay, to lodge multiple applications, to abuse the system.

“Third, we are closing loopholes that can be abused by asylum seekers. So it's not possible anymore with a pact to just abscond. And then get yourself another possibility to choose for example where to apply for asylum or to start from scratch again with your procedures.” (Johansson, 12 March 2024)

When the migrant acts, the migrant offends. This pattern connects directly to the topos of abuse discussed in 5.2.

5.2. The argumentative construction of expulsion (topoi)

After conducting the research, it was identified that the argumentation of expulsion was found to be built on a few layers.

The first argumentative layer constructs expulsion through the **topos of danger** and the **topos of burdening** working together: the external border is figured as a shared European responsibility under threat, and expulsion is embedded within the resulting security response. The Commission's own term for what this licenses is solidarity, and it is worth noting that solidarity in this corpus is invoked

exclusively between Member States. The obligation is owed to states carrying disproportionate pressure, never to the people subject to the measures that follow. This is the clearest in Schinas's remarks, which opens by connecting the national border with the European one:

“Greece's border is Europe's border. Bulgaria's border is Europe's border. And Cyprus’ border is Europe's border.” (Schinas, 4 March 2020)

In such a way, casting a member state's “incredibly challenging situation” as the Union's collective burden (topos of burdening). The response Schinas outlined is securitised: additional border guards and equipment (patrol vessels, helicopters, aircraft, thermo-vision vehicles (Schinas, 4 March 2020)). Also, expulsion appeared as one element of this security package – a new return programme coordinated by European Border and Coast Guard, “making use of Frontex's new mandate on returns” (Schinas, 4 March 2020). Expulsion therefore is folded into border protection and seen as an instrument of securing the threatened European border.

A second argumentative layer constructs expulsion as a necessary component of a functioning EU migration system, built on the **topos of numbers**. The persistently low proportion of return decisions actually enforced is invoked repeatedly – by different actors, in different settings, across the full period of the corpus (Table 1 (quotes presented in chronological order)). The figure is remarkably stable: from Schinas's “around a third” in 2020 through the recurring “one in five” of 2024-2025, the low return rate functions as the standing evidence that the system is failing and must be made more effective. It is this number, more than any other single argument, that is used in argumentation of tightening of return policy.

The reliability of the figure though has been questioned. The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), points to several problems with the methodology by which the return rate is calculated. The underlying data are incomplete: national statistics do not capture all departures and returns by people who were neither detained nor assisted (data often go unrecorded), so actual returns may be higher than reported. The figure may also be inflated by duplication, since Member States may issue multiple return decisions against the same individual (between 2019 and 2022 in France alone, more than 43,000 people were subject to multiple decisions). Moreover, ICMPD argues that reading the low rate as a matter of migrant compliance obscures the structural reasons for non-enforcement. A substantial proportion of return decisions are annulled by national courts, often on grounds of non-refoulement or family unity; others concern stateless persons or countries to which removal is not practically possible. ICMPD quote, that the Commission's own estimate is that around 60 per cent of

return decisions (roughly 300,000 per year) simply cannot be enforced.¹⁰⁰ On this account, the gap between decisions issued and returns carried out reflects the limits of the procedure rather than the defiance of those subject to it.

One shift within this otherwise constant framing is worth noting. In October 2025, von der Leyen reverses the statistic: where the corpus had consistently cited the roughly 20 % of decisions enforced (“only 20 % are returned”), she instead foregrounds the 80 % not enforced (“80 % do not leave but stay in Europe”). The earlier framing locates the failure in the institution (the state returns too few); the 2025 framing locates it in the migrants (they defy the rules and remain). The same statistic thus shifts from a measure of administrative underperformance to non-compliance – a small rhetorical move that transfers responsibility from the system to those subject to it.

Table 1. The return-gap statistic across the corpus, 2020-2025.

Date	Actor	Quote
September 2020	Margaritis Schinas	”On average every year around 370,000 applications for international protection are rejected in the EU, but only around a third of these persons are returned home”
February 2023	Ursula von der Leyen	“However, the asylum and reception systems across Member States are under considerable strain. And fact is that the majority of those who apply for asylum are not in need of protection. But return rates are at a low of 22% . And there is an increasing number of secondary movements.”
June 2024	Ylva Johansson	“Last year, we have returned 26% more people than we did in 2022 but overall, this is still a low return rate, only 19%. In the beginning of this year, the return rate is 25% , still too low, but we are on a steady way to make progress when it comes to returns and it is very important that this continues.”
October 2024	Ursula von der Leyen	“Today, we see that from all those that have no right to stay in the European Union, only 20% of those who have a return decision are really returned to their countries of origin.”
March 2025	Magnus Brunner	“Right now, 4 out of 5 people subject to a return decision do not actually leave the EU.”
April 2025	Ursula von der Leyen	“It cannot be that only 20% of those who have a negative asylum decision , actually leave Europe. This is way too low and we cannot explain it to our citizens.”
October 2025	Ursula von der Leyen	“Let me again give you a figure – I think this is telling: Out of those migrants who have a negative asylum decision, 80% do not leave but stay in Europe . This cannot be. Everyone must abide by our rules – and they must be enforced. That is a principle in a democracy that is working. “

Source: compiled by the author.

¹⁰⁰ Alexis McLean, "Policy by Percentage: Rethinking the Return Rate," ICMPD, 2026, <https://www.icmpd.org/blog/2026/policy-by-percentage-rethinking-the-return-rate>.

A third layer argues for expulsion through the **topos of usefulness** and the **topos of justice**, expressed in the register of efficiency: the removal of “those who do not have a right to stay” (e.g., Johansson, 23 September 2020) is presented as the enabling condition for protecting “those who need it.” (e.g., Schinas, 27 April 2021) Brunner's remarks on the proposed Return Regulation is a good example:

“Right now, 4 out of 5 people subject to a return decision do not actually leave the EU. Frankly speaking, this is unacceptable. It undermines our credibility as a Union. It wastes the resources our authorities should be devoting to those with a genuine right to stay. And it damages people's trust in Europe's ability to manage migration effectively.” (Brunner, 11 March 2025)

The argument argues for expulsion as a means to a set of goods (credibility, efficient use of resources, public trust) and, crucially, as an act of justice towards the deserving. In other words, resources are being wasted that should go to those with a genuine right to stay. This reasoning recurs across actors and years and can be treated as a stable feature of the discourse. It maps closely onto Fassin's account on humanitarian reason as serving, to a big extent, the interests of the host state, and onto Ticktin's “regimes of care,” in which the system extends protection to some precisely by reinforcing the removability of others.

A fourth layer justifies expulsion through the **topos of responsibility**, as well as closely linked **topos of reality**: a situation of lost control and public frustration (reality) is pointed out, and the EU is figured as responsible for restoring trust and control (responsibility). Looking inwardly, concerning EU citizens, Member States:

“And these reforms are badly needed because there is growing frustration, and a sense that our rules are being ignored. ^[P]_[SEP]We need to restore trust – between Member States and by EU citizens. ^[P]_[SEP]That is exactly what the reform is about, to restore trust, and to restore control.” (Brunner, 11 November 2025)

Such reasoning foregrounds a factual state of disorder: “our rules are being ignored” (von der Leyen, 10 September 2025), “growing frustration” (topos of reality) (Brunner, 11 November 2025), and moves then from it to an obligation to act: “we need to restore trust, and to restore control” (topos of responsibility) (Brunner, 11 November 2025). The repeated “restored” presupposes a prior order now lost, therefore constructing the present as a condition to be reclaimed. Analytically, this performs what Walters describes as deportation's function as an assertion of sovereignty here mobilised as a response

to popular frustration. It is often expressed in the register of performance improvement (“we have to get better” (von der Leyen, 1 February 2023)).

The fifth layer is built on the **topos of abuse**, and it stands in relation to the pattern identified in 5.1: where migrants are activated in this discourse, they are activated as rule-breakers. Here, in 5.2, the same construction does argumentative work. Migrants exploiting the rules is the premise for a stricter returns policy. The construction takes several forms. Von der Leyen builds it through the categories of unfounded applications and secondary movements:

“The majority of those who apply for asylum are not in need of protection. But return rates are at a low of 22%. And there is an increasing number of secondary movements.” (Von der Leyen, 1 February 2023)

A year later, in terms of repeated applications framed as fuelling public resentment:

“In 2023, an estimated 400 000 to 500 000 people arrived illegally in Europe. The number of asylum applications in the EU – the same application sometimes being lodged several times – increased to one million. This is a legitimate source of frustration and resentment. It cannot continue. And we will take all the necessary steps to deal with it.” (Von der Leyen, 9 January 2024).

A further variant works through European identity. Brunner affirms European generosity as a matter of identity, then presents its maintenance as depending on the exclusion of those who abuse it.

“The European Union has some of the highest asylum standards in the world. And rightly so: this is who we are as Europeans. But this is not sustainable if people who don't have that right abuse the system.” (Brunner, 11 March 2025)

Johansson's use of the abuse topos deserves separate attention, since she is otherwise the actor most associated with a humanitarian register. Johansson is the most explicit of the four Commissioners. In the passage quoted in 5.1., naming absconding and re-applying as the practices the Pact is designed to prevent. That the topos appears in her discourse indicates that the construction of migrants as someone who offend is a stable, corpus-wide feature. What distinguishes her discourse is not that it replaces the enforcement register but that it holds it together with a humanitarian one, sometimes within a single passage:

“<...> with all the things we are doing to close the loopholes for secondary movements, we will have less pressure on the reception facilities which is important. This is also an opportunity to see better how to make them truly child friendly for example.” (Johansson, 12 June 2024)

Here the topos of abuse ("close the loopholes") and the language of protection ("truly child friendly") appear side by side, presented as complementary aspects of a single functioning system.

A similar balancing appears in her account of the agreement itself:

“<...> how rare it is to be able to find an agreement to manage migration in an orderly way, to protect the fundamental rights but also to make sure that we protect our borders and that we manage migration together and in solidarity.” (Johansson, 12 June 2024)

Such formulations position fundamental rights and border protection equal standing, where Schinas and Brunner tend to foreground control. Yet this difference is one of emphasis, not so much of structure. Johansson does argue within the same institutional logic, and for the same instruments (the Pact, faster procedures, more effective returns, though she does specifically mention the illegality of pushbacks). The topoi Johansson uses and the emphasis she gives them differ from those of the other actors. Though, the construction of the deportable migrant does not fundamentally differ.

To conclude, the argumentative construction of expulsion is conducted almost entirely from the standpoint of the EU and its Member States. Across its layers – the topoi of danger and solidarity, of numbers, of usefulness and justice, of responsibility, and of abuse. Expulsion is argued for by reference to Europe's borders, resources, credibility, citizens, and capacity to control.

5.3. Mitigation: how "return" softens "expulsion" (Reisigl & Wodak's mitigation strategy)

5.2. showed how expulsion is argued for, this section examines how it is softened – the mitigation strategies through which expulsion is constructed as “return”, characterised as voluntary, dignified, and beneficial. Neither "deportation" nor “expulsion” appears in the corpus. "Return" is used throughout to name the process.

Several mitigation strategies were identified. The first operates through lexical euphemism, and the substitution of "return" for what would otherwise be named as deportation or expulsion is its foundational move, on which the others partly build. Other examples include “innovative ways” for offshore return hubs (specifically named by von der Leyen, 17 October 2024), “the right procedure” (this

phrase was largely used by Schinas), “migration management.” In each case mitigation reduces the force of the utterance, so a coercive act registers as something gentler.

The second strategy is the balance frame, pairing an enforcement term with a humanitarian one. Often, those pairings are joined by either “and” or “but”, so that the two are presented as compatible. Table B sets out some of the clearest instances.

Table 2. The balance frame in Commission discourse, 2020-2025.

Date	Actor	Quote	Pairing
September 2020	Schinas	Firm but fair internal rules, which ensure that solidarity is provided to Member States under pressure.	Firm but fair
September 2020	Schinas	On the third floor of our theoretical house, we find firm but fair internal rules:	Firm but fair
April 2024	Von der Leyen	<...> a European solution. One that is effective, and both fair and firm. This is what the Pact on Migration and Asylum delivers.	Fair but firm
July 2024	Von der Leyen	We need a common approach on returns, to make them more effective and dignified.	Effective and dignified
July 2024	Von der Leyen	Migration challenges need a European response with a fair and firm approach based on our values.	Fair and firm
March 2025	Brunner	<...> a crucial and ambitious proposal aimed at strengthening and streamlining the EU's return system. This is about ensuring a fair and firm approach to managing irregular migration.	Fair and firm
March 2025	Brunner	<...> the European Union is putting in place a sustainable and comprehensive migration policy, one that is both fair and firm.	Fair and firm
March 2025	Brunner	This firmer system is balanced with a fairer system: we reinforce the safeguards to ensure respect for fundamental rights.	Firm and fair
September 2025	Von der Leyen	And we must also ensure that we fully implement the Pact on Migration and Asylum as soon as it enters into force. The pact is strict but fair.	Strict but fair

Source: compiled by the author.

Two things are visible. The first is the stability of the framing. It is present from the beginning of the research period to the end, across three of the four actors, and in a range of settings – the presentation of the Pact, the announcement of the Return Regulation, the review of an agreement reached. Whatever else changes in the discourse, expulsion remains framed as balanced. The second is a shift in the enforcement term. From 2020 to early 2025 the pairing is built on “firm”; by September 2025 von der Leyen uses “strict but fair”. The humanitarian term remains “fair” throughout, while the term it is paired with hardens. Such shift is noticed once, so it cannot be called a pattern, but the difference is present.

A related strategy operates through the assurance of legal compliance. Where the balance frame pairs the enforcement with a positive quality (such as fairness, dignity), this pairs it with a statement that the law will not be broken. The formulation "in full respect of" recurs across three actors: Johansson on voluntary return and reintegration "in full respect for human rights"; von der Leyen on acting "in full respect of our obligations under international law"; and, most directly, Brunner on ensuring that "forced returns are carried out in full respect of fundamental rights." The Brunner formulation is instructive, and it appears in identical wording in both of his March 2025 presentations of the proposed Return Regulation (to the European Parliament, and to the press alongside Executive Vice-President Virkkunen). Force is named without euphemism and balanced with the assurance that the actions will remain within the law. In other words, balanced with the assurance of legality.

A further strategy constructs expulsion as beneficial for everyone involved. To compare, the balance frame concedes a tension and claims to resolve it, the win-win logic denies that there is one. The win-win logic drops the trade-off: Member States, the EU, third countries, and migrants all benefit. Schinas's account on the voluntary return strategy is a good example:

“The strategy acknowledges that return is more effective when carried out voluntarily and accompanied with strong reintegration measures. This is because voluntary return gives the returnees real opportunities and takes into account their needs, expectations and prospects once returned. When developed as part of a comprehensive partnership, countries of return would also be more inclined to participate in and take ownership of the process when the returns are voluntary. Voluntary return is also more cost effective and reintegration measures ensure returns are more sustainable in the long-run.” (Schinas, 27 April 2021)

The passage distributes benefit across three parties in sequence. Returnees are given "real opportunities" and have their "needs, expectations and prospects" taken into account; countries of return gain participation and ownership; and the Union gains cost-effectiveness and sustainability. Each is presented as benefiting.

The final strategy to consider – the vocabulary of voluntariness. The uniqueness of it is that it relocates agency. In essence, a person is not removed but leaves. And what is notable, the discourse does not leave at the level of description. It also explains what makes a departure voluntary or, in other words, why it is chosen. Discussing on the proposal for a new Common European System for Returns, Brunner sets out the relation:

“We will continue to incentivise voluntary returns, which are often quicker and less costly than forced return procedures. The new rules will, however, make sure that when you are ordered to leave the EU, you will leave the EU – either forcibly or voluntarily. Forced return will become the rule in a clearly defined set of cases, such as when they are security risks. This in turns strengthens voluntary returns, as forced return becomes a clear and credible instrument.” (Brunner, 11 March 2025)

In this passage, voluntary return is recommended on administrative grounds – quicker, less costly. But the key message is that departure is inevitable “either forcibly or voluntarily.” In a way, voluntary return is presented as being strengthened by the credibility of force. The first one depends on the second being available and believable.

Similar discourse appears earlier in the corpus as well. Schinas supports the return border procedure on the ground that it “<...>should facilitate and encourage voluntary returns since people will be available and more prone to cooperate with the authorities” (Schinas, April 2021)

Johansson sets out a similar argument. When describing the border procedure (the recognition-rate threshold, the exemptions for families with small children, unaccompanied minors and those with medical needs, the requirement that decisions come within twelve weeks) she states its purpose: “Why do we do this? We do this, because it would make it easier, for voluntary returns.” The reasoning follows: “when a person has been living in country for years, having relations, falling in love, then it's much more difficult, both for the individual and for the authorities to do the return.” (September 2020) In this argumentation, speed serves removal because time produces attachment. The migrant's interest is mentioned on the side of speed: being removed before one has formed ties is presented as easier for the person as well as for the authorities. The same phrase elsewhere marked Johansson's personalising register (“falling in love”) here supports the reason for accelerating the procedure.

5.4. The trajectory and the institutional production of deportability

Some intra-Commission differences were noted throughout the corpus. Johansson and Schinas are important to consider together. Several of the most important speeches analysed were actually delivered jointly, one after another in the same setting, and the pattern of labour division was consistent (and articulated by themselves). Schinas would set out the broader vision, focusing on EU values, the architecture of the system, vision, further trajectory, while Johansson provided the more operational and legislative detail. Their topoi differ and so does the argumentation, but the construction of the deportable migrant is not fundamentally different between them. Brunner, taking the Commissioner position in

2024, speaks consistently in a security-focused register, and the humanitarian framing that appears in Johansson's discourse is largely absent from his.

These differences are of emphasis rather than of direction. Schinas was more control-oriented from the outset, treating the EU as the principal actor, while Johansson made the same case in a more humanitarian register. Read chronologically, several features of the corpus point in the direction of hardening, though the evidence is limited to a small number of instance. The balance frame stays in use throughout, but the enforcement term shifts from "firm" to "strict" by late 2025 (5.3). And the return-gap figure, cited since 2020 as evidence that the system was underperforming, is reframed by October 2025 as evidence that migrants are not complying (5.2). Neither is decisive on its own, but both point the same way.

To conclude, the institutional logic is understandable on its own terms. The EU has obligations to Member States, solidarity between them is a real concern, and a system issuing decision it cannot enforce is a genuine problem. What the analysis shows is the fact that the logic itself largely follows the path where expulsion becomes the necessary measure.

6. The Deportable Migrant in European Cinema

One difference from the previous chapter should be noted at the outset, since it shapes how this one is organized. Topoi are considerably less prominent in the film corpus than in the political one. Film presents situations rather than making arguments, and where argumentation does appear it is voiced by characters rather than by the film. The relevant topoi are identified where they occur, but the analysis here rests more heavily on the other strategies. This asymmetry is itself a finding and is taken up in Chapter 7.

To avoid repetitiveness, the focus of each chapter, dedicated to movies is on what does the movie highlight the most. In other words, largely all movies focus on all dimensions mentioned, but each of them give most attention to specific parts. Therefore, I will focus on those specific parts. In the cross-film synthesis some of the existing tendencies will be discussed.

Table 3 sets out the four films in this chapter to make the film analysis easier to follow. Together they span 2020-2024 and cover four distinct positions within the condition of deportability. The film visual grid, as well as the full list of scenes selected, can be found in Annex 3.

Table 3. The film corpus: production details and protagonists' legal status.

Film	Director	Year	Country	Setting	Protagonist(s)	Legal status shown
Tori and Lokita	Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne	2022	Belgium/France	Belgium	Lokita, Tori	Claim refused; undocumented
Souleymane's Story	Boris Lojkine	2024	France	Paris,	Souleymane	Claim pending (récépissé)
To a Land Unknown	Mahdi Fleifel	2024	Greece	Athens	Chatila, Reda	Stateless; in transit
Limbo	Ben Sharrock	2020	UK	Scottish island	Omar	Awaiting decision

Source: compiled by the author.

6.1. Tori and Lokita

The film “Tori and Lokita” (Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, 2022) follows two undocumented minors from Cameroon and Benin, living in a children's home for unaccompanied minors in Belgium. Tori, a younger boy, has been recognised as a persecuted “child sorcerer” and already has received asylum status. Lokita, on the other hand, is still in the process, and the two claim to be siblings so that she can obtain papers. When her claim is refused, she takes work in a cannabis grow house for the man who supplies them with drugs to sell, in exchange for forged documents. No deportation occurs in the film. What it depicts is the condition of removability itself, and what that condition produces.

The Dardenne brothers have returned repeatedly to undocumented labour and precarity in Belgium, (e.g., “La Promesse” (1996), “Le Silence de Lorna” (2008)), and the film premiered in competition at Cannes in 2022, where it received the 75th Anniversary Award.¹⁰¹ Importantly to note, the directors made a decision not to work with professional actors for Tori and Lokita roles.¹⁰²

The migrant as a social actor

Lokita is fully nominated, personalised and individualised – we know her name, her situation, even her fears and wishes. In the rehearsal scene, Tori plays the official and Lokita composes her answers. Lokita is fully activated here, she directs the rehearsal, interrupts herself, refines her own answers. She is nonetheless passivated in institutional encounters. In the interview scene, she is questioned, tested, and doubted. She does not initiate the conversation, only answers the questions posed. In the police scene, she and Tori are reactive, explaining and accounting for themselves, and the fabricated sibling claim reappears as in the interview scene before. Tori’s “c'est ma soeur”¹⁰³ explains their being together. In

¹⁰¹ “Tori et Lokita,” Festival de Cannes, accessed 25 August, 2026, <https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/f/tori-et-lokita/>.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ This is my sister.

Betim scene, Lokita is most clearly passivated. She asks, requests, and concedes – "Si, je les veux," "Oui".¹⁰⁴ She is accepting the terms she cannot refuse, Betim is now her only option to get the papers (illegally).

Tori's most agentive moment is the decision scene (where Lokita's asylum claim gets denied). He interrogates the migration officer, argues, pleads and demands – "Pourquoi?", "Je vous jure," "Qu'est-ce que je vais faire moi ici sans elle?"¹⁰⁵ The official is activated but evasive, answering while repeatedly disengaging "J'ai une réunion," "je dois y aller," "Au revoir."¹⁰⁶

The institution appears in two modes. In the interview, the officer is impersonalised: voice only, never in frame, no reverse shot, therefore none of the visual categories can be applied to at all. The official is unexposed while Lokita is entirely visible. In the police scene, the officials are already embodied and present. They also are the ones acting – asking, verifying, deciding.

Betim is fully activated and dominant, dictating conditions and setting deadlines "réponse maximum demain matin"¹⁰⁷. He is also disengaging: "c'est pas mes affaires"¹⁰⁸. Lokita's own agency in the scene is expressed only in relational terms. She asks to see Tori once a week, to keep the Sundays, to keep the Friday dinners, to send money to her mother. Each request is refused.

Topoi

Argumentation appears only where characters argue with one another, which in this film mainly appears in the decision scene. During the conversation, topos of justice and topos of law stood in different positions. Tori argues that equal danger should mean equal treatment "c'est la même chose"¹⁰⁹, while the official answers with rule-boundedness "j'aimerais bien, mais je peux pas"¹¹⁰, pointing to the fact that Tori was indeed recognised to be a child sorcerer "et ton dossier le prouve"¹¹¹. Lokita might have faced the same threat, she might have helped Tori, but these questions are not analysed. A topos of danger appears in Lokita's account in the interview: the uncle's accusation that infant was a sorcerer and had to be killed, as well as her decision to find him and flee. Nevertheless, it appears as a testimony rather than as an argument, and it is discarded along with the claim it was attached to.

¹⁰⁴ Yes, I want them. / Yes.

¹⁰⁵ Why? / I promise. / What am I going to do without her?

¹⁰⁶ I have a meeting. / I must go. / Goodbye.

¹⁰⁷ Answer until tomorrow morning.

¹⁰⁸ That's not my business.

¹⁰⁹ It's the same thing.

¹¹⁰ I would like to, but I cannot.

¹¹¹ And your profile (documents) proves it.

Mitigation and intensification

The film's institutional encounters are conducted in a mitigated register. The interview is calm and procedural. The questions are about a river, a lake, the name of a school director. Nothing is raised, and the encounter ends with an offer to take a break and continue next time. The officers in police scene are routine and procedurally correct “stop”, “vos papiers.”¹¹²

Against this, the film intensifies the passages where the conditions produced are shown. The breakdown scene is its clearest instance. Tori proposes doing deliveries to send fifty euros a week to Lokita's mother, and she reacts to the suggestion as a loss of her own role “c'est à moi gagner de l'argent pour la famille... moi, ça”¹¹³, then beats her head against an iron pole, turning the violence inward. She asks “pourquoi ils veulent pas me donner mes papiers, Tori? Pourquoi?”¹¹⁴ Tori calms her, sits her down, takes care of her and answers “ils ne veulent pas de nous.”¹¹⁵ The reply shifts the ground of the question, from something she has failed to do to a decision made about them both, and it is also the film's plainest position of the procedural apparatus.

Visual construction

Visual analysis conducted provided few findings. Starting with an uniform eye-level throughout. In every scene with no exception the camera is at eye-level with either Tori, Lokita, or both, even in the scenes with authorities (e.g., when Tori confronts the official on why Lokita is not getting her papers; and the official in this case is seen only partly, not fitting fully in the frame, because of the size and the eye-level with Tori.). There is no hierarchy with Tori and Lokita established through vertical angle anywhere in the film.

The second finding shows that the camera never observes from the outside. In other words, meaning there is no stabilised or “objective” shot in the scenes. There is no position of the observer-from-above. Rather, the camera moves as the characters move and stills when they are still. In the funeral scene, when Tori sways slightly, the camera sways with him. As well as in the interview-preparation scene it seems to breathe with Lokita. Only the very first interview scene appears static, but Lokita herself

¹¹² Stop. / Your papers.

¹¹³ It's for me to earn money for the family... me, that's mine.

¹¹⁴ Why won't they give me my papers, Tori ? Why ?

¹¹⁵ They don't want us.

is held still as well – the camera's relation to the body does not change. The camera work is detailed and careful to the movement of Lokita's and Tori's bodies.

Third aspects to grasp is an offer throughout. The protagonists never address the camera. What varies is where the gaze goes – directed at officials (e.g. the interviewer, the police) and exploiters (e.g. Betim), mutual between Tori and Lokita in private scenes. The gaze tracks who holds the power.

And finally, composition consistently centres Lokita rather than Tori. When both in frame, the frame holds her (corresponding to the fact that it is her whose position is uncertain; despite his involvement, Tori already has papers). The exception is funeral scene, where Tori becomes the central figure.

These patterns are clearest in the interview scene. Lokita is maximally exposed to viewers, making her emotions vividly visible. The shot is close, creating intimate/personal social distance; the camera is frontal, directly facing Lokita, establishing involvement; and it is held at eye-level establishing equality. Her gaze is pointed slightly off the lens, towards the interviewer – an offer rather than a demand, presenting her as an object of contemplation rather than as a subject addressing us (viewers). She holds her near-gaze steadily throughout an entire interrogation and breaks it only in the very end.

What the film shows deportability producing

Without status, the work available to Lokita is informal (as well as for Tori, but he is a lot younger, therefore the situation is different). They sing in Betim's restaurant, and the same man has her and Tori selling drugs. Meanwhile, Lokita and Tori owe money to the smugglers who brought them to Belgium and now are threatening. Lokita as well needs to send money home to her mother. This is why she is carrying drugs when the police stop them (the police scene), and why she says "ne te retourne pas"¹¹⁶ before any contact with the officers is made. Deportability does not merely expose her to the police; in this film, it produces the offence that makes them dangerous.

When the claim is refused, Betim becomes the only route to papers, and his terms are therefore non-negotiable. The papers are priced "sur le marché 10 000 euros minimum"¹¹⁷, and paid for in labour in the cannabis grow house. The arrangement also involves sexual abuse, shown rather than named and recurring before and across Lokita's months in the grow house. These instances show deportability converting into exploitability. Her lack of status is what gives Betim his leverage, and the absence of any

¹¹⁶ Don't turn around.

¹¹⁷ On the market, 10 000 euros minimum.

legal route to papers is what makes his terms non-negotiable. She cannot refuse, cannot report him, and has nowhere else to go.

And so, the film makes visible that the same absence of status which renders Lokita removable also renders her exploitable and unprotected. The procedure that decides she may be removed does not simply register a fact about her; it produces the position she then occupies. The film states this itself in its final funeral scene, where Tori addresses her directly and names the absence of papers as the reason for her death: "si tu avais eu tes papiers"¹¹⁸, she would have become an *aide ménagère* (domestic help) and they would have lived together in Belgium. "Maintenant t'es mort et je suis tout seul."¹¹⁹

6.2. Souleymane's Story

Souleymane's Story (Boris Lojkine, 2024) follows an undocumented Guinean delivery cyclist in Paris over the two days before his asylum interview at the OFPRA (Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides (eng. French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless people). Lojkine dates the film's origin to the Covid lockdowns, when delivery riders were among the few people visible on the streets, and the production sought a Guinean lead on the grounds as most riders in Paris at that time were Guinean.¹²⁰ Abou Sangaré, who plays Souleymane, was working as a mechanic.¹²¹ The film premiered in Un Certain Regard at Cannes in 2024, taking the Jury Prize and the performance prize, and Sangaré later won best actor at the European Film Awards and the Lumières.¹²² The film depicts a French asylum procedure and an informal labour market.

The migrant as a social actor

Souleymane is nominated, personalised and individualised, and he is passivated in every encounter with someone who holds something he needs. In the interview scene, he is questioned and corrected. With Emmanuel (selfie scene), another migrant who rents him the delivery account he works under, Souleymane pleads "s'il te plaît"¹²³ and justifies himself: "je bosse", "je joue pas".¹²⁴ With the police he is made to confess the account, the rent he pays for it and his earnings.

¹¹⁸ If you've had your documents.

¹¹⁹ Now you're dead and I'm all alone.

¹²⁰ "L'histoire de Souleymane: The Vision of Boris Lojkine," Festival de Cannes, 2024, <https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/2024/lhistoire-de-souleymane-the-vision-of-boris-lojkine/>.

¹²¹ Barlow, "The Undocumented Story of Abou Sangaré."

¹²² Helen Barlow, "The Undocumented Story of Abou Sangaré," FilmInk, accessed June 15, 2026, <https://www.filmink.com.au/the-undocumented-story-of-abou-sangare/>.

¹²³ Please.

¹²⁴ I'm working. / I'm not playing around.

He is activated in the rehearsal scene (which corresponds closely to the equivalent passage in “Tori and Lokita.”). Souleymane is memorising the dates and facts of the account he will give at his asylum interview in two days. He is activated here; he is the one producing and correcting the account. Nevertheless, the narrative is not his, it is a script he has been given. His self-correction, “le 30 mars 2020... le 30 mars 2019”¹²⁵, shows that a wrong date is what makes a story fail, so he is exercising. Emmanuel is fully activated and dominant. He sets the terms, withholds payment, dictates when and where he will hand it over, and judges Souleymane's earnings. He is himself a migrant, so the exploitation is horizontal – someone with an account extracting from someone without one. Emmanuel's justification draws on a familiar standard: “on est pas venu en Europe pour jouer”, “il faut bosser”¹²⁶. So the figure of the hard-working deserving migrant here is turned into a disciplinary demand and used by one migrant against another.

The other moment when Souleymane is activated is when he objects. In the coaching scene, where a fixer named Barry prepares asylum applicants for their interviews, Souleymane raises his eyes to Barry and says “je ne peux pas inventer tous ces détails... je connais rien à la politique”¹²⁷. It is the point at which he stops repeating memorised lines and speaks for himself. Barry is activated in the same way as Emmanuel. He directs the exercise, corrects Souleymane, and dictates what the account must contain and how it must be delivered. He knows exactly what needs to be said to OFPRA: specific dates, embodied details, persecution categories. The written account and the spoken one are different things, and the skill lies in making the second feel lived “le récit ce qu'on écrit et ce que tu vas dire... C'est pas la même chose. Il faut qu'on sente que c'est des faits que t'as vécu.”¹²⁸

Topos

As in Tori and Lokita, argumentation appears only between characters. Emmanuel argues from work discipline, and Barry instructs rather than argues. The rehearsed script itself deploys a topos of danger (destroyed houses, arrest, party membership, imprisonment) but it is a manufactured one, assembled to fit what the procedure recognises.

Mitigation and intensification

¹²⁵ The 30th of March, 2020... the 30th of March 2019.

¹²⁶ We didn't come to Europe to play. / You have to work (direct translation: “one must work”, but the passage is directed to Souleymane specifically).

¹²⁷ I don't want to invent all these details... I know nothing about politics.

¹²⁸ The account, what we write and what you're going to say... it's not the same thing. It has to feel like these are the things you lived through.

The institutional scenes are conducted mildly. At the interview scene, the OFPRA officer tells Souleyman she has heard this story before “Même votre histoire de photos avec les machettes, je l’ai déjà entendue deux fois la semaine dernière.”¹²⁹ Then the officer invites him to tell the real story, and closes the interview with an administrative explanation of what will happen next.

The police encounter is conducted without aggression (the scene also recalls the one in “Tori and Lokita”). Souleymane delivers food to officers (three of them were seen in the frame, two were actively engaging), The police officers recognise immediately he is not the man in the delivery app’s account, and question him: his real name, whose account it is, what each of them earns, and check the bike – “Tu livres que de la nourriture ?”¹³⁰ They note his stress and his broken headlight. The centrepiece is the officer’s remark: “Tu sais que tu peux pas travailler avant réception en France quand même ?”¹³¹ The *réception* proves his claim is pending and simultaneously forbids him to work while he waits. But then the twist – they let him go (“allez-y, on va manger”¹³²) and take the food (“14,30 euro”). No arrest follows, but he has been made to confess the account, the rent he pays for it, and his earnings. The scene shows how much his position depends on discretion. The officers could act on the situation they found out about and choose not to.

Against this, the film intensifies what the position costs. Souleymane rehearses while working, cycling between deliveries and in the lift on the way to a customer’s door, with no interval between the two. Mamadou, another resident of the accommodation centre, describes what a refusal produced. He and Thierno applied at the same time, and Thierno was granted asylum while Mamadou was not. What followed he describes flatly: “quand j’ai reçu l’enveloppe avec la réponse, pendant trois jours, je suis resté couché. Je parlais pas. Si on me parlait, je répondais pas. Si on m’appelait, je décrochais pas.”¹³³ He has since stopped engaging “je ne m’intéresse plus à ces histoires d’asile.”¹³⁴ And the account Souleymane gives in the final interview scene of his true reason on why he came to France ends with his own judgement on it: “elle m’a dit de ne pas mentir, et je continue toujours à mentir.”¹³⁵

Visual construction

¹²⁹ Even your story about the photographs with the machetes, I heard it twice just last week.

¹³⁰ Do you only deliver food?

¹³¹ You do know you can’t work before the *réception* [the receipt issued to asylum applicants] in France, don’t you?

¹³² Off you go, we’re going to eat.

¹³³ When I got the envelope with the answer, for three days I stayed in bed. I didn’t speak. If someone spoke to me, I didn’t answer. If someone called me, I didn’t pick up.

¹³⁴ I’m not interested in all this asylum business anymore.

¹³⁵ She told me not to lie, and I keep on lying.

Camera movement is closely tied to Souleymane's own. In many scenes he is cycling, moving fast, and the camera follows in an unstable, handheld manner that conveys the pace and the tension of the work. The exception is the two procedural scenes – the coaching session and the interview, where the camera seems to be stable. The camera moves with him through the city and stills when he is questioned. The same pattern appears in “Tori and Lokita”, where the mobile camera of the street scenes gives way to the held frame of the interview.

Eye level is generally maintained with Souleymane throughout, with the brief exception in the interview scene discussed above. The medium shot dominates, often moving into a closer one, and a recurring feature is the gradual push-in: the camera begins at a medium distance and tightens as the scene develops, so that proximity tracks rising pressure rather than being set at the outset. Contact is offered throughout – Souleymane never addresses the camera. What varies is the strength of his gaze, which he holds steadily on Barry or on the police at moments when he is asking for something or growing anxious.

The coaching scene divides its characters visually in the same way it divides them as actors. Barry is frontal throughout and holds the gaze of whoever is speaking. By contrast, the woman (rehearsing her story right before Souleymane) and Souleymane are slightly oblique and look down as they give their accounts. Souleymane raises his eyes only when he objects – the moment he is not repeating the lines memorised and voices out his thoughts. In the advice scene, the camera moves to a close shot at the moment Souleymane asks whether the two accounts were really identical – the point at which he understands what the procedure will test.

The most marked visual change in the film comes in the final asylum interview scene. At the moment the officer tells him she has heard this story before “*même votre histoire de photos avec les machettes, je l'ai déjà entendue deux fois la semaine dernière*”¹³⁶ and invites him to tell the real one, three dimensions change at once. The shot moves from medium to close, the camera turns from frontal to oblique, and the angle drops from eye level to low. Each change affects only Souleymane: the officer is framed identically throughout, so that she is institutionally stable and he is the one to whom the camera responds. The close shot in this interview scene strips his privacy in the moment when the official encourages to tell the real story (the moment of exposure). Before the shift he is seen at a distance, back straight, hands carefully placed; in the close shot he holds his head in one hand and no longer sits upright. The low angle is the surprising element – at the moment the procedure catches him out, the camera drops

¹³⁶ Even that story of yours about the photos with the machetes, I've already heard it twice last week.

below him and looks up, granting him stature rather than diminishing him. When the interview closes with the procedural explanation, all three resolve to where they began.

What the film shows deportability producing

Two things follow from Souleymane's position.

The first is the labour trap. The *récépissé* proves that his claim is pending and simultaneously forbids him to work while he waits. Since he must nonetheless live, he works under Emmanuel's delivery account, paying for the use of it and coordinating with him to defeat the platform's identity checks. The delivery app demands to confirm who is working by doing a selfie. This is precisely what the police catch him at, and the officer names the trap without appearing to notice it: “tu sais que tu peux pas travailler avant *récépissé* en France quand même?”¹³⁷ The selfie scene shows deportability converting into exploitability.

The second is the demand for a performable account. The coaching scene shows what the procedure requires. A woman recounts a forced marriage that reads as true, though the film does not confirm it; Souleymane's account has been bought. Both are coached by the same man for the same procedure, which suggests that what the procedure sorts is not truth but performance. Barry says so directly: “le récit, ce qu'on écrit et ce que tu vas dire... c'est pas la même chose. Il faut qu'on sente que c'est des faits que t'as vécu.”¹³⁸ Mamadou's story is an example of the stakes a performable account has. He and Thierno applied at the same time with identical accounts, and Thierno was granted asylum while he was refused; what separated them was detail, since Mamadou was asked what the prison looked like inside and what was written on its walls and could not say, never having been there. Hearing this, Souleymane says: “je sais pas pourquoi je suis venu en France.”¹³⁹ He is two days from an interview at which he will be required to give an account of precisely that, and the account he has bought describes a persecution he did not undergo. His real reasons have no form the procedure recognises, which is why he was sold a story that does.

The interview confirms it. The account he finally gives explains why he left. His mother is mentally ill; what he earned in Guinea was not enough to care for her, and he had nothing himself “Mais en Guinée, je ne pouvais rien faire. Je n'avais rien. Je n'avais même pas un endroit où dormir.”¹⁴⁰ He went Algeria

¹³⁷ You know you can't work in France before you get your receipt [*récépissé*], right?

¹³⁸ The account, what we write down and what you're going to say... they're not the same thing. It has to feel like these are things you actually experienced.

¹³⁹ I don't know why I came to France.

¹⁴⁰ But in Guinea, I couldn't do anything. I had nothing. I didn't even have a place to sleep.

expecting to work, fell ill, and continued with his friends to Libya, where they were imprisoned and extorted “On nous traitait comme des animaux, comme des... rien du tout. Ils nous ont amenés directement en prison, et tout ce qu’on nous demandait là-bas, c’était de l’argent.”¹⁴¹ Even though the movie does not show whether he received an asylum, generally, poverty is not a ground for protection, nor caring for a sick parent. And the imprisonment and torture in Libya fall outside the procedure's scope, since what is assessed is persecution in the country of origin rather than what the journey itself inflicts. His deportability here is produced partly by lying but also partly by the fact that what happened to him has no admissible form.

6.3. To a Land Unknown

“To a Land Unknown” (Mahdi Fleifel, 2024) is set in present-day Athens, where its two protagonists feel trapped. Chatila and Reda are Palestinian cousins coming from a refugee camp in Lebanon, stateless before they arrived in Europe and undocumented within it. They are saving for forged passports to reach Germany, dreaming of opening a café. Chatila would be the owner, his wife Nabila, currently still in the camp, the cook, and Reda would be the man behind the bar.

The director himself is a Palestinian filmmaker who grew up in Dubai and Denmark, and the film draws on stories he encountered across that displaced life. It opens with an epigraph from Edward Said: “In a way, it's sort of the fate of Palestinians, not to end up where they started, but somewhere unexpected and far away.” Fleifel has named Scorsese, Lumet and De Palma among his influences, and the film is structured as a thriller rather than in the observational realist mode of the other films analysed here.¹⁴²

Two questions drive the film: how to get the money, and how to get out. Each decision that brings them closer to an answer takes them further into criminality, and each is justified by the same hope – that this one will finally get them out.

The migrant as social actor

The protagonists of this film are the most consistently activated in the corpus. Chatila plans, negotiates, assesses, persuades and decides. In the fake documents scene he negotiates, assesses the forged document: “no, that won't work”. And he as well manages the money: “give me two weeks.” In the trust scene that follows right after the fake documents scene, the two of them weigh cost against

¹⁴¹ They treated us like animals, like... like we were nothing. They took us straight to prison, and all they asked us for there was money.

¹⁴² Tara Judah, “To a Land Unknown: Intense Thriller Explores the Lives of Palestinian Exiles,” *Sight and Sound*, 11 February 2025, <https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound/reviews/land-unknown-intense-thriller-explores-lives-palestinian-exiles>.

reliability of the smuggler and compare the alternative routes available to them. Both are strongly activated, they both decide to trust the smuggler, though Reda is anxious throughout, biting his nails. In the becoming-smuggler scene, Chatila plans and persuades: “leave it to me.”

What the film shows is not passivation but a particular deformation of agency. The exploited become the exploiting. Chatila's line “what's a smuggler anyway? They're like us, but they don't give a fuck” points to indifference, rather than locating to character. He is not describing smugglers so much as identifying what he is about to do.

Reda, in many instances, acts as the counterweight, raising doubts and resisting “it'll never work” when Chatila raises the possibility of becoming smugglers. Reda says smugglers “come from a different world”, and later refuses to accept what they have become: “they don't deserve this. We're torturing them. They're just like us.” The phrase “they're just like us” returns from the becoming-smuggler scene, where Chatila used it to dissolve the line between themselves and smugglers. Reda uses it here to restore the line between themselves and the men they are holding.

Nabila (Chatila's wife) is a full character in her own right, named and individualised: waiting for his call, relaying news of Walid, carrying her brothers' contempt for him, voicing her own doubts “hopefully” and her own entrapment: “I'll never get out of this camp.” Nabila is speaking from outside Europe. She's the wife, back home (almost certainly a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, given the film's setup; Chatila is trying to get to Germany to bring the family), raising their son Walid, living with/near her brothers. The call with Nabila scene works through intimacy and irony together. Chatila reassures her that the money is nearly saved, and the sound bridge carries his promise over the image of Reda smoking it. The café, and the “little bit longer,” collapse as he is promising them.

Argumentation

Argumentation to large extent is concentrated in the bad-people scene. Here, Reda uses the topos of justice, arguing that the captives are the same as them and are treated as though they were not. Chatila's answers with topos of reality “get out of the fantasy world you're living in. Look at the shit we're in. Tell me, what has the world given you?”

A topos of humanitarianism appears instrumentally in the rationalisation of exploitation of a minor “we'll help the kid out too”, “God sent him to us”, as well as during the call with Malik's aunt: “we want him to get out of here as much as you do. We've grown fond of Malik.”

Mitigation and intensification

The scene intensifies what is being planned while the language mitigates it. The exploitation of a vulnerable minor is rationalised as assistance "we'll help the kid out too", "God sent him to us" - a topos of humanitarianism laid over a plan to use him. The camera closes in precisely at "we'll help the kid too."

Mitigation here is performed by the film's protagonists. In the call with Malik's aunt, Chatila distances himself from other smugglers: "yes, auntie, but we aren't like the others. They'll ask you to pay upfront to a middleman. Then the middleman disappears, like you saw." He describes this fraud in precise detail because he himself fell victim to it, and it is precisely that precision that lends him credibility. He reassures her by distancing himself from the smuggler category. The second mitigating move is kinship: "we want him to get out of here as much as you do. We've grown fond of Malik.". In the end of the day, these arguments serve to receive money and human-trafficking.

The smuggler is again constructed positively, mostly valued for his reliability: "He actually gets people into Germany." Chatila and Reda assess him, weighing cost against the likelihood that he delivers, and comparing the routes available to them. Intensification can be noticed in the moment the routes are compared "At least we aren't getting fucked trying to cross the borders on foot. Or suffocating in the back of a truck. We'll be taking a plane." Showing the contrast, the scene then turns immediately to the café "I swear, this café idea is no joke", giving strong personalisation to the actors.

In the Tatiana scene, the act is called out directly. Tatiana refuses to go through with it and says what it is: "it's human trafficking, Malaka." Chatila immediately renames it: "you're helping a little boy." The same act is given two descriptions: the legal one and the humanitarian one, and it is the second that Chatila uses to persuade Tatiana to continue. Chatila is coercive, then manipulative. He demands, searches her belongings, finds the ID she has hidden, and only when he recognises her fear, he changes the register: "you are scared," the pause, sitting beside her, "tomorrow you come back and it's all gonna be finished... it's gonna be okay," a hug, a kiss on the forehead. The tenderness is what overrides her refusal, and the film leaves it ambiguous, does not settle whether it is feigned. The Tatiana scene shows the relation between mitigation and intensification at its most prominence.

The anger scene is the film's most intense passage. Chatila frames his departure as sacrifice "I was worried you'd kill yourself. I'd got married, had a kid. Know what I left behind?". Reda refuses the framing "What? What did you leave? Nothing. You were unemployed, broke, and dying to come to Europe." In the film, this journey is not portrayed as a noble act of self-sacrifice. Chatila also left behind

poverty. This scene also shows how the pressure caused by their situation takes on a different form. With no way to change the circumstances that force them to remain in Athens, Chatila and Reda turn away from each other.

The decisive line is Chatila's: "I know they don't deserve it. I also don't want to do this." He is not deceived about what he is doing and does not believe it is justified. The film portrays them as people who run out of alternatives. Around this, Chatila mitigates continuously. He minimises "it's not that bad", "he's bullshitting" and defers the harm into an imagined future repair: "when we get to Germany, we'll make it up to them. Who knows? Maybe we can send them money and bring them over." Reda refuses the mitigation: "you'll forget about them. Just like that Greek woman." The film does not let the softening stand.

Visual Patterns Across the Film

The most distinctive technique setting this film apart from the others in the corpus is the sound bridge: the audio of one scene continues over the image of the next. It allows the film to place a claim and its refutation in the same moment. During the call with Nabila, Chatila's reassurance that they have almost saved enough carries over a high-angle long shot of Reda smoking the drugs he has bought with that money. Therefore, the hope is spoken and disproved simultaneously.

The second finding is a systematic vertical asymmetry. In four of the ten scenes analysed (specifically, trust, anger, becoming-smuggler and dream) the camera sits below Chatila and above Reda. In such a way, the camera grants Chatila more power. Where *Tori and Lokita* holds a uniform eye level, Fleifel's framing encodes a hierarchy between the two men, granting Chatila stature and placing Reda beneath him. It appears in the scenes where Chatila is making the case and Reda is hesitating.

The camera is tethered to the body in the conflict scenes: in the bad-people scene it lowers as Chatila sits and rises as he stands, the same relation to the body and observed in "*Tori and Lokita*".

Oblique framing dominates. The characters face one another rather than the viewer, so that their exchanges are observed laterally; viewers are rarely addressed. Contact is offer throughout: neither man looks at the camera. What varies is the direction of the gaze, which is mutual between the two of them in the private scenes and directed at whoever they are dealing with elsewhere – the forger, Malik's aunt on the phone screen, Tatiana. In such a way, Chatila and Reda are standing one ground when interacting with others.

Social distance is predominantly medium and long. Closeness is reserved rather than default: the trust and dream scenes are shot close, and the becoming-smuggler scene moves into a close shot at the point where the plan is rationalised as help.

What the film shows deportability producing

What is distinct in this film, that deportability does not create passivation as much as it corrupts. The fake documents scene establishes the starting position. It shares with “Tori and Lokita” and “Souleymane's Story” the manufacture of an admissible identity; the process of seeking a forged document standing in for a wanted status (that cannot be obtained legally for specific reasons). What differs is the figure of the smuggler. In the fake document scene, he is competent and reliable – he delivers, “I found it”, and Chatila acknowledges the skill: “you really are a pro”. He is also relaxed and sociable: “Are you keeping out of trouble?”, “Drink your tea”. The relationship is a working one, and close to warm. Nothing in the composition subordinates anyone; the shot is medium, the angle is oblique as the three face one another, the camera at eye level and stable. What the scene shows is a transaction between equals, conducted calmly, with the smuggler as a service provider rather than a predator.

The becoming-smuggler scene is the pivotal scene in the film. Having been exploited, they become the exploiters, and the film is explicit that this follows from the situation rather than from character. The opposition between reality and rhetoric is explicit. Reality – planning of exploiting a minor, but framing it through the prism of helping the kid.

The constant of the film is something that also appears in all the other films of the corpus – dreams, what they want. It is rather modest. Reda asks Chatila to describe the café, though he already knows it “talking about it always relaxes you”. Therefore, the account seems to be a ritual they return to for comfort. What Chatila describes is modest: a small shop in an Arab neighbourhood, no great sum of money required, a big ashtray on his desk, Nabila running the kitchen, Reda behind the bar. The dream is then given its source: his father's café, where “every story from that neighbourhood was discussed” and which “brought everyone together.” Reda remembers the blue chairs. They both are dreaming of creating a place where they are known and connected with the people around them.

6.4. Limbo

Limbo (Ben Sharrock, 2020) follows Omar, a young Syrian musician, and three other men awaiting decisions on their asylum claims on a beautiful remote Scottish island (fictional place, seems to be mostly deserted). It is the one film in the corpus set outside the European Union, and the one with a comedic tone: a serious comedy-drama in which the humour is how the men bear their situation, and in which the

absurdity reveals a cruelty that, in other case, a serious approach might have turned into a sentimental story. Sharrock studied in Damascus shortly before the outbreak of the civil war, and the film draws on personal stories from his network of friends there. He has named the Palestinian director Elia Suleiman as an influence, and the film's register combines dry British humour with a comedic absurdism. It was part of the Cannes Official Selection in 2020 and screened at Toronto and the BFI London Film Festival.¹⁴³

This movie is a bit different from the rest of the movies in this thesis. Two main differences were identified. The first is that the asylum procedure is entirely off-screen. In this movie we do not hear anything about the preparation for the asylum interview, let alone see the interview itself. There is no interview, no preparation for one, and no decision for the main protagonist. Where the other three films locate their densest material in the encounter between migrant and institution, here that encounter never takes place. The second is that the protagonists do not turn to illegal work or criminality. Omar states plainly that he is not permitted to work, and when a local offers him cash in hand at the fish factory he does not take it up. What viewers experience watching is exactly what the title says – a limbo status. The main protagonists are already simply waiting for their decisions – they are watching TV series “Friends”, they encounter local people (which seem to be very few left), and their racist discriminatory worldviews, which nevertheless are presented in a light-hearted way.

The migrant as a social actor

Omar is nominated, personalised and individualised, and passivated by the condition rather than by any other character in the movie. He cannot work, cannot earn, cannot send money home and cannot say how long he will wait: “Mum, I told you. I can't work without asylum.”

The agency retained is exercised among the men themselves. In the new flat mate scene, Farhad returns to the house with a stolen chicken, introduced as their new flatmate “Freddie Jr.” Abedi distances himself, Wasef teases him about being afraid of chickens, and the comedy runs until Omar cuts it off: “if they notice, the first place they're going to look is with the migrants with no money or morals.” Abedi objects – “we have morals, okay?” – and Omar clarifies that he is quoting a suspicion, not endorsing it: “that's what they think.”

¹⁴³ “Limbo,” Screen Scotland, accessed 20 July 2026, <https://www.screen.scot/film-in-scotland/made-in-scotland/film/limbo>.

The film gives much attention to what the men want. Wasef would play for Chelsea, Farhad would work in an office. Omar's want is harder to name, and the film gives it an object instead: he carries his oud everywhere and does not play it. In a film where nothing happens, the imagined future is the only place agency exists, and Abedi names the economy of it: "it's a good thing that God made dreaming free."

Wasef is the film's analytic voice. He reads the group's situation and names it. He does so from inside the experience he describes (will be mentioned more in the "Argumentation" passage).

The men are also constructed by other. In the encounter on the road (not a tourist scene) Omar is taken for a tourist, then he is placed as "not from around here", then absorbed into a demographic "we're looking at a 25 % population increase with you lot arriving." The scene closes with an offer of work: "the fish processing plant is looking for folk just like you". He is othered as "you lot" and recruited as "folk just like you" in the same conversation. The situation depicts immigrants unwanted as a population and useful as labour. There is no violence and no drama in any of this. The exchange is friendly throughout, and it is othering.

Argumentation

The voluntary return scene is rich in activation for all four men. They joke, borrow things, tease one another and talk about what they will do if they are allowed to stay. "Friends" plays in the background; Farhad announces he will borrow Omar's coat, and Omar asks how he can get "Friends" from the donation centre but not a coat. Wasef says "I hope you get deported" and Abedi answers, "probably better than being stuck here with you." It is exactly inside this exchange that Wasef makes the short speech containing one of the film's central arguments, voiced by a character analysing his own position.

WASEF: You know they put us out here in the middle of nowhere to try and break us.

OMAR: What do you mean?

WASEF: They try to get us to volunteer to go home. We're all single, male, low priority, past the sell-by date. Look. Afghanistan: best before 2003. Sudan: best before 2006. Iraq: best before 2005. But I thought they were rolling out the red carpet for Syrians.

ABEDI: Maybe you came a year too late.

There are four points to single out. Firstly, the reading of the placement itself: "they put us out here in the middle of nowhere to try and break us." The remoteness is presented as a conscious method.

Visually, the film shows the island as a beautiful landscape, Wasef reads it as an instrument. Secondly, he explains what the method is for. “They try to get us to volunteer to go home.” Wasef names the mechanism by which a departure becomes voluntary: make remaining unbearable for long enough, and leaving will be chosen. The word “volunteer” is his, and he uses it to describe something that is not a choice. The third point is the hierarchy. “We're all single, male, low priority, past the sell-by date.” The men know which category they occupy – not children, not families, not the visibly vulnerable. He sees it as the factor determining how their claims will be treated. The final fourth is the temporal logic: “Afghanistan: best before 2003. Sudan: best before 2006. Iraq: best before 2005.” Recognition is figured as a product with an expiry date. In other words, the outcome of an asylum claim depends on whether the situation behind it is currently recognised. Wasef applies this to Omar – “I thought they were rolling out the red carpet for Syrians” - and Abedi completes it: “maybe you came a year too late.” Even the favourable category has a window, and it closes.

Mitigation and intensification

Mitigation as well here is performed by the men themselves. Omar softens his situation during the call with his parents, he reassures “it's not like that”, “I'm OK”. In the waiting scene, even after waiting for thirty-two months, Farhad sustains himself on a hope “but... letter will come.” The humour works for the same purpose. For instance, in the conversation between Abedi and Wasef (Voluntary return scene) deportation become a punchline – “I hope you get deported”. And the answer follows “probably better than being stuck here with you brother”.

There are no dramatic scenes in this film, and the intensification comes from ordinary exchanges. Farhad's answer to how long he has waited is exact: “thirty-two months and five days.” Nearly three years, counted to the day, because when nothing happens, time becomes the only thing left to measure. Abdul, in the English class (“I used to” scene), offers a sentence that is not an exercise: “I used to be happy before I came here. I used to cry myself to sleep every night. But now I don't have any tears left.” The teacher responds not to what he has said but to its form: “brilliant, you have just jumped to our next lesson on ‘I used to be’.” The tense in question is the tense of irrecoverable loss, and Abdul has demonstrated the grammatical shape of his condition.

Visual construction

This film works through image, silence and duration much more than through dialogue. The sentences exchanged are short, and what carries the meaning is often the background, the colours, the stillness, the pauses. And so, visual analysis did a much bigger part than in the others.

Firstly, the camera here never really shakes or trembles – it is rather stable throughout, and even when it moves to follow an action, it turns steadily. Then secondly, the social distance is as well different from the other movies – long and even very-long shots dominate. Characters in many of the scenes are small figure in vast, empty (and really beautiful) landscape, which may be read as the visual register of being place “in the middle of nowhere”. The distance, though, does not create the coldness towards the protagonists, but rather shows their isolation.

And so close shots are really rationed, used to intensify the crucial parts – “we're all single, male, low priority”, or just before “but letter will come”, and Farhad through the glass. Therefore, the distance is the default category here, and intimate close scenes are very reserved. The characters themselves are very still, they are mostly shown facing the camera from the front, and even from a far. Contact is offer throughout.

What the film shows deportability producing

What this film shows, uniquely in the corpus, is what the condition produces when nothing else happens.

The first is suspension. The call with Omar’s parents (the call with mum scene) establishes the film's condition without any institutional encounter. Omar, on the island awaiting a decision, calls his parents in Istanbul, themselves displaced. The call is full of small mismatches: his mother thought he was going to London; she suggests Germany or Sweden instead, where she has heard they are “nicer to Syrians”; his father asks whether it is like Guantanamo. They ask whether he can send money, and he cannot “Mum, I told you. I can't work without asylum.” She offers instead to send Makdous. She asks about his hand, still in a cast and still unchecked. The exchange that names the condition is about time: “how long is it going to take?” – “I don't know. A few months or more.” – “More? What if they say no?” There is no date and no certainty, only duration and the possibility of refusal at the end of it.

The coat is the film's running detail on the same condition. Farhad acquires a ping-pong table and a bicycle, and each time Omar asks where they came from the answer is the donation centre. What he cannot get is a coat. The provision available to them supplies everything except the thing they need, and the joke is repeated because nothing about the situation changes throughout the whole film.

The second is compliance. The men do not take up illegal work, and the flatmate scene explains why. Farhad returns with a stolen chicken, the comedy runs, and Omar cuts it off: “one wrong step, and they will deport you, or all of us.” Abedi adds, “like the guys at the fish factory” – they know about a local precedent. Deportability here is produced by permanent exposure: any infraction, however small, can end everything, and not only for the person who commits it. The liability is collective. This is also the reason why the men do not take up illegal work. Not out of virtue, but because the cost of being caught is shared. The condition produces here not criminality but rather a self-surveillance. Omar is the one who enforces it: “you have to give it back”, “you have to put the chicken back.”

The third is the erosion of a prior self. Farhad's imagined future is modest – a suit, a shirt and tie, black coffee, eggs sunny-side up, a desk, a telephone, “and I answer phone, and I say, ‘Hello. How may I help you today?’” The specificity is the point; he has imagined it down to the breakfast and the phone script. He also grasps how acceptance works here: “in this country, I think people like you more if you wear suit” (deservingness). Belonging is understood as a costume, and the performance that the asylum claim requires does not end when status arrives. The scene acquires a second meaning later, when Omar turns these details into an accusation “you want to wear a suit? Eggs sunny-side up?” Farhad answers that he could not go back because he cannot be himself at home. What Omar reads as material aspiration turns out to be a description of safety.

6.5. Cross-film synthesis

After conducting the analysis of the film corpus, four reoccurring patterns were identified.

The prohibition on working, and what it produces. All four films touch upon the fact that migrants waiting for their asylum status to be approved, are barred from legal employment, and in all four films this prohibition is what shapes what follows. The responses though differ. In *Tori and Lokita*, Lokita sings in Betim's restaurant and sells drugs for him, as well as is sexually abused by the same man. In *Souleymane's Story*, Souleymane rides under Emmanuel's delivery account, paying for the use of it. In *To a Land Unknown*, Chatila and Reda save for forged passports by stealing, as well as, in Reda's case, by providing sexual services. Eventually, by trafficking a child. In *Limbo*, by contrast, the men comply: Omar states plainly that he is not permitted to work, and does not take up the cash-in-hand offer at the fish factory.

The interview, and the account it requires. Three of the four films build toward an asylum interview, and in each the same thing occurs: the account the procedure requires is not the account the

person has. Lokita fabricates a sibling relationship because the bond she actually has with Tori is not a recognised category. Souleymane buys and memorises a political persecution story he did not undergo. In the same movie, Mamadou and Thierno submit identical accounts and receive opposite decisions. In *Limbo* the interview is absent altogether, and the same point emerges from the outcome: Farhad is granted, and Omar's case remains unresolved. Despite many untold resolutions of the accounts, across the four films, what determines the decision is not the truth of the claim, and often not the claim at all.

The dreams, and their modesty. Every film includes a passage in which a character describes the life they are trying to reach, and in every case that dream life is modest and simple in its account. Lokita would have become a an *aide ménagère* and lived with Tori in Belgium. Chatila wants a small café in an Arab neighbourhood, with Nabila (his wife) cooking and Reda behind the bar. Farhad wants an office job, a suit, and eggs sunny-side up. And while Omar's is not so clear, it seems, he wants to continue playing Oud. None of these cases is an ambition in any expansive sense; each is a description of ordinary settled life. These passages though tend to sit immediately beside danger or wrongdoing – the café dream fall between the calculation of which route is at least likely to kill them and the decision to pose as smugglers.

Personalisation against criminality. The films give their protagonists both full agency, including the agency to harm others, and full personalisation. The scenes in which they telephone home – Souleymane to his family, Chatila to Nabila, Omar and Lokita both to their mothers – establish who these people are outside the procedure that is assessing them. The result is that the viewer cannot resolve them into either victims or offenders. The characters perform that judgement themselves and refuse to settle it. For instance, Reda tells Chatila “we are bad people”, and Chatila answers that he knows the captives do not deserve it and does not want to do it either. As well as Souleymane, when finally telling his true story about the reason of coming to France and seeking asylum, finishes his account reminiscing on his mother's teaching to never lie. And so, such depictions balance on showing the criminal actions and deep personalisation. The films therefore make judgment difficult.

This is not, however, an invitation to the viewer to decide whether the protagonists deserve asylum. What the films show is that deservingness is not settled on those grounds. In some instances, even similar accounts receive opposite decisions.

A few remarks specifically on the **synthesis of the visual analysis.** The films differ in composition, colour, angle and social distance, which made identifying patterns more difficult. One holds across the corpus nonetheless: none of the films looks down on its protagonists. In the scenes analysed there is no

high angle on a migrant character anywhere – the diminishing position, with the camera placed above the person it observes, is not adopted in any of the four. The films differ, however, in how they use the vertical dimension. *Tori and Lokita* maintains a uniform eye level throughout, including the scenes with officials, so that no hierarchy is established through angle at all. *To a Land Unknown* uses verticality to rank its two protagonists against each other, sitting below Chatila and above Reda in the scenes where Chatila is pressing Reda towards a decision. *Souleymane's Story* holds eye level except at a single moment: when the officer exposes the fabricated account, the camera drops beneath him and looks up, which can be read as granting him stature at the point when he is giving a true account. *Limbo* holds level throughout, but at a distance, framing its characters as small figures in an empty landscape.

7. Comparative Analysis

7.1. Social actor construction compared

In the case of **activation**, the political corpora tends to passivate migrants (meaning, they are acted upon by someone else). More interesting, however, are the cases where migrants are activated, since they are activated almost exclusively in verbs of transgression: to abscond, to overstay, to lodge multiple applications, to "not leave but stay." The films also show migrants acting illegally. In three of the four, with "Limbo" as the exception. Nevertheless, the difference lies in the information around it. In the political corpus, transgression is presented as a feature of migrant's behaviour. Phrases such as "those who abscond," "abuse the system," "lodge multiple applications," or "do not leave but stay" focus on migrants' actions and portray these behaviours as characteristic of the migrants themselves. These actions are then used to justify enforcement measures. Little attention is given to the circumstances or conditions that might explain such behaviour. Instead, the behaviour itself is treated as sufficient justification for enforcement. In films, in contrast, and this is where these corpora diverge, the wrongdoing is traced to something. Lokita runs drugs *because* she cannot work and owes the smugglers and needs to send money to her mother. Chatila traffics Malik because legal routes are shut. And the films show the characters knowing it's wrong. For instance, Reda's "we are bad people," Chatila's "I know they don't deserve it. I also don't want to do this." The act, in this case, is not evidence of a disposition or tendency. Rather, it's the visible end of a chain the film depicts. To put it in one sentence, both corpora activate migrants through transgression. But while in the speeches the transgression comes first (a cause, therefore enforcement), in the films the transgression comes last (foreclosure, therefore transgression), as a culmination of events that precede it.

Summarising the findings in the case of **personalisation**, the differences are less subtle. The impersonalisation / aggregation is often used in political corpora (“400,000 arrivals,” “border crossings,” “applications,” the return-rate percentages) and collectivisation (“those who come,” “those with no right to stay”). Personalisation is a relatively rare case, mostly found in Johansson or in some case in van der Leeuwen speeches. And even in these instances, often via victimisation. Films, on the other hand, work on individualisation and nomination throughout. Named people having close relations with mothers, sons, wives, having dreams. Johansson's observation comes here in hand “it's such a huge difference when you have the names of those coming... it's so much easier for a country to welcome these.”

Turning the analysis around, the question stills yet also on “what's the role of institution?” or “where the institutions stand here?” And this is an important aspect to note. In political corpus, institutions are activated – they act, decide, initiate. In the films, though, it is a barely a visible dimension. Lokita's interviewer is never in the frame, no reverse shot; Souleymane's officer holds a fixed framing while Souleymane's shifts on three axes; in “Limbo” the procedure is entirely off-screen. To simplify the equation, generally, the speeches make the migrants invisible, and the institution is the main active actor, while the films make the migrant entirely visible, but the institution tends to be merely a voice.

7.2. Topoi compared

The first thing to note is an asymmetry in the material itself. Of the discursive strategies drawn from the DHA, argumentation is heavily present in the speeches and relatively rarely present in the films. The political discourse argues for the instruments through which expulsion is carried out (the Pact, faster procedures, the Return Regulation). The films, on the other hand, show what the condition produces. And where films do argue, it is their characters arguing with one another rather than the film addressing the viewer. This asymmetry means the comparison below concerns a smaller set of shared topoi than the political corpus alone would suggest.

One of the clearest differences – the construction of smuggler. In three movies analysed (all except for “Limbo”, where no such figure appears), the smuggler is someone who does the job that needs to be done. Smugglers are multifaceted – they are money-earning, not to be trusted, sometimes vicious, but also the only ones seen as capable of getting the protagonists where they want to go. Despite largely negative characteristics, the migrants choose to cooperate with them (or to become them in the case of “To a Land Unknown”) because the alternative they see is remaining where they are or to be expelled. The same movie also dissolves the category of a smuggler “What's a smuggler anyway? They're like us,

but they don't give a fuck.” The smuggler is therefore described not as a type of person, but rather a position, that anyone could end up occupying. This is where the contrast with political corpora is the clearest, where the smuggler is external and carries the explanation for migrant suffering, since migrants are victims “lured with false promises”. The films remove the externality and the explanation. The smuggler remains a migrant who stopped caring, and the harm is not his alone.

Topos of abuse is inverted. In the political corpus, the abuse source is mostly migrants who abuse the system. Migrants abscond, overstay, lodge repeated applications, exploit loopholes. In the films, abuse towards the migrants is highlighted, and removability is the reason for it. Lokita cannot refuse Betim's terms and cannot report him. Souleymane pays a hundred and twenty euros a week for the use of an account he is not permitted to hold in his own name. And in “To a Land Unknown” the exploited become exploiters. Films name the condition of removability to be the cause for such situations.

7.3. Mitigation vs intensification: expulsion, return, deportation

The mitigation traced in 5.3 is systematic. Expulsion is never named as such: the word does not appear, and neither does deportation. Removal is return, force is balanced against fairness, coercion is carried out in full respect of fundamental rights, and departure, where possible, is voluntary. The films use none of this vocabulary, and not necessarily because they reject it. Their characters have no occasion to use it, since these are the terms of those administering the system. What Lokita and Souleymane talk about is papers.

Two passages in the film corpus make the mitigation mechanism visible by naming it. The first is Wasef's account (“Limbo”) of why the men have been placed on a remote island: “they put us out here in the middle of nowhere to try and break us... they try to get us to volunteer to go home.” Brunner describes the same relation from the other end: “this in turn strengthens voluntary returns, as forced return becomes a clear and credible instrument.” The word is the same, but the difference is that one describes it as policy design and the other as something being done to him.

The films mitigate too. Chatila rationalises continuously, Omar softens his situation for parents who cannot reach it, and the men in “Limbo” manage their position through jokes about deportation. The difference is that the films show the act as well as the description of it. Chatila calls it helping a little boy, and the audience has seen him searching Tatiana's room for the ID she hid. The political corpus offers only its own account, and there is nothing beside it against which the description can be measured.

Both corpora intensify migrant suffering. The difference lies in the question to whom the suffering is attributed to. In the political corpus, suffering is attributed to smugglers, therefore the enforcement of stricter rules is justified through the argumentation that smugglers cannot continue benefiting from this situation and torturing migrants. The activation is generally put on smugglers, while migrants remain passive. In the case of the films, the suffering is more attributed to the system itself (the asylum procedure, the prohibition on work, the waiting). Smuggler figure is a more ambiguous figure, neither fully a villain nor fully a saviour, and in “To a Land Unknown” a position anyone in their situation might occupy. Therefore, looking from above, there is the same intensification in both corpora, but the cause is rather different.

7.4. Answering the research question

The three possible outcomes set out at the start of this thesis were convergence, divergence, and partial overlap. What the analysis shows is that the two corpora construct the deportable migrant in opposite ways at the level of social actors (aggregated and passivated in the speeches, individualised and activated in the films) and they attribute the suffering they both depict to different causes. But they also converge – both give the smuggler a central place, even if the role differs. And both intensify what migrants undergo, though not for the same reasons.

Before setting out what the relationship reveals, one qualification is needed, since skimming this thesis might give the impression that the films are more moral, or offer a more accurate representation of migrants and expulsion. That is not the claim being made. The speeches were noticed to be more focused on the EU and its Member States rather than on migrants, and therefore the expulsion is explained through that dimension. The films have no institutional adherence and no obligation to propose a common strategy. They are focused by nature on an individual story, which allows a continuous and explicit narrative. Their purpose is different – not to propose a solution but to open up the problematic points. Analysed alone, the political discourse tells you about institutional framing, and whether one finds it persuasive depends largely on one's view of expulsion as a governance tool. Analysed alone, the films tell you about individual experience, mostly difficult and often tragic, and the evaluation again depends on one's prior position. Reading them together offers something neither provides alone. It shows what each leaves out – not out of bad faith, but as a consequence of what each kind of discourse is for – and it also shows where they agree. The prominence of the smuggler is one such point, even though the figure is explained very differently in each.

That the two fields mean different things by expulsion is not a dramatic result. It amounts more or less to the hypothesis with which this research began, and the personalisation and impersonalisation contrast could have been anticipated by anyone familiar with both fields. What seems more important is the stability within each field. The discourse in each does not vary as much as might be expected, and where the political corpus does vary, the variation is chronological rather than personal: specific developments appear to shape how deportation is spoken about more than individual actors or party affiliations do. Across the period, both fields remain largely faithful to the terms already established within them, rarely challenging their own settled ideas or admitting perspectives from outside. That is what a more nuanced conversation about deportation would require – one that could ask which aspects of it carry most weight, on what argumentation, and which European values (quite often referred to either directly or indirectly in both fields), invoked constantly in both fields, matter most in this conversation.

Conclusions

When the EU political actors use the term ‘returns,’ what kind of phenomenon are they constructing? And when European cinema depicts the condition of being removable, what does it make visible? These were the leading questions in the writing of this thesis. The aim was to examine how political and cinematic discourse construct expulsion and the figure of the deportable migrant, and what these constructions reveal about the meaning attached to expulsion.

The analysis finds neither complete convergence nor complete divergence between political and cinematic discourse. Rather, the two corpora construct the deportable migrant from fundamentally different standpoints while retaining several important points of overlap. At the level of social-actor representation, the contrast is clear. Across the political corpus, migrants are predominantly categorised rather than named, aggregated into figures, and passivated: they are acted upon by smugglers, procedures and circumstances. Where migrants are activated, their agency is frequently associated with transgression – absconding, abusing procedures, remaining without authorisation or otherwise failing to comply. In the films, by contrast, deportability is attached to particular people. Migrants are individualised, named and activated, and expulsion is encountered through their relationships, decisions, aspirations and everyday constraints. This distinction is a finding of the comparative analysis: the speeches predominantly aggregate and passivate, while the films individualise and activate.

The difference, however, goes beyond personalisation. The two fields construct expulsion from different positions. Political discourse approaches it primarily from the standpoint of the European Union and its Member States: their borders, resources, credibility, procedures and capacity to control migration.

Consequently, expulsion emerges primarily as a problem of governance. The films reverse this perspective. They do not ask principally whether a return system functions, and do not address the question of the functioning system or satisfied societies, but show what deportability means for the person who lives under it. Waiting, restrictions on work, asylum procedures, economic vulnerability, as well as the possibility of removal become part of everyday experience. This difference in standpoint is central to why the same underlying practice acquires different meanings in the two fields.

Yet the findings should not be reduced to an opposition between an impersonal political discourse and a humanitarian cinema. There are significant points of convergence. Both corpora intensify migrant suffering, and both assign a prominent role to smugglers. What differs is the attribution of responsibility. In the political corpus, suffering is frequently attributed to smugglers, allowing stronger enforcement to be presented partly as a means of protecting migrants from exploitation. In the films, suffering is more often connected to the conditions surrounding migration itself – asylum procedures, waiting, restrictions on employment and the condition of deportability, while smugglers occupy a more ambiguous position. The difference is therefore in the questions of how its cause is explained and what response that explanation makes reasonable.

This distinction becomes particularly visible in the treatment of the tension between humanitarian norms and removal logics. Political discourse largely resolves this tension through language. Expulsion becomes return; removal is situated alongside voluntariness; enforcement is repeatedly articulated together with fairness and fundamental rights. Neither expulsion nor deportation appears in the five years of Commission discourse analysed in this thesis; migrants are instead consistently described as being returned. The discourse constructs expulsion in terms that make enforcement compatible with a humanitarian register. The films do something different: they leave the tension unresolved. They place procedural and humanitarian claims alongside the consequences experienced by individual characters without necessarily reconciling the two. As the comparative analysis showed, the result is that expulsion acquires a different end-meaning in each field: in the films, it is predominantly encountered as a personal condition and possible tragedy; within political discourse, as an element of a stable and functioning migration-management system. This finding should not be interpreted as demonstrating that cinema provides a more truthful representation while political discourse provides a false, or vice versa. The two corpora perform different functions and are produced under different conditions. European Commission actors speak from institutions responsible for proposing, explaining and legitimising common migration policy. The films have neither an obligation to design a workable migration system nor to reconcile competing Member State interests; their narrative form instead permits sustained attention to individual

experience. The value of comparing the two lies precisely in their difference. Read together, they make visible what each discourse excludes from its principal frame. Both political speeches and films participate in producing what expulsion means. Political speeches and films are therefore not simply sources of information about deportation, but rather they are sites where the meaning of deportation and the figure of the deportable migrant are actively produced and contested.

A short assessment of the suitability of the theoretical framework. Three observations have been made. Firstly, van Leeuwen's social actor categories worked across both corpora, and this made the systematic comparison possible. The same questions could be asked of a Commission speech and of a film scene alike. The second observation concerns what did not transfer. Topoi are drawn from a taxonomy developed for argumentative discourse, and the film corpus largely does not argue. Where argumentation appears in the films it is voiced by characters in dispute with one another rather than advanced by the film. This became a finding of its own in Chapter 7, but it was not anticipated at the outset, and it meant the framework was applied unevenly across the two corpora. The third observation concerns selection. A subset of van Leeuwen's inventory and a subset of Reisigl and Wodak's topoi were applied, chosen for their possible relevance to discourse on migration and returns. This was needed given the scale of both frameworks, but certain findings were possibly not touched upon. For instance, genericization, which was not included in the coding frame, and in retrospect, it might have been productive. The formulations beginning "those who" were coded as categorisation, which captures their classificatory function but not their generic reference.

Further research could therefore examine how these constructions relate to public understanding of expulsion. A recent 2025 YouGov survey found that, among respondents who supported large-scale returns, support was strongest for removing migrants perceived as breaking rules, including those claiming benefits or entering irregularly to seek asylum.¹⁴⁴ Another direction for further research is to explore the relationship between political and cinematic discourse through the IOM's practice of screening films in host communities where returnees often face suspicion or scepticism. This could provide a more direct setting for examining how cinematic discourse interacts with public perceptions of return and returnees. The comparative methodological approach developed in this thesis could provide a basis for such research, offering a way to analyse political and cinematic discourses with a shared analytical framework. A further possible research direction concerns the analytical categories themselves. This thesis applied a subset of van Leeuwen's inventory and a subset of Reisigl and Wodak's topoi,

¹⁴⁴ "YouGov, "What Do Europeans Think about Immigration?," 16 December 2025, <https://yougov.com/en-gb/articles/53744-what-do-europeans-think-about-immigration>.

selected in advance. A study applying the fuller inventories (e.g., backgrounding, genericisation, or the topoi excluded here) might identify argumentative and representational patterns this analysis was not designed to detect.

Santrauka

Šiame magistro darbe analizuojama, kaip išsiuntimas ir migranto, kuriam gresia išsiuntimas, figūra konstruojami Europos Sąjungos politiniame diskurse ir šiuolaikiniame Europos kine 2020–2025 m. Darbo tikslas – išanalizuoti šias dvi skirtingose srityse kuriamas išsiuntimo sampratas, jas palyginti ir nustatyti, ką jų santykis atskleidžia apie išsiuntimui suteikiamą reikšmę. Tyrime keliamas klausimas, kaip ES politiniai veikėjai ir Europos kino kūrėjai konstruoja migranto, kuriam gresia išsiuntimas, figūrą ir ką šių konstrukcijų santykis atskleidžia apie išsiuntimo prasmę.

Tyrimas remiasi kritinės diskurso analizės prieiga, pirmiausia Reisigl ir Wodak diskurso istoriniu metodu. Abiem analizuojamiems korpusams taikomos van Leeuwen socialinių veikėjų kategorijos, argumentacijos topas bei švelninimo ir intensyvinimo strategijų analizė. Tyrimą taip pat konceptualiai papildė nusipelnymo (deservingness) ir galimybės būti deportuotam (deportability) sąvokos, o kino vizualiniam lygmeniui analizuoti pasitelkiama Kress ir van Leeuwen vizualinės gramatikos teorija. Politinį korpusą sudaro 2020–2025 m. keturių Europos Komisijos atstovų (Ursulos von der Leyen, Margaritis Schinas, Ylvo Johansson ir Magnuso Brunnerio) kalbos bei pareiškimai migracijos ir grąžinimo klausimais. Kino korpusą sudaro keturi to paties laikotarpio Europos filmai: „Limbo“, „Tori and Lokita“, „Souleymane’s Story“ ir „To a Land Unknown“.

Tyrimo rezultatai parodė, kad politinis ir kino diskursas nei visiškai sutampa, nei visiškai išsiskiria. Ryškiausias skirtumas atsiskleidžia konstruojant patį migrantą. Politiniame diskurse migrantai dažniausiai kategorizuojami, apibendrinami statistiniais dydžiais ir vaizduojami kaip veiksmo objektai. Tais atvejais, kai jiems suteikiamas aktyvus vaidmuo, jų veikimas dažnai siejamas su taisyklių pažeidimu, pavyzdžiui, slapstymusi, procedūrų išnaudojimu, neteisėtu pasilikimu ar kitokiu reikalavimų nevykdymu. Kino diskurse, priešingai, išsiuntimo grėsmė siejama su konkrečiais žmonėmis: migrantai įvardijami, individualizuojami ir vaizduojami kaip aktyvūs veikėjai, mezgantys santykius, turintys siekius, pasirinkimus.

Skiriasi ir pozicija, iš kurios konstruojamas pats išsiuntimas. ES politiniame diskurse jis pirmiausia pateikiamas iš ES ir valstybių narių perspektyvos, t.y., jų sienų, patikimumo, procedūrų ir gebėjimo valdyti migraciją. Todėl išsiuntimas daugiausia konstruojamas kaip migracijos valdymo klausimas. Filmuose perspektyva apverčiama: dėmesys sutelkiamas į tai, ką gyvenimas išsiuntimo grėsmės sąlygomis reiškia konkrečiam žmogui. Laukimas, prieglobsčio procedūros, darbo apribojimai, ekonominis pažeidžiamumas ir nuolatinė išsiuntimo galimybė tampa kasdienės patirties dalimi.

Vis dėlto abu diskursai turi ir panašumų. Abiejuose kalbama apie migrantų patiriamus sunkumus ir svarbus vaidmuo tenka kontrabandininkams. Tačiau skiriasi tai, kas laikoma šių sunkumų priežastimi. Politiniame diskurse jie dažnai siejami su kontrabandininkų veikla. Todėl griežtesnė migracijos kontrolė gali būti pateikiama kaip būdas apsaugoti migrantus. Filmuose migrantų patiriami sunkumai dažniau siejami su pačia migracijos sistema, t.y., prieglobsčio procedūromis, ilgu laukimu, darbo apribojimais ir išsiuntimo grėsme.

Tyrimas nevertina nei vieno iš šių diskursų kaip „teisingesnio“ už kitą. Politinis ir kino diskursas atlieka skirtingas funkcijas ir yra kuriamas skirtingomis sąlygomis. Jų palyginimo vertė slypi būtent tame, kad kiekvienas iš jų išryškina tai, kas kito pagrindiniame matymo lauke lieka nuošalyje. Šis darbas parodo, kad politinės kalbos ir filmai nėra vien informacijos apie išsiuntimą šaltiniai. Tai taip pat yra ir erdvės, kuriose aktyviai kuriama, įtvirtinama ir ginčijama išsiuntimo prasmė bei migranto, kuriam gresia išsiuntimas, figūra.

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Annexes

Annex 1. Film selection

Title	Original title	Year	Original language	Theme	Festivals (Europe)	Length	Short description	Film corpus selection argumentation	Film corpus selection decision
Our Time Will Come	Unsere Zeit Wird Kommen	2025	German	Forced Displacement, Integration, Undocumented Migration, Discrimination	Berlin 2025	Feature	An Austrian woman and Gambian man navigate the challenges of their cross-cultural romance in Vienna: despite obstacles, they strive to build a lasting relationship and family, bridging the gap between two continents and cultures	Peripheral - romance/integration focus	NO
Anywhere, Anytime	Anywhere, Anytime	2024	Italian	Undocumented Migration	Venice 2024	Feature	Undocumented Pakistani migrant in Turin navigating precarious labour and legal status	Similar to Souleyman's story in a sense	NO
Elbow	Ellbogen	2024	German	Border Crossing, Integration	Berlin 2024	Feature	Hazal is 17 and lives in Berlin. Her biggest wish: to be given a chance. For her 18th birthday she wants to escape the everyday grind and party with her friends. But an incident changes everything. Hazal is forced to flee.	Peripheral - integration focus	NO
Souleymane's Story	Souleymane's Story	2024	French	Undocumented Migration, Bureaucracy, Discrimination	Cannes 2024 (the Jury Prize and the Performance Prize)	Feature	The movie follows Souleymane, a Guinean immigrant working as a food delivery cyclist in Paris, as he prepares for his asylum application interview	Yes.	YES
The 47	El 47	2024	Spanish	Integration, Bureaucracy, Discrimination	Goya Awards 2025	Feature	Based on a true story, in late 1970s Barcelona, Manolo Vital, a bus driver, takes bold action to protest the neglect of Torre Baró, an immigrant neighborhood	Exclude - integration focus	NO

To a Land Unknown	Σε μια άγνωστη χώρα	2024	Greek	Border Crossing, Forced Displacement, Smuggling, Undocumented Migration, Discrimination	Cannes 2024	Feature	Two Palestinian cousins, Chatila and Reda, who flee a refugee camp in Lebanon and find themselves stranded in Athens. Desperately seeking a way to reach Germany, they become entangled in a perilous smuggling		YES
Green Border	Zielona Granica	2023	Polish, Arabic	Polish, Arabic	Venice 2023	Feature	Interweaves the experiences of Syrian refugees, volunteers, and border guards at the frontier between Belarus and Poland	Pushback focus	NO
The Old Oak	The Old Oak	2023	English	Integration, Bureaucracy	Cannes 2023	Feature	The Old Oak is a drama about a struggling pub owner in a declining British village who forms an unexpected bond with newly arrived Syrian refugees, sparking unity in a divided community	Integration Focus	NO
There are People in the Forest	W Lesie Są Ludzie	2023	English	Border Crossing, Forced Displacement, Undocumented Migration	Krakow 2023	Short	This animated short film depicts the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border, illustrating the experiences of refugees hiding in the forest	Short animated movie - excluded for different genre	NO
Winter Crossing	La Tête Froide	2023	French	Smuggling, Undocumented Migration	Valencia 2023	Feature	The meeting of two solitudes, a French woman who smuggles cigarettes into Italy and a young African who wants to reach England		NO

A Change of Heart	Ils Sont Vivants	2022	Greek	Undocumented Migration	Palermo 2022	Feature	Béatrice, a recent widow living with her son and mother, whose life is transformed upon meeting Mokhtar, an Iranian teacher who arrived in Europe clandestinely	Romantic story focus	NO
Behind the Haystacks	Πίσω από τις Θημωνιές	2022	French	Border Crossing, Forced Displacement	Thessaloniki 2023	Feature	The impact of the refugee crisis on a Greek family living near the border, delving into themes of xenophobia, compassion, and moral dilemmas	Greek family is the focus, not migrants	NO
In a Better World	Les Engagés	2022	French	Undocumented Migration	Angoulême 2022	Feature	After accidentally hitting a young migrant with his car near Briançon, David decides to hide him in his home, delving into themes of solidarity and challenges by migrants in France	Frenchman focus	NO
Kitchen Brigade	La Brigade	2022	French	Integration, Labour Migration, Undocumented Migration	L'Alpe d'Huez 2022	Feature	Cathy Marie, leaves her position as chef at a fancy restaurant, takes a position at the canteen of a shelter for immigrants, mostly African and South Asian youths likely to be deported at age 18: she introduces use of brigade de cuisine in the shelter's kitchen	Integration focus	NO
No Dogs or Italians Allowed	Interdit Aux Chiens et Aux Italiens	2022	French	Border Crossing, Labour Migration	Annecy 2022	Feature	The animated story of a Piedmontese family of farmers who emigrates to France to improve their living conditions and escape the rise to power of the fascist party	Different historical period	NO

The Swimmers	The Swimmers	2022	English, Arabic	Forced Displacement, Undocumented Migration	Zurick 2020 (though world premiere - Toronto)	Feature	Tells the story of two Syrian sisters fleeing war and aiming for the Olympics	Journey focus	NO
Tori and Lokita	Tori and Lokita	2022	French	Border Crossing, Undocumented Migration, Discrimination	Cannes 2022	Feature	Two African migrants, Tori and Lokita, form a strong bond while experiencing the hardships of undocumented life in Europe		YES
Dreams Are Like Wild Tigers	Träume Sind Wie Wilde	2021	German	Border Crossing, Diaspora, Return Migration	Hamburg 2021	Feature	12-year-old Ranji is new in Berlin, his big dream is Bollywood, and a casting call in Mumbai is the chance, but Ranji has to overcome a few hurdles: finding friends, making a video, traveling to Mumbai without his parents and believing in himself		NO
Mediterraneo: The Law of the Sea	Mediterraneo: Cada Vida Cuenta	2021	Spanish	Border Crossing	San Sebastian 2021	Feature	Two lifeguards, Óscar and Gerard, travel to Lesbos, shocked by the photograph of a drowned child in the Mediterranean. Upon arrival, they discover an overwhelming reality: thousands of people risk their lives crossing the sea in precarious boats	Journey focus	NO
The Emigrants	Utvandrarna	2021	Swedish	Border Crossing	Norwegian 2021	Feature	The journey of Norwegian emigrants to the United States in the 19th century	Different historical period	NO
White Paradise	Les Survivants	2021	French	Border Crossing, Undocumented Migration	Angoulême 2021	Feature	The journey of migrants attempting to cross the Alps in search of safety	Focus - Frenchman, not migrants	NO

After Love	After Love	2020	English	Border Crossing	BFI London 2020	Feature	A widow uncovers her late husband's hidden life across the Channel	About a woman discovering her husband has a secret family across the channel	NO
Beyond is the Day	Dalej Jest Dzień	2020	Polish	Undocumented Migration	Krakow 2020	Short	This short film portrays Paweł, a lonely Polish man whose life changes when he meets Mohammad, an undocumented immigrant	Exclude - short movie	NO
His House	His House	2020	English	Border Crossing, Forced Displacement	Sundance 2020	Feature	A refugee couple from South Sudan, after escaping war, seek asylum in England. As they adjust to their new life, they are tormented by a sinister force lurking in their assigned housing, symbolizing the haunting traumas of displacement	Action is set in the UK. To retain the majority of corpusto be set in the EU, only one movie set in the UK was selected - Limbo.	NO
I never Cry	Jak Najdalej Stąd	2020	Polish	Return Migration, Bureaucracy	San Sebastian 2020	Feature	Ola sets off to Ireland to bring her father's body back to Poland after he dies in a building site accident	From Poland to Ireland (repatriation of father)	NO
Limbo	Limbo	2020	English	Border Crossing, Forced Displacement	Cannes 2020	Feature	Omar, a Syrian musician seeking asylum, finds himself on a remote Scottish island awaiting the results of his application. The film portrays the isolation and uncertainty faced by refugees, blending humor with reflections on displacement and identity	Chronic waiting	YES

No Hard Feelings	Futur Drei	2020	German	Diaspora, Forced Displacement, Bureaucracy	Berlin 2020	Feature	Parvis, the son of exiled Iranians in Germany, copes with life in his small hometown by indulging himself with pop culture, Grindr dates, and raves. After being caught shoplifting, he is sentenced to community service at a refugee shelter where he meets siblings Banafshe and Amon, who have fled Iran	Diaspora/integration focus	NO
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Source: compiled by the author.

Annex 2. Political discourse corpus: selected speeches.

Code	Speaker	Date	Title	Genre	Reference
Ursula von der Leyen					
U_2020 09	Von der Leyen	23 Sept 2020	Press statement by President von der Leyen on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum	Statement	STATEMENT/20/1727
U_2020 11	Von der Leyen	19 November 2020	Speech by President von der Leyen at the high-level conference on migration and asylum in Europe	Speech	SPEECH/20/2157
U_2021 11	Von der Leyen	23 November 2021	Speech by President von der Leyen at the	Speech	SPEECH/21/6249

			European Parliament Plenary on the conclusions of the October European Council and the situation in Belarus and at its border with the EU		
U_2023 02	Von der Leyen	1 February 2023	Speech by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary on the preparation of the Special European Council meeting of February, in particular the need to develop sustainable solutions in the area of asylum and migration	Speech	SPEECH/23/526
U_2023 02 II	Von der Leyen	10 February 2023	Opening remarks by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with President Michel following the special meeting of the European Council of 9 February 2023	Statement	STATEMENT/23/761
U_2023 09	Von der Leyen	13 September 2023	2023 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen	Speech	SPEECH/23/4426
U_202309 II	Von der Leyen	17 September 2023	Press statement by President von der Leyen with Italian Prime Minister	Statement	STATEMENT/23/4502

			Meloni in Lampedusa		
U_2023 10	Von der Leyen	27 October 2023	Opening remarks by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with President Michel following the meeting of the European Council of 27 October 2023	Statement	STATEMENT/23/5373
U_2023 12	Von der Leyen	13 December 2023	Speech by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary on the review of the Spanish Presidency of the Council	Speech	SPEECH/23/6585
U_2023 12 II	Von der Leyen	20 December 2023	Statement by President von der Leyen on the political agreement on the Pact on Migration and Asylum	Statement	STATEMENT/23/6781
U_2024 01	Von der Leyen	9 January 2024	Speech by President von der Leyen on the occasion of the New Year reception of the Stade Chamber of Industry and Commerce for the Elbe Weser region	Speech	SPEECH/24/102
U_2024 04	Von der Leyen	10 April 2024	Statement by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with President Metsola and Belgian Prime Minister	Statement	STATEMENT/24/1953

			De Croo on the adoption of the Pact on Migration and Asylum		
U_2024 07	Von der Leyen	18 July 2024	Statement at the European Parliament Plenary by President Ursula von der Leyen, candidate for a second mandate 2024-2029	Statement	STATEMENT/24/3871
U_2024 10 II	Von der Leyen	17 October 2024	Opening remarks by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with President Michel following the meeting of the European Council of 17 October 2024	Statement	STATEMENT/24/5363
U_2025 03	Von der Leyen	9 March 2025	Press remarks by President von der Leyen on the first 100 days of the 2024-2029 Commission	Statement	STATEMENT/25/721
U_2025 04	Von der Leyen	29 April 2025	Speech by President von der Leyen at the 2025 EPP Congress	Speech	SPEECH/25/1117
U_2025 09	Von der Leyen	10 September 2025	2025 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen	Speech	SPEECH/25/2053
U_2025 10	Von der Leyen	21 October 2025	Speech by President von der Leyen in the European Parliament plenary debate on the Commission Work Programme 2026	Speech	SPEECH/25/2462

Ylva Johansson					
J_2020 09	Ylva Johansson	23 September 2020	Speech by Commissioner Johansson on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum	Speech	SPEECH/20/1733
J_2020 09 II	Ylva Johansson	24 September 2020	Commissioner Johansson's opening statement at the LIBE debate on the new Pact on Asylum and Migration	Speech	SPEECH/20/2923
S_2023 12	Ylva Johansson	20 December 2023	Opening remarks by Vice-President Schinas and Commissioner Johansson at the press conference on the political agreement reached on the Pact on Migration and Asylum	Speech	SPEECH/23/6787
S_2024 03	Ylva Johansson	12 March 2024	Opening remarks by Vice-President Schinas and Commissioner Johansson at the press conference on the Communication taking stock of the achievements in the area of migration and asylum	Speech	SPEECH/24/1479
S_2024 06	Ylva Johansson	12 June 2024	Remarks by Vice-President Schinas and Commissioner Ylva Johansson on the Common Implementation Plan	Speech	SPEECH/24/3249

Margaritis Schinas					
S_2020 03	Margaritis Schinas	4 March 2020	Press remarks by Vice-President Schinas on immediate actions to support Greece	Statement	STATEMENT/20/395
S_2020 09	Margaritis Schinas	23 September 2020	Speech by Vice-President Schinas on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum	Speech	SPEECH/20/1736
S_2021 03	Margaritis Schinas	18 March 2021	Introductory remarks by Vice-President Schinas : Panel discussion at the Irish Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) “Forging a Comprehensive EU Approach to Migration”	Speech	SPEECH/21/1244
S_2021 04	Margaritis Schinas	27 April 2021	Press remarks by Vice-President Schinas on the EU's Voluntary Return and Reintegration Strategy	Speech	SPEECH/21/1991
S_2023 12	Margaritis Schinas	20 December 2023	Opening remarks by Vice-President Schinas and Commissioner Johansson at the press conference on the political agreement reached on the Pact on Migration and Asylum	Speech	SPEECH/23/6787
S_2024 03	Margaritis Schinas	12 March 2024	Opening remarks by Vice-President Schinas and Commissioner Johansson at the press conference on the	Speech	SPEECH/24/1479

			Communication taking stock of the achievements in the area of migration and asylum		
S_2024 06	Margaritis Schinas	12 June 2024	Remarks by Vice-President Schinas and Commissioner Ylva Johansson on the Common Implementation Plan	Speech	SPEECH/24/3249
Magnus Brunner					
B_2025 03	Magnus Brunner	11 March 2025	Presentation to the European Parliament of the proposal on a new common approach on returns	Speech	SPEECH/25/748
B_2025 03 II	Magnus Brunner	11 March 2025	Remarks by Executive Vice-President Virkkunen and Commissioner Brunner on the proposal for a new Common European System for Returns	Speech	SPEECH/25/751
B_2025 11	Magnus Brunner	11 November 2025	Remarks by Commissioner Brunner on the Annual Migration Management Cycle	Speech	SPEECH/25/2665

Source: compiled by the author

Annex 3. Film visual analysis grid.

No	Movie	Scene	Contact	Social distance	Attitude-horizontal	Attitude-vertical	Camera movement	Composition (who is in the frame)
1	Tori and Lokita	Interview	Offer - gaze at interviewer, just off-lens; sustained; breaks (looks down) only at the end when offered a pause	Close shot	Frontal (shoulders parallel to frame)	Eye-level (with Lokita)	Handheld, minimal movements - near-static, holds on Lokita	Lokita
2	Tori and Lokita	Police	Offer - Tori and Lokita gaze to the officer; the pre-emptive "ne retourne pas" (en. don't look) precedes contact	Medium/medium-long (knees-waist up, walking)	Frontal (walking) -> oblique (police enter); camera sits oblique to the encounter overall	Eye-level	Handheld, mobile - follows walking, unsteady at the stop	Both in frame; police enters
3	Tori and Lokita	Rehearsal	Offer - mutual gaze between the two; close, intimate	Medium (waist up)	Oblique (for both)	Eye-level (with Tori)	Handheld, breathing with Lokita (minimal drift)	Both in frame
4	Tori and Lokita	Decision	Offer - Tori's gaze shifts between the actors present (social worker, Lokita, interviewer)	Medium (medium-short?)	Mostly oblique	Eye-level (with Tori)	Handheld	Both in frame; composition changes fast, Tori remains centred
5	Tori and Lokita	Betim	Offer - Lokita and Tori gaze predominantly Betim (the abusive chef and local drug dealer whom Tori and Lokita work for)	Medium (medium-short?)	Oblique	Eye-level (with Lokita)	Handheld	Both in frame; Lokita centred
6	Tori and Lokita	Breakdown	Offer - mutual gaze / to the road; off-camera	Medium shot (maybe medium-short?) from the waist up)	Frontal Lokita (Tori slightly oblique, facing a bit Lokita)	Eye-level (with Lokita)	Handheld, mobile - tracks their movement	Both in frame; Lokita centred

7	Tori and Lokita	Funeral	Offer - gaze to mourners (reading); to Lokita's coffin (singining), though coffin is out of frame	Medium shot	Oblique Tori at first, when saying the speech. Frontal - when singing (facing Lokita)	Eye-level (with Tori)	Handheld, near-stable; small sway matching Tori	Tori foregrounded (giving the speech)
8	To a Land Unknown	Fake documents	Offer - mutual gaze among the three	Medium shot	Oblique (actors face each other)	Eye-level	Stable	Chatila, Reda and smuggler
9	To a Land Unknown	Trust	Offer - mutual gaze / to the road	Close shot	Oblique, slightly from behind	Low on Chatila / high on Reda	Handheld, follows pace of actors	Chatila and Reda
10	To a Land Unknown	Call with Nabila	Offer - Chatila's gaze to the street, just off-lens	Close shot	Oblique -> frontal (early shift)	Slightly low on Chatila	Stable; final moments cut to Reda (high angle, long shot)	Chatila; Reda in closing beat
11	To a Land Unknown	Anger	Offer - mutual gaze between Chatila and Reda	Medium shot	Predominantly frontal	Low on Chatila / high on Reda	Handheld, follows action	Chatila, Reda; neighbours briefly
12	To a Land Unknown	Becoming -smuggler	Offer - mutual gaze between Chatila and Reda	Long shot -> close (at "we'll help the kid")	Oblique -> frontal	Eye-level (both) -> low on Chatila / high on Reda	Handheld, moving; angle shifts	Chatila, Reda
13	To a Land Unknown	Call with aunt	Offer - all three gaze at the aunt on phone screen	Medium shot	Oblique	Eye level	Stable; slight approach in the end	Chatila, Reda, Malik; aunt (on phone screen)
	To a Land Unknown	Smuggler deal	Offer - all three gaze each other	Long shot	Oblique (Chatila, Reda)/ frontal (smuggler)	Eye level	Stable	Smuggler centred between Chatila and Reda, equal spacing
14	To a Land Unknown	Tatiana	Offer - mutual gaze between Chatila and Tatiana	Medium shot	Oblique -> frontal (Chatila);Tatiana	Eye level	Stable, follows action	Chatila, Tatiana

					from behind throughout; near-frontal (both, on the bed)			
15	To a Land Unknown	Dream	Offer - both gaze at the horizon	Close shot	Oblique, near-rear	Low on Chatila / high on Reda	Stable	Chatila, Reda
16	To a Land Unknown	Bad people	Offer - mutual gaze between Chatila and Reda	Close shot (Reda) / Medium shot (Chatila)	Oblique (Reda) / frontal (Chatila)	Eye-level (both)	Handheld; lowers as Chatila sits, rises as he stands	Chatila, Reda
17	Souleyman e's Story	Rehearsal	Offer - filmed from behind; gaze not visible	Long	Rear	Eye-level	Camera moves with the bike	Souleymane (cycling)
18	Souleyman e's Story	Selfie	Offer - gaze off-lens when alone; mutual gaze with Emmanuel when both in frame	Medium	Frontal (Souleymane alone) -> oblique (Souleymane) / frontal (Emmanuel) when together in the frame	Eye level	Camera moves/shakes while cycling -> stable in the shop, follows speaker	Souleymane; then Souleymane and Emmanuel
19	Souleyman e's Story	Coaching	Offer - gaze directed at Barry(central); Souleymane and the woman largely look down	Medium -> close	Barry frontal throughout; woman oblique -> frontal; Souleymane near-frontal	Eye-level	Stable	Barry, the woman, Souleymane
20	Souleyman e's Story	Police	Offer - mutual gaze between Souleymane and officers	Medium	Officers frontal; Souleymane near-frontal	Eye-level	Follows the movement	Souleymane and two officers

21	Souleymane's Story	Advice (Mamadou)	Offer - both gaze down at the washing, or at each other	Medium -> close (at "you had the same story?" for Souleymane) -> medium	Oblique (both); near-rear on Souleymane at "you had the same story?"	Eye-level	Stable, follows the movement	Souleymane, Mamadou
22	Souleymane's Story	Interview	Offer - mutual gaze, just off-lens	Medium -> on Souleymane slightly close at "Were there other people with you?" -> close on Souleymane at "I've heard it twice" (interviewer stays medium) -> medium when interviewer finishes the meeting with procedural timeline	Frontal -> oblique (Souleymane) at "I heard it twice last week" -> frontal at "you'll have the right to work and live here"	Eye-level for both -> low angle (Souleymane) at "I heard it twice last week" -> eye-level at "well, it's ..."	Stable	Souleymane, protection officer
23	Limbo	Call with Mum	Offer - Omar's gaze to the road, on the phone	Close -> medium ("Germany or Sweden") -> medium (oud) -> close (dad playing in the streets)	Oblique	Eye-level	Stable	Omar; later other migrants waiting near the phone box

24	Limbo	Voluntary return	Offer - all gaze slightly past the camera (toward the TV)	Long → close ("better than being stuck here") → long ("I could be Wasef's agent") → close ("single, male, low priority")	Frontal	Eye-level	Stable	Omar, Farhad, Wasef, Abedi
25	Limbo	Waiting	Offer - mutual gaze / to the horizon	Long → close on Omar (before "but letter will come")	Frontal	Eye-level	Stable	Omar, Farhad
26	Limbo	"I used to"	Offer - gaze toward or just past the lens [verify — long shot]	Long	Frontal	Eye-level	Stable	Abdul and the class
27	Limbo	Not a tourist	Offer - just past the lens; mutual gaze	Long ↔ medium (alternating)	Frontal (the two locals) / slightly oblique (Omar)	Eye-level	Stable	Margaret, the man, Omar
28	Limbo	Economic migrants	Offer - near-frontal, close to the lens	Medium	Frontal	Eye-level	Stable	Omar, Farhad, Wasef, Abedi; migrants passing the Fisheries building
29	Limbo	Suit	Offer - both gaze at the road, seen from the side	Very long shot → Long shot - >very long shot	Oblique (side-on)	Eye-level	Stable	Omar and Farhad walking; Farhad in Omar's coat
30	Limbo	New flat mate	Offer - near-lens or mutual gaze	Long	Frontal → oblique (Omar confronting Farhad about the chicken)	Eye-level	Stable	Omar, Farhad, Wasef, Abedi

31	Limbo	Anger	Offer- mutual gaze	Long → close on Farhad through glass ("live your life like in some American TV show?") → medium ("is that what you wanted to know?")	Frontal → oblique (Farhad behind glass door); Omar seen from behind	Eye-level	Stable	Omar, Farhad
32	Limbo	Letter	Offer -mutual gaze	Medium	Oblique (both, side-on) → frontal when Omar reads "successful"	Eye-level	Stable	Omar, Farhad

Source: compiled by the author

Annex 4. Film corpus: transcribed dialogue from the scenes analysed

“Tori and Lokita”

Interview scene

INTERVIEWER (off-screen): Tu ne te souviens pas ?

LOKITA: Non.

INTERVIEWER (off-screen): C’est un affluent de l’Ouémé. Il porte le même nom que le lac près d’où tu m’as dit que tu habitais. Tu te souviens du nom du lac ?

LOKITA: [Silence]

INTERVIEWER (off-screen): Lors de ton audition à l’Office des étrangers, tu as dit qu’avant de quitter le Bénin, tu avais étudié au collège Titirou de Parakou. La personne qui dirigeait le collège, c’était un homme ou une femme ?

LOKITA: C’était un homme.

INTERVIEWER (off-screen): Tu te souviens de son nom ?

LOKITA: C’était M. le directeur.

INTERVIEWER (off-screen): Oui, mais son nom.

LOKITA: Je l’appelais M. le directeur.

INTERVIEWER (off-screen): Tu as dit que c’était dans cette école que tu avais rencontré ton petit frère.

LOKITA: Oui.

INTERVIEWER (off-screen): Comment l’as-tu reconnu ?

LOKITA: Comme ça.

INTERVIEWER (off-screen): Il a été abandonné à sa naissance, tu ne l’avais jamais vu. Comment as-tu su que c’était lui ?

LOKITA: [Silence]

INTERVIEWER (off-screen): Lokita, comment as-tu su que c’était lui ?

LOKITA: Ce n’est pas à l’école que je l’ai vu, c’était à l’orphelinat. Quand ma mère est morte, mon oncle a dit que c’était à cause de mon frère. Qu’il avait encore ses pouvoirs de sorcier, et qu’il fallait le tuer. Alors je suis allée lui dire, on s’est cachés, puis on est partis.

INTERVIEWER (off-screen): Tu savais dans quel orphelinat il était ?

LOKITA: Je savais que beaucoup d'enfants sorciers étaient chez Maman Monique. Je suis allée là.

INTERVIEWER (off-screen): Comment as-tu fait pour savoir que c'était lui ?

LOKITA: J'ai demandé après Tori.

INTERVIEWER (off-screen): Comment savais-tu qu'il s'appelait Tori ? C'est l'orphelinat qui lui a donné ce prénom, toi tu pouvais pas le savoir.

[Lokita is close to tears, looks to her left, the camera moves for the first time and shows two people sitting next to her, a woman and a man. A woman touches her back and says:]

LAWYER: Ça va ? [woman]

MAN: Je crois que c'est mieux de faire une pause. [man]

INTERVIEWER (off-screen): Bien sûr. [intelocutor]

LAWYER: T'as tes médicaments ? [woman]

LOKITA: Oui. [Lokita; Lokita takes out her medicine, the camera is again focused on her, she drinks her medicine]

INTERVIEWER (off-screen): Tu veux qu'on reporte l'audition ? [interlocutor]

LOKITA: Oui. [Lokita. Before saying yes she breathes in fastly couple of times. The scene ends].

Police scene

LOKITA : Ne te retourne pas.

POLICE : Eh vous deux là ! Vous deux là-bas ! Stop ! [Lolita and Tori stop and turns to the police] Longe le mur ! Pourquoi tu traverses sans regarder ? [Police runs closer]

LOKITA : Il voulait venir près moi.

TORI : C'est ma soeur.

POLICE : C'est pas une raison. Vos papiers. [Tori and Lolita show their documents]
C'est à quelle heure que vous devez rentrer dans votre centre ? [Police, while looking at the documents]

LOKITA : Vingt-deux heures.

TORI : On allait prendre le bus sur la place.

Rehearsal scene

Tori and Lolita are at their temporal home, in pyjamas, preparing for the interview.

LOKITA: On continue les questions.

TORI : Comment t'as pu reconnaître ton frère quant t'es allé à l'orphelinat ?

LOKITA : Je savais qu'il était né en 2011. Non, faut que je sois plus précis. Je dirai le mois de ta naissance. Répète ta question.

TORI : Comment t'as pu reconnaître ton frère quand t'es allé à l'orphelinat ?

LOKITA : Je savais qu'il était né en décembre 2011, et il y en avait que un.

TORI : Question piège. Est-ce que tu te souviens s'il y avait des arbres dans le jardin de l'orphelinat ?

LOKITA : Non, je m'en souviens pas.

TORI : Tant mieux, parce qu'y pas d'arbres et y pas de jardin. [Tori and Lolita laughing.]

Decision scene

TORI: Ça fait combien de temps ?

SOCIAL WORKER: Trente-cinq minutes.

TORI : Ça sera pas bon, c'est trop long

SOCIAL WORKER : Hey, ça va aller.

TORI : Mais ils t'ont pas acceptée ?

LAWYER : Il y avait question auxquelles elle n'a pas pu répondre.

SOCIAL WORKER : Viens t'asseoir.

TORI : Pourquoi ma soeur peut pas avoir ses papiers ?

INTERVIEWER : Tu es qui, toi ?

TORI : Tori, le frère de Lokita.

INTERVIEWER : Demande à Lokita, elle le sait. J'ai une réunion, excuse-moi.

TORI : Je vous jure que c'est ma soeur. Sans elle, j'étais mort. Pourquoi moi j'ai mes papiers et elle peut pas les avoir ?

INTERVIEWER : Parce que toi tu étais un enfant sorci percus, et ton dossier le prouve.

TORI : Mais eux aussi, ils ont essayé de la tuer parce qu'elle m'a aidé. C'est la même chose.

INTERVIEWER : Son avocat a proposé de faire un test ADN pour prouver qu'elle est bien ta soeur. Je crois que c'est la meilleure solution. Excuse-moi, mais je dois y aller.

TORI : Madame ! Qu'est-ce que je vais faire moi ici sans elle ? Pourquoi vous lui donnez pas ses papiers ?

INTERVIEWER : J'aimerais bien, mais je peux pas. Au revoir.

Betim scene

LOKITA : Non, même pas être séparés. Et trois mois, c'est beaucoup. Il n'y aura pas moyen de se...

BETIM : Non!

LOKITA : Au moins une fois par semaine.

BETIM : Non, je t'ai dit! Tu veux des faux papiers, je te trouve direct une solution. Maintenant, tu discutes. Ça va pas la tête. Tu veux les papiers ou t'en veux pas?

LOKITA : Si, je les veux.

BETIM : Bah alors?

TORI : On pourra au moins se voir le dimanche?

BETIM : Non! Je veux une réponse maximum demain matin, OK?

LOKITA : Oui. Je vais travailler pour payer mes papiers. Ça veut dire que je pourrais plus gagner d'argent?

BETIM: Oui. T'as logement, manger. Et quand t'as fini, tu as les papiers. Sur la marché 10 000 euros minimum.

LOKITA : Ce serait bien si je pouvais encore dîner le vendredi.

BETIM : Je t'ai dit, tu restes là-bas un instant. Allez-y.

TORI : Et comment on va faire pour envoyer de l'argent à notre maman?

BETIM : C'est pas mes affaires, allez-y!

Breakdown scene

TORI : Ta mère, on en 50 euros chaque semaine.

LOKITA : Mais comment tu vas faire, Abdo? On est déjà une heure. Les clients vont pas t'attendre jusqu'à 11 heures.

TORI : Je le ferai en vélo.

LOKITA : Quel vélo?

TORI : Il y en a un au centre. Et c'est juste de réparer.

LOKITA : C'est à moi gagner de l'argent pour la famille, ça. Moi, ça. [Lokita starts hitting her head]

TORI : Arrête, Lolita, arrête!

LOKITA : Pourquoi ils veulent pas me donner mes papiers, Touri? Pourquoi?

TORI : Ils ne veulent pas de nous. Tu saignes, viens t'asseoir. Ça va?

LOKITA : Ça va. T'es gentil, Tori. Y a personne comme toi. Personne.

Funeral scene

TORI : Lokita, si tu avais eu tes papiers, tu serais devenue aide ménagère et on aurait habité ensemble en Belgique. Maintenant, t'es mort et je suis tout seul.

“To a Land Unknown”

Fake documents scene

SMUGGLER: Are you keeping out of trouble?

CHATILA: Yes

SMUGGLER: Excellent.

CHATILA: So did you find anything?

SMUGGLER: I got a phone call this morning. I was shocked. Look. Take a look [shows a picture on his phone]. See?

CHATILA: You really are a pro.

SMUGGLER: Your twin. Your bastard brother, see? Man, I can't believe i found it.

CHATILA: What about me?

SMUGGLER: You. You were a tougher case. What do you think?

CHATILA: No. That won't work.

SMUGGLER: Yes, it does work. He's never satisfied. Never satisfied [laughing]. And the money?

CHATILA: We need a bit more time.

SMUGGLER: [stares]

CHATILA: Give me two weeks and you will have it.

SMUGGLER: [silence] Drink your tea.

Trust scene

REDA: Think we can trust him? [biting nails]

CHATILA: More than the others, don't you think?

REDA: I don't know, he is expensive.

CHATILA: But he actually gets people into Germany. At least we aren't getting fucked trying to cross the borders on foot. Or suffocating in the back of a truck. We'll be taking a plane. Germany is not like Greece. I swear, this cafe idea is no joke.

Call with Nabila scene

CHATILA: [answers the phone] My dear, how is it going?

NABILA: Good, I was waiting for you to call.

CHATILA: I'm sorry, I was busy today. You know how it is.

NABILA: Walid also wanted to speak with you.

CHATILA: Man, oh man, how did that slip my mind? Did he have fun? Let me speak to him.

NABILA: He's asleep. It was good, he had fun.

CHATILA: I'm sorry, my love.

NABILA: No, it's not that.

CHATILA: What is it? What's wrong Nabila.

NABILA: My brothers.

CHATILA: What about them?

NABILA: I didn't say anything, but they asked what you sent Walid.

CHATILA: And?

NABILA: They say all you do is bullshit. That I'll never get out of this camp and that it was wrong of me to marry you. It went on and on.

CHATILA: Don't listen to them, Nabila. You know they're wrong, don't you? Right? [The scene changes, the voiceover of the same conversation stays. Now in the frame is Reda, half-naked, sitting on the toilet, smoking drugs. Later it will become clear that for these drugs he used the money that he and Chatila were saving]. We've saved almost all the money. Then we'll be in Germany together.

NABILA: Hopefully.

CHATILA: Just a little bit longer. Alright? My love.

Anger scene

Chatila is throwing Reda's stuff at him from the place they are staying after finding out that Reda again started using drugs and used their common money for it.

CHATILA: Just tell me how you found it

REDA: What do you mean? Half of it is mine.

CHATILA: Half of it is yours? Your junkie friend talked you into it to get drugs, you idiot. You don't understand shit.

REDA: An idiot? Listen up, Chatila. You think you're so smart? I've seen you. Everyone knows you're using me.

CHATILA: Who's "everyone"? You begged me to come here with you.

SOMEONE FROM A FAR: What's with you guys? We're sleeping.

CHATILA: Stay out of it!

REDA: I begged you?

CHATILA: You almost died the last time you were here. “Athens is amazing”, “I won't use this time”, “Just a few months and we'll go to Europe”. You know what? I'm the idiot for coming here with you. I was worried you'd kill yourself. I'd got married, had a kid. Know what I left behind?

REDA: What? What did you leave? Nothing. You were unemployed, broke, and dying to come to Europe.

[Chatila turns around and starts walking away]

REDA: Chatila, I'll get the you the money, I swear. I will. Just let me sleep inside. Don't leave me out here. I'll get it for you and go back to the camp.

CHATILA: Go back to the camp, yeah? Know what they say about you? You'll go and deal that shit to the kids? I don't wanna see your face, Reda. Fuck you, man.

Becoming-smuggler

REDA: Are you crazy? It'll never work.

CHATILA: Why not?

REDA: Well, I don't know. Smugglers come from a different world.

CHATILA: What's a smuggler anyway? They're like us, but they don't give a fuck.

REDA: I don't know, man. Maybe you are right. I can't think clearly.

CHATILA: Think it over, brother. Let's say it doesn't work, let's say we fuck up. What do we have to lose? And we'll help the kid out too. That kid is a gift from heaven, man. God sent him to us. I hope this works, man. This is it, it'll get us out. Leave it to me.

Call with aunt

CHATILA: Hello.

MALIK'S AUNT: Hello. How are you, my dear?

MALIK: Good. How are you, auntie?

AUNT: Good. They're taking care of you?

MALIK: Yes, I'm happy with them.

AUNT: I swear, if I could I'd come get him. But I don't have my documents. We trusted them, and look what happened.

CHATILA: Yes, auntie, but we aren't like the others. They'll ask you to pay upfront to a middleman. Then the middleman disappears, like you saw.

AUNT: I'm telling you, I won't send a single penny before I see Malik here in Italy.

CHATILA: Look, we want him to get out of here as much as you do. We've grown fond of Malik, right?

REDA: You bet, auntie. He's like our little brother.

CHATILA: All we ask is for a small advance to cover his basic expenses.

AUNT: What expenses?

CHATILA: It's simple, don't worry. He just needs an ID. I mean, and Arab kid travelling out of Greece alone is a bit suspicious.

AUNT: So what do you need?

CHATILA: The solution is to find a respectable woman to travel with him. Like a mother and son going on a trip.

Tatiana scene

CHATILA: Hey, Tatiana.

TATIANA: Take your food and go home.

CHATILA: What?

TATIANA: I don't want to do it. Leave me alone, go.

CHATILA: Why are you saying this?

TATIANA: I don't want to go.

CHATILA: What are you doing?

TATIANA: I'm not doing anything. I lost it.

CHATILA: You lost what?

TATIANA: My ID.

CHATILA: But I gave it to you three days ago.

TATIANA: And then I lost it. I don't know where it is. I am sorry. I looked everywhere.

CHATILA: You fucking with me? Start looking. [Chatila starts going through Tatiana's stuff]. Is it here?

TATIANA: No, it's not there, stop it.

CHATILA: Then where the fuck is it? [Chatila finds Tatiana's ID under the mattress] You hid it. Are you fucking crazy? [Sits on the bed next to Tatiana, calms down]. [pause] You are scared.

TATIANA: It's human trafficking, Malaka.

CHATILA: You're helping a little boy. Tomorrow you come back and it's all gonna be finished. Ah? [Hugs Tatiana] It's gonna be okay. [Kisses her forehead]

Dream scene

REDA: Tell me about the cafe.

CHATILA: You already know everything.

REDA: I know, but talking about it always relaxes you.

CHATILA: All we need is a small shop in an Arab neighborhood. We won't need a lot of money. It'll be welcoming. And that's our plan, you know? The most important thing is having a big ashtray on my desk. [both laughing] I always wanted one of those.

REDA: What else?

CHATILA: Nabila will run the kitchen. People will come running when they taste her food.

REDA: What about me?

CHATILA: You? You'll man the bar. As soon as they walk in, people will see your big dumb face. You don't remember my dad's place?

REDA: We hardly saw each other back then. I just remembered the blue chairs. Damn, they were blue.

CHATILA: Every story from that neighborhood was discussed in that cafe. He brought everyone together. May he rest in peace. He loved that place.

REDA: Rest in peace. He was an honest man.

CHATILA: Yeah.

Bad people scene

CHATILA: What'd you do to the guy?

REDA: I didn't mean to, I thought he would attack me.

CHATILA: Calm down, it's not that bad.

REDA: He's all bloody, said he was gonna die.

CHATILA: You believed him? He's bullshitting so we take him to the hospital. Wouldn't you do the same?

REDA: They don't deserve this. We're torturing them. They're just like us.

CHATILA: I know they don't deserve it. I also don't want to do this.

REDA: Why didn't you know about the password before?

CHATILA: Fuck the password, how was I supposed to know? [brief silence] When we get to Germany, we'll make it up to them. Who knows? Maybe we can send them money and bring them over.

REDA: You're fucking around. You'll forget about them. Just like that Greek woman. Chatila, we are bad people. Bad people. [Chatila pfff laughing] You're laughing: You think this is a joke?

CHATILA: Do you hear yourself? "We're bad people, Chatila". Get out of the fantasy world you're living in. You think you get whatever you want? Look at the shit we're in. Tell me, what has the world given you? What have you gotten? Spare me your empty words, Reda. [Reda gets up and is leaving] What are you doing? Don't be an idiot, sit down. Hey, I'm talking to you.

REDA: Fuck you, you're on your own. Move.

CHATILA: Go on, you're useless anyways. You think I'm happy babysitting you with your mom calling every second?

REDA: What did you say? What's your problem? Fuck you. You're always making me feel bad.

CHATILA: I make you feel bad? [Chatila looks at his phone] Amazing, Reda. The passports will be ready tomorrow.

REDA: Congratulations.

CHATILA: Do you know what this means? After tomorrow, we'll be on a plane out of here. Listen, you're right. I'm a shithead [Chatila hugs Reda] Forget it. Let me go get the tickets and I'll be right back, okay? Alright? [Reda nods]

“Souleymane’s Story”

Rehearsal scene

SOULEYMANE while riding a bike: Le 19 février 2019, les agents du gouvernement sont venus pour nous annoncer la destruction de nos maisons. Le 22 février 2019; j’ai été arrêté pour la première fois, car je résistais à une opération de déguerpissement. Le 30 mars 2020... Le 30 mars 2019, je suis entré au parti UFDGN. Le 23 octobre 2020, j’ai été envoyé en prison comme opposant politique.

SOULEYMANE while in an elevator: J'ai été arrêté car je résistais à une opération de déguerpissement. Le 30 mars 2019...

Selfie scene

SOULEYMANE: Allô, Emmanuel. Il faut faire le selfie, j'arrive tout de suite.

SOULEYMANE: Selfie.

EMMANUEL: Souleymane! Encore ce problème à la con.

SOULEYMANE: S'il te plaît, Emmanuel, y a moyen que to me payes aujourd'hui. S'il te plaît.

EMMANUEL: Déjà, combien t'as fais, là ?

SOULEYMANE: 253

EMMANUEL: 253 ? C'est minable. Non, il faut bosser, frérot.

SOULEYMANE: Je bosse, t'as pas à me dire...

EMMANUEL: Je t'ai donné le compte pour que tu travailles. Il faut travailler. On est pas venu en Europe pour jouer.

SOULEYMANE: Je joue pas, je travaille. Je joue pas. Emmanuel, tu peux me payer aujourd'hui ?

EMMANUEL: Tu sais que notre deal, c'est mardi.

SOULEYMANE: J'ai besoin de sous aujourd'hui, si y a moyen...

EMMANUEL: Ca dépend de l'argent. Une fois que l'argent vient je te donne.

SOULEYMANE: Tu vas recevoir des sous demain avant 12h, on est d'accord? S'il te plaît.

EMMANUEL: Demain, je te paie à 13h à la gare du Nord.

SOULEYMANE: Ok, 13h.

Coaching scene

BARRY: ça va ? Quand tu iras demarer l'asile à l'OFPPRA, ils vont te demander pourquoi tu es partie. Faudra expliquer aux Blancs ce qui t'est arrivé. Comme ça, ils te donneront des papiers. Alors, dis-moi : pourquoi as-tu quitté la Guinée ? Je sais que c'est difficile pour les femmes de parler de tout ça, surtout de mariage forcé, de rentrer dans les détails. Mes tu devras dire ce qui s'est réellement passé. Vas-y.

WOMAN: La première nuit, il m'a rejoint dans la chambre. Il m'a demandé de coucher avec lui. Je voulais pas, je le connaissais pas. Je l'aimais pas. Mais il a dit que j'étais sa femme, qu'il fallait qu'il ait son dû. Je me suis débattue. Il m'a giflée, j'ai résisté. Mais il était plus fort que moi, je suis tombée. Il a sorti sa ceinture, il m'a tapée, m'a donné des coups de pied. Je faisais pas le poids contre lui. Alors, je l'ai laissé faire. Il a fait son affaire, et il m'a abandonnée sur le sol, en pleurs.

BARRY: Qu'as-tu fait, quant le jour s'est levé ?

WOMAN: Quand le jour s'est levé, j'avais envie de mourir. En repensant à ce qui s'était passé, qu'un inconnu m'avait fait une chose pareille, j'ai voulu demander à mon père si je méritais un sort pareil. Il ne m'a même pas laissée parler : "Tu es mariée, rentre chez ton mari." Il a pris un bâton et il m'a chassée.

BARRY: Souleymane, vas-y.

SOULEYMANE: J'habitais à Bambéto dans le secteur de Kipé II. C'est un quartier généralement habité par les Peuls et les partisans de l'opposition. Le 22 février 2019, les gendarmes nous ont attaqués...

BARRY: Souleymane, c'est le pas le 22 février, c'est 19 février. Ton entretien est dans deux jours et tu maîtrises pas ton histoire.

SOULEYMANE: J'apprends.

BARRY: Souleymane, le récit ce qu'on écrit et ce que tu vas dire... C'est pas la même chose. Il faut qu'on sente que c'est des faits que t'as vécus. Tu rentres dans les détails, c'est ça qui compte. Compris ? Explique que les gendarmes vous ont encerclés. Ils ont sorti les traques, le gaz lacrymogène. Ils ont tiré. Les gens tombaient dans les caniveaux. Les gendarmes donnaient des coups de pied, des coups de matraque. Tu racontes des faits réels.

SOULEYMANE: Barry, attends...

BARRY: Tu dois donner des détails.

SOULEYMANE: Ces détails-là, c'est difficile. Je ne peux pas inventer tous ces détails. Je peux changer l'histoire ?

BARRY: On peut pas changer, sinon ils te traiteront de menteur.

SOULEYMANE: Je connais rien à la politique.

BARRY: Donne ton téléphone, je te fais un mémo. Pourquoi tu as adhéré au parti UFDG ? D'abord, c'est le projet de société qui t'a convaincu, tu as trouvé que c'était bien pour la Guinée. Deuxièmement, dans le domaine de l'éducation, nous voulons l'école obligatoire pour les enfants dès 5 ans. Nous voulons augmenter le budget de 13 à 20 percent. OK ? Personne suivant.

Police scene

SOULEYMANE: Bonsoir. C'est vous, M. Fred ?

POLICE: Ouais. Par contre, toi, c'est pas Emmanuel. C'est pas lui, là. C'est pas toi, là.

POLICE 2: Qu'est ce que passe ?

POLICE: C'est pas lui là.

POLICE 2: Effectivement.

POLICE: Tu t'appelles comment ?

SOULEYMANE: Souleymane Sangaré: Je peux avoir le code ?

POLICE 2: Tu'as pas de papiers, Souleymane ?

SOULEYMANE: J'ai un récépissé de demande d'asile.

POLICE 2: Tu sais que tu peux pas travailler avant récépissé en France quand même ?

POLICE: C'est qui, Emmanuel ?

SOULEYMANE: C'est un ami de moi.

POLICE: Un ami ou celui qui te loue le compte ?

SOULEYMANE: Un ami qui me loue son compte.

POLICE: Il prend combien cet ami-là ?

SOULEYMANE: ça dépend

POLICE: ça dépend, arrête

SOULEYMANE: 120 euro

POLICE: Par mois ?

SOULEYMANE: Par semaine

POLICE: Et toi ? Toi, tu gagnes combien ? Par semaine, tu fais combien, toi ?

SOULEYMANE: C'est pareil, ça dépend. Des fois, 150.

POLICE: T'es stressé.

POLICE 2: OK. Tu parais bien nerveux, là.

SOULEYMANE: Mais c'est pas ça. C'est que je suis pas... C'est pas... Jamais je m'énerverais contre un policier. C'est juste une soirée je suis en retard.

POLICE 2: Pas sur moi. Tu livres que de la nourriture ?

SOULEYMANE: Excusez, j'ai un bus à prendre.

POLICE 2: Ouais, effectivement il y a rien.

SOULEYMANE: Monsieur, vous pouvez me passer le code ? Je vais être en retard.

POLICE: Ton phare, il est cassé, là.

SOULEYMANE: c'était un accident. Je peux avoir le code ? Sinon, je vais...

POLICE 2: Parce que ça, c'est pas dangereux, en plus, la nuit.

SOULEYMANE: S'il vous plaît, monsieur.

POLICE: Ouais, ouais allez-y, on va manger.

SOULEYMANE: Merci beaucoup.

POLICE: 14,30 euro

Advice (Mamadou) scene

SOULEYMANE: Tu sais, pour mon entretien, je sais pas ce que je vais dire, là-bas, après-demain.

MAMADOU: Barry t'a rien dit ?

SOULEYMANE: Oublie Barry ! Il devait me donner tous les documents mais je n'ai rien eu. Je voudrais que tu me racontes au moins en peu ce que tu sais.

MAMADOU: Je ne m'intéresse plus à ces histoires d'asile. Thierno a eu ses papiers, pas moi. On va demandé en même temps.

SOULEYMANE: Vous aviez le même histoire ?

MAMADOU: Oui, identique. Mais lui, il a eu l'asile, et moi, il m'ont rejeté. Quand je reçu l'enveloppe avec la réponse, pendant trois jours, je suis resté couché. Je parlais pas. Si on me parlait, je répondais pas. Si on m'appelait, je décrochait pas.

SOULEYMANE: Je comprends. Je suis désolé. Je sais pas pourquoi je suis venu en France.

MAMADOU: Il m'ont interrogé sur la prison.

SOULEYMANE: Quelle prison ? La prison centrale ? Il t'ont demandé quoi ?

MAMADOU: Il m'ont demandé comment c'était l'intérieur, ce qui est écrit sur les murs.

SOULEYMANE: Et tu as répondu quoi ?

MAMADOU: J'en savais rien. Je suis jamais allé là-bas. Bonne chance.

SOULEYMANE: Merci, Mamadou. À demain.

Interview scene

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Bien. Donc, nous allons commencer cet entretien. Comme vous voyez, il y a un micro sur la table. Tout l'entretien est enregistré. Si vous recevez une réponse négative, vous avez le droit de contester cette décision et de demander à réécouter cet enregistrement. C'est compris ? Il faut répondre à voix haute pour l'enregistrement, s'il vous plaît.

SOULEYMANE: Oui, j'ai compris.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Vous avez demandé à passer l'entretien en français, sans avoir recours à un interprète, c'est ça ?

SOULEYMANE: Oui, c'est ça. Je parle en français.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: OK. Avant de commencer l'entretien, est-ce que vous avez des documents à ajouter au dossier ?

SOULEYMANE: Merci. Donc, la carte d'adhérent de l'UFDG, l'attestation et le certificat médical.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: D'accord. OK. Alors, par quels pays êtes-vous passé avant d'arriver en France ? — De la Guinée, on est partis au Mali.

SOULEYMANE: Au Mali, on est passés par le désert...

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Les pays, pardon, je vous coupe, mais c'est juste les pays. Donc, après le Mali, vous êtes allé où ?

SOULEYMANE: Après le Mali, on est partis en Algérie.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Vous êtes resté combien de temps ?

SOULEYMANE: Quelques semaines, puis nous sommes partis en Libye.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Et après la Libye ?

SOULEYMANE: Après la Libye, nous sommes partis en Italie.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Donc, on va reprendre votre récit depuis le début. Vous dites que vous êtes entré à l'UFDG début 2019, c'est ça ?

SOULEYMANE: Le 30 mars 2019, oui.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: À Bambeto, c'est ça ?

SOULEYMANE: Oui.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Et qui était le président du comité ?

SOULEYMANE: Abdoulaye Bah.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Alors, est-ce que vous pourriez m'expliquer les raisons qui vous ont poussé à adhérer à ce parti ?

SOULEYMANE: En fait, c'est le projet de société de l'UFDG que j'ai lu qui m'a convaincu. J'ai trouvé ce projet intéressant pour le pays. Par exemple, concernant le secteur de l'éducation, nous voulons rendre l'école obligatoire pour tous les enfants à partir de 5 ans et aussi augmenter le budget de l'éducation de 13 à 20 %. Deuxièmement...

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Attendez, attendez, pardon. Donc, c'est le programme qui vous a convaincu ?

SOULEYMANE: Tout à fait.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Et comment vous avez entendu parler du parti ? Qu'est-ce qui vous a motivé à vous rapprocher d'eux ?

SOULEYMANE: En fait, c'était après le déguerpissement, après la destruction de nos maisons. J'ai rejoint l'association des déguerpis.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: L'association des déguerpis, c'est pour ceux qui ont perdu leur maison ?

SOULEYMANE: Exactement, oui. Et c'est là que j'ai croisé les militants de l'UFDG.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: D'accord. Donc, vous avez déclaré que vous étiez secrétaire à la sécurité de votre comité de base, c'est ça ?

SOULEYMANE: Oui, c'est ça.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Vous avez été élu quand ?

SOULEYMANE: Le 12 mai 2019.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Donc, vous êtes entré au parti le 30 mars.

SOULEYMANE: Oui.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Et le 12 mai, vous êtes élu secrétaire à la sécurité.

SOULEYMANE: Oui.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: C'est rapide comme promotion, vous ne trouvez pas ?

SOULEYMANE: Je ne sais pas.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Et vous les avez convaincus comment ?

SOULEYMANE: C'était... En fait, ils ont vu mes motivations.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Vos motivations ? Mais ensuite, vous avez prononcé un discours. Qu'est-ce que vous avez dit pour les convaincre ? Comment ça s'est passé ? Prenez votre temps, il n'y a pas de souci.

SOULEYMANE: C'était à propos du foot.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Je ne comprends pas le rapport. Il faut que vous m'expliquiez.

SOULEYMANE: En fait, madame, vous savez, j'étais le capitaine de l'équipe de foot. J'avais l'habitude d'organiser des matchs et les jeunes du quartier me respectaient. Vous savez, madame, le foot, quand on est l'organisateur, tout le monde nous respecte.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: D'accord. Mais concrètement, je veux dire, comment ça s'est passé ? Moi, je n'étais pas là, donc imaginez qu'il faut m'expliquer la scène pour que je comprenne. Par exemple, est-ce qu'il y avait d'autres candidats pour ce poste ?

SOULEYMANE: Madame, honnêtement, on était nombreux. Je ne peux pas vous dire combien de candidats il y avait. Je ne me souviens plus, après toutes ces années.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: D'accord. Et ça s'est passé où ? Cette élection, ça s'est passé où ?

SOULEYMANE: À Bambeto.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: À Bambeto ? Et où, à Bambeto, exactement ?

SOULEYMANE: Au rond-point.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Au rond-point, dehors ?

SOULEYMANE: Oui, dehors.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Ça ne devait pas être facile de faire une élection dehors.

SOULEYMANE: En fait, c'était dehors, mais sous une tente, au rond-point.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Sous une tente. Quand est-ce que vous avez été arrêté, M. Sangaré ?

SOULEYMANE: C'était le 23... pardon, le 23 octobre 2020.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Et qu'est-ce qui s'est passé ?

SOULEYMANE: Alors, arrivé à la gendarmerie, on m'a fait entrer dans une salle. Là-bas, il y avait deux inspecteurs de police.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Deux inspecteurs, oui ?

SOULEYMANE: Oui. Il y avait des feuilles sur la table. Ils m'ont demandé de signer les feuilles, soi-disant que c'étaient mes aveux. Moi, j'ai dit non. Puis ils ont appelé les gendarmes. Les gendarmes sont venus et ont commencé à me brutaliser. Puis...

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Attendez.

SOULEYMANE: Ils ont commencé à me taper avec des matraques et des ceintures, puis à me donner des coups de pied. Moi, j'ai dit non. Après, ils ont continué à me taper. Et quand je me suis évanoui, ils ont pris mes mains, puis ils ont mis mes empreintes sur des feuilles. Après ça, ils ont amené des objets : il y avait des machettes, des fusils de chasse et un peu de tout. Puis ils ont mis ça autour de moi et ils m'ont pris en photo avec, en disant que j'avais été arrêté avec ces objets.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Il y avait d'autres gens avec vous ?

SOULEYMANE: Non. Je ne connaissais personne.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Il n'y avait personne que vous connaissiez ?

SOULEYMANE: Madame, vous savez, j'étais dans la salle, je n'étais pas bien dans ma tête, du coup...

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Ensuite, ils vous ont transféré à la prison centrale, c'est ça ?

SOULEYMANE: Oui.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Et donc, là, ils vous ont...

SOULEYMANE: Quand on m'a transféré à la maison centrale, on m'a emmené dans une salle où il y avait 32 personnes.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: 32 personnes ?

SOULEYMANE: Oui.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: D'accord. C'est très précis. Et parmi ces gens, il y avait des personnes que vous connaissiez ?

SOULEYMANE: Non. Ces gens-là, non.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Il n'y avait pas d'autres membres de l'UFDG là-bas non plus ?

SOULEYMANE: Honnêtement, je n'ai vu aucun membre de l'UFDG là-bas.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Mais en fait, je ne comprends pas. Vous avez passé quoi, 45 jours environ en prison ? Donc vous avez parlé avec les gens ?

SOULEYMANE: Oui, j'ai parlé avec les autres. C'était pour trouver des solutions pour sortir de la prison.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Et il n'y avait toujours aucun membre de l'UFDG parmi les gens qui étaient là-bas ?

SOULEYMANE: Honnêtement, non, madame.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Donc personne à la gendarmerie, personne à la prison centrale ? Pas une seule personne que vous auriez pu croiser à la manifestation ?

SOULEYMANE: Non.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Le récit, qui est-ce qui vous l'a écrit ?

SOULEYMANE: C'est moi qui l'ai écrit, mais je me suis fait aider par un assistant social de notre association.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Monsieur Sangaré, je crois que vous ne vous rendez pas compte de cette histoire-là. Je n'arrête pas de l'entendre. Les maisons détruites, les manifestations, la prison... Même votre histoire de photos avec les machettes, je l'ai déjà entendue deux fois la semaine dernière.

SOULEYMANE: Madame, je pense que c'est normal. On était nombreux.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Donc tout le monde raconte les histoires de la même manière, avec les mêmes mots ? Il ne faut pas vous inquiéter, d'accord ? Là, ce qui est important, c'est ce que vous me dites maintenant. C'est ça qui est important. Ce qui a été déposé dans le dossier, il n'est pas trop tard pour le changer. Moi, je suis là pour vous écouter. Donc, qu'est-ce qui vous est arrivé, à vous ? C'est quoi, votre histoire à vous ?

SOULEYMANE: C'est mon histoire, madame.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Monsieur Sangaré, il n'est pas trop tard. Moi, je suis là pour vous écouter. Pourquoi avez-vous quitté la Guinée ?

SOULEYMANE: En fait, c'est quand j'étais petit. Quand j'avais sept ans, on vivait ensemble : mon père, ma mère et moi. Mais mon père a renvoyé ma mère parce qu'elle était malade, parce qu'elle... Il a renvoyé ma mère parce qu'elle n'était pas comme les autres.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Qu'est-ce qu'elle a, votre maman ?

SOULEYMANE: Tout le monde disait que ma maman était une femme diabolique. Et moi, j'avais du mal à entendre tout ça. Je ne pouvais pas supporter tout ce qu'on disait sur ma mère. Elle est malade mentalement, mais ce n'est pas de sa faute. On me disait tout le temps : « Toi, t'es la fille d'une folle. » En fait, je suis parti parce que le peu que je gagnais en Guinée ne suffisait pas. Je voulais faire quelque chose pour elle. Je voulais qu'elle se sente bien. Enfin, même pas bien... Au moins, je voulais juste qu'elle ait un endroit où elle puisse se sentir mieux. Mais en Guinée, je ne pouvais rien faire. Je n'avais rien. Je n'avais même pas un endroit où dormir. C'est pour cette raison que je suis parti avec mes amis en Algérie, parce que je pensais qu'on allait au moins travailler là-bas et pouvoir faire quelque chose pour ma maman. Mais au final, ce n'était pas ça. Je suis arrivé, j'étais malade. Et mes amis étaient déjà prêts à partir en Libye. Du coup, j'ai continué avec eux. On est partis en Libye. Mais en Libye, madame, vous ne pouvez même pas imaginer comment on vivait. Là-bas, on n'était pas considérés. On nous traitait comme des animaux, comme des... rien du tout. Ils nous ont amenés directement en prison, et tout ce qu'on nous demandait là-bas, c'était de l'argent. « Vous allez appeler vos parents. Ils vont vous envoyer telle somme. » Moi, je n'avais rien. Ma maman, elle n'a rien. Elle compte sur moi. Là-bas, en prison, ils nous ont torturés. Tout ce qu'on nous disait, c'était : « L'argent. Appelez vos parents. » Les autres ont appelé leurs parents. Moi, ma famille... En prison, dans ma tête, je me disais que je n'avais pas le droit de mourir en prison, puisque ma maman... Je n'avais pas le droit de mourir là-bas, parce qu'elle a besoin de moi. Elle a besoin de moi. Elle... Elle m'a donné la vie, mais je dois faire quelque chose pour elle. Elle m'a dit de ne pas mentir, et je continue toujours à mentir.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Est-ce que vous voulez rajouter quelque chose ?

SOULEYMANE: Non, ça va.

AGENTE DE PROTECTION: Je pense qu'on a terminé. Les résultats vous seront envoyés par courrier. Si la réponse est positive, vous bénéficierez de la protection de la France. Vous aurez le droit de travailler et de vivre ici. Si la réponse est négative, vous aurez un mois pour déposer un recours. Vous avez compris ?

“Limbo”

Call with mum scene

MOTHER: Hello?

OMAR: Hello, Mum?

MOTHER: Who is it? Omar?

OMAR: Hi, Mum.

MOTHER: Khalid, it's Omar on the phone.

OMAR: How are you, Mom? Where are you? How are things? How are things in Istanbul?

MOTHER: Don't worry about us, we're fine. How are you? What's the news? Where are you?

OMAR: I'm in Scotland.

MOTHER: Scotland?

OMAR: I'm on an island somewhere in Scotland.

MOTHER: Khalid, he's on an island in Scotland. I thought you were going to London?

OMAR: Yeah, I was but...

MOTHER: Are you working?

OMAR: Mum, I told you. I can't work without asylum.

MOTHER: Well, how long is it going to take? Well?

OMAR: I don't know. A few months or more.

MOTHER: More? What if they say no? What about Germany or Sweden? I heard they are nicer to Syrians there.

OMAR: Mum, I speak English.

MOTHER: What's that? Your dad is asking if it's like Guantanamo.

OMAR: No. No, it's not like that.

MOTHER: Do you have enough money? Huh?

OMAR: I'm OK. They give me a little to survive.

MOTHER: I'm not asking that. Your dad is asking if you can send us money?

OMAR: Mum... I don't have any. Do you need money? I don't get enough.

MOTHER: No, no, we're fine. It's... Are you eating enough? Maybe I can send Makdous.

OMAR: You tell me how to make it.

MOTHER: I almost forgot... How's your hand, Omar? Did you get the cast off?

OMAR: Not yet. I should get it checked.

MOTHER: Omar, have you heard from Nabil? Well?

OMAR: No, you?

MOTHER: Not since you left.

Voluntary return scene

FARHAD: I'll borrow your coat tomorrow.

OMAR: You can get "Friends" from the donation centre, but you can't get a coat?

FARHAD: Coat is in high demand.

WASEF: The post comes tomorrow.

ABEDI: We won't get any then.

WASEF: I hope you get deported.

ABEDI: Probably better than being stuck here with you, brother.

FARHAD: Joe is so funny.

OMAR: What would you do if they let you stay?

WASEF: I'd go to London. Play for Chelsea Football Club.

ABEDI: It's a good thing that God made dreaming free.

FARHAD: I could be Wasef agent. Like Tom Cruise in Jerry Maguire.

WASEF: You know they put us out here in the middle of nowhere to try and break us.

OMAR: What do you mean?

WASEF: They try to get us to volunteer to go home. We're all single, male, low priority, past the sell-by date. Look. Afghanistan: best before 2003. Sudan: best before 2006. Iraq: best before 2005. But I thought they were rolling out the red carpet for Syrians.

ABEDI: Maybe you came a year too late.

Waiting scene

OMAR: How long have you been waiting?

FARHAD: Thirty-two months and five days. But... letter will come.

"I used to" scene

ABDUL: I used to be happy before I came here. I used to cry myself to sleep every night. But now... But now I don't have any tears left.

Y: Brilliant. Abdul, you have just jumped to our next lesson on "I used to be."

Not a tourist scene

MARGARET: Hey, pal. Want a leaflet? Catch a glimpse of our local celebrity. Derek the Dolphin. Discount with the flier.

OMAR: Thank you.

X: He's not a tourist, Margaret.

MARGARET: Well, he's not from around here, is he?

X: Bet you never thought you'd end up here, pal, eh? We're looking at a 25 % population increase with you lot arriving.

MARGARET: Aye, but mind Wee Davie McEwan passed last week. That's one down.

X: That's maybe just as well. I wouldn't say Wee Davie was a racist. It's just, he didn't like Blacks and Pakis. I mean, no offence.

OMAR: What's a Paki?

X: It's like tanned, but not Spanish, you know like fol from India and, like, uh...

MARGARET: Pakistan.

X: Aye, aye, aye. It's just like Wee Davie didn't like people that weren't from around here. I mean, legend has it we had a tourist here once got in a confrontation with Wee Davie. Wee Davie bit his finger clean off.

MARGARET: The wee one, the pinkie.

X: Spat it right back out into the boy's pint. Anyways, no worries. Wee Davie, he stays down in hell now. So you should be alright.

OMAR: Thank you.

X: Hey, pal, pal. If you want to make some extra cash, the fish processing plant is looking for fol just like you. I'll tell you, it'll be better money than the pennies you're on at the moment.

OMAR: I'm not allowed to work.

X: Oh, hey, hey, it's cash in hand. Send money home for the family and that. You know, that sort of thing.

Economic migrants scene

FARHAD: Economic migrants...

WASEF: What is "economic migrant"?

Suit scene

[Farhad with Omar's coat]

FARHAD: I think, when I get asylum, I would like to wear suit and work in office. In the morning, I put on shirt and tie, and I drink mug of black coffee, and I eat eggs sunny-side up. And I have desk and compute and phone. And I answer phone, and I say, "Hello. How may I help you today?" Something like this. In this country, I think people like you more if you wear suit. And you famous again, like musician in Syria.

New flat mate scene

FARHAD: I want to introduce our new flat mate. This... Freddie Jr.

ABEDI: What are you doing? Ahhh! Get that... get it out of here.

FARHAD: It's chicken.

WASEF: Are you scared of chickens?

ABEDI: No, no. I'm not scared of... I just... I...

OMAR: Did you steal that chicken Farhad? Farhad? You have to give it back.

FARHAD: They have many, many chicken. They'll not notice one chicken missing.

OMAR: If they notice, the first place they're going to look is with the migrants with no money or morals.

ABEDI: We have morals, okay?

OMAR: I know. I'm saying that's what they think. Farhad, you have to put the chicken back. One wrong step, and they will deport you, or all of us.

ABEDI: Like the guys at the fish factory.

Anger scene

OMAR: How do you find it so easy?

FARHAD: What you mean?

OMAR: Do you ever think about who you were before all of this?

FARHAD: I try not to.

OMAR: Would you go back if you could?

FARHAD: I can't.

OMAR: But if you could? Would you come back if you could, Farhad?

FARHAD: You don't think I need to be here?

OMAR: Why are you here? Huh? Because you want a job in an office? You want to wear a suit? You want to live your life like you're in some American TV show? Eggs sunny-side up? You won't come back because your life amounted to nothing back home.

FARHAD: I wouldn't go back because I cannot be myself back home. Is that what you wanted to know?

Letter scene

OMAR: Farhad? What happened?

FARHAD: A letter.

OMAR: Successful. That's, uh...

FARHAD: I am sorry. There was nothing...

OMAR: It's okay. Congratulations. That's great.

FARHAD: You don't hate me?

OMAR: No. No. I'm sorry, I... I didn't mean to... I've never met anyone... you know, like, uh...

FARHAD: Neither have I.

DECLARATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USAGE

Name: Roberta Rakauskaitė

Student ID number: 2416064

Please tick 'x' for applicable items:

☐ I have not used any AI tools in this assignment.

☒ I have used one or more AI tools in this assignment.

If yes, which ones? Claude, Chatgpt, Grammarly

I used AI tools critically, as an additional tool. I take full responsibility for the information, arguments and final results of my work.

(Signature)

.....

Please tick 'x' for applicable items and explain how you used AI tools.

I used the AI tool as a(n)/for the purpose of:

1. x Idea generator (e.g., generating arguments or counter-arguments, developing a plan for structure, generating potential research questions, etc.)

Please explain: I used AI for developing the possible plan for structure in the very beginning of the research, but in the end result it changed considerably.

2. x Search engine (e.g., to find additional literature or contextual information on a specific topic, etc.)

Please explain: Used to identify key scholars and relevant literature. AI was used as an additional search tool in the process.

3. x Writing assistant (e.g., to correct spelling mistakes and/or typos, to rewrite the text in a more formal or academic style, to restructure paragraphs, etc.)

Please explain: I used AI to correct spelling mistakes and typos, improve clarity, and flag instances where connections between sentences or paragraphs were unclear or insufficiently developed.

4. ☐ Designer (e.g., to create a new, unique image or visualization, etc.)

Please explain:

5. ☐ Study buddy (e.g., to ask for additional explanations with regard to specific learning contents, to generate self-check exercises, etc.)

Please explain:

6. ☐ **Data analysis tool** (e.g., to perform calculations, coding, create charts, graphs or other quantitative/qualitative data visualizations, etc.)

Please explain:

7. ☒ **For efficiency** (e.g., to summarize existing texts, format references, etc.)

Please explain: I used AI to assist with formatting references and bibliography entries.

8. ☐ **Other** (I used AI tools in a different way.)

Please explain:

9. **What steps were taken to mitigate errors and minimize the chance of harm or inappropriate use of AI?**

Please explain: All sources found with AI were obtained and read by myself. Other than that, AI was largely used for language clarity, writing assistance. All analytical decisions, the corpus construction, the coding and the findings are my own. Importantly, AI outputs were treated as suggestions.