Borderline communities: aesthetic and authorial thresholds in the postcolonial script and film adaptations of Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*

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**Introduction**

1 Ernest Hemingway’s advice to any literary author whose work was being adapted was “to arrange a rendezvous with the movie men at the California state line: ‘you throw them your book, they throw you the money, then you jump into your car and drive like hell back to where you came from’” (Murray 2012, 26). Whether a loss of authorship and agency was a concern for Jhumpa Lahiri when she sold the film rights to *The Namesake* is anyone’s guess, although the contentious process of novel to film transformations may have been foremost in the minds of screenwriter Sooni Taraporevala and film director Mira Nair as they set forth on the task of transforming the Ganguli family story – members of the diasporic community – to the screen.

2 Fortunately, audiences and critics responded favourably to the adaptation, particularly in the US, where the film is partly set, with the transposition being described as “gentle and compassionate”, conveying “a palpable sense of people as living, breathing creatures” (Holden 2007), and with the material having been handled with tenderness and “subtle charm” (Ebert 2007). Lahiri (2006) also seems to have been satisfied with the outcome; in *The Namesake: A Portrait of the Film Based on the Novel by Jhumpa Lahiri*, a collection of writings co-authored with Nair, she asserts that, despite the differences between novel and film, “the song remains the same” (9). However, this was not the reaction of critics across the board. In Britain, some were more scathing – *The
Guardian’s Steve Rose (2007), for instance, claims there were many “moments when I found myself wanting to refer to the book to find out what really happened.”

Indeed, for many years, this attitude, in which the book is held as a hallowed text to the detriment of its adaptation, was to be found in much of the writing surrounding page-to-screen transformations both in the mainstream media – where fidelity to the text still largely remains a paragon of virtue – and in academia, which denigrated film in favour of its literary source, with analyses focusing on what was left out, what was amiss, and how the adaptation always came up short. This contrasted with the experiences of filmmakers working in the field: for instance, in his book of essays describing his artistic process, Satyajit Ray (1994) highlights the necessary process of selection and elimination in the process of adaptation, insisting that this emerges from artistic integrity.

However, times have changed, and in recent decades, film adaptation theorists have focused their attention on the fruitful instability of textual remains, in which films refer to other narratives in a dialogic process of intertextuality (Stam, 2004). Today, the field of adaptation continues to transform, opening up its areas of interest to include analyses of adaptations of less canonical works by artists from diasporas and developing countries. These include works focusing on interstitial filmmakers producing “accented cinema,” to use Hamid Naficy’s (2001) terminology: authors who are “situat[ed] in the interstices of cultures and film practices, who exist outside and prior to their films.” (4).

Nonetheless, this crossing of borders – critical work elucidating the practice and agency of those working between and betwixt – has yet to engage with the complexities of context and industry. Despite calls to adopt a more transdisciplinary approach and to bridge the divide between different subject areas, as advocated by Raw (2017), amongst others, the liminal screenplay, an industrial document, is still considered an “area of neglect” (Sherry 2016, 12), with little communication between adaptation and screenwriting studies.

A review of the critical work produced about the adaptation of The Namesake bears witness to this. Indeed, much of it is concerned with novel-to-film comparisons, focusing on an interpretation of the possible conscious and unconscious intentions of Lahiri, as novelist, and Nair, as director of the film, with the screenplay and scriptwriter, Taraporevala, being largely excluded from the discussion (Chakraborty 2014; Setyaningrum and Hapsarani 2018; Das, 2013). This tendency persists even in research that favours an intertextual approach (Bakirathi 2012), as well as in articles in which the overall role of the script in the filmmaking process is actually discussed. A case in point is Trivedi (2009) whose analysis of cultural translation and bilingualism in Nair’s film highlights the function played by the script, as paratext, but does not delve deeper into the dynamics of script-to-film transformations, with Taraporevala not even getting a mention.

Moreover, although there has been some work in which adaptation studies, as a field, has engaged with postcolonial concepts – with regards to The Namesake, most notably in Trivedi (2009), Setyaningrum and Hapsarani (2018) and Richards (2017) – the fruitful overlaps between the two areas have not been exploited to a great degree, as Ponzanesi (2014) points out. If, however, to use Deborah Cartmell’s (2017) words, we are to look “at how adaptations are shaped by the period in which they are produced and how they define their audiences” (1), we must also pay attention to every aspect of that process,
as well as to the particular positioning and authorship of postcolonial “transversal intellectual” filmmakers (Isin 2020, xiii). These are artists who “traverse both dominant and dominated positions” (xiii) across knowledge-power and imperial-colonial networks – filmmakers like Nair and Taraporevala, who enjoy a certain privilege, in their ability to work and live across cultures, and yet, who still face systemic labelling as ‘Other’. Indeed, such critical work would give us insight into how global power relations – between North and South, East and West, Hollywood and the rest of the globe – impact artists’ power to speak from within and without those filmmaking and cultural interstices.

Through an analysis of various screenplay versions of The Namesake written by Taraporevala, based on Lahiri’s novel, and Nair’s filmic transposition, this article aims to contribute to remedying these lacunae, albeit within the limited scope afforded by such an article.

The Namesake seems perfectly poised to elucidate these dynamics. It tells the story of two generations of the Ganguli family, spanning the period between the 1970s and the film’s present day. Ashoke and Ashima move from their native India to New York, where, isolated and trying to adapt, they eventually have a son, whom they call Gogol, after the Russian writer, Nikolai Gogol. The reason for this choice of name lies in a traumatic event from Ashoke’s past, a train crash which he miraculously survived. The accident remains imprinted in Ashoke’s memory, as does the advice given to him by a fellow passenger just before – to depart from India, his home country, and see the world – and the story he was reading on that fateful journey, Gogol’s The Overcoat, becomes symbolic of the decision to leave his home country. Years later, his son, who becomes a pot-smoking, rock-and-roll loving teenager, has to contend with his split identity, part-Indian, part-American, an out-of-place identity represented by his name - the past and present of the immigrant experience. The film itself is also a product of mixed cultures: although it is classified by IMDB as an Indian/American production, Fox Searchlight Pictures were actually the sole financers of the project, which was filmed in Kolkata as well as New York.

Thus, with a focus on The Namesake, this article argues that an analysis of postcolonial adaptation, taking the liminal screenplay into consideration, gives insight into the negotiated territory of authorship. This is particularly the case in the work produced by postcolonial artists – who, like the characters in the film, are often members of the diasporic community, living between and betwixt borders. Such an analysis deepens our understanding of the aesthetics rooted in transcendental homelessness, framed within Naficy’s “accented cinema” (9); haptic imagery which is utilised to recall the memory of home; and the representation of the experience of living out of time – between places and, thus, chronologies. However, before delving into the details, we must first examine how the traditional borders of adaptation and authorship studies can be dismantled by adopting a transdisciplinary approach that takes the industrial screenplay and postcolonial studies into consideration.
Postcolonial adaptation and the liminal screenplay: re-examining the traditional borders of adaptation and authorship studies

“Adaptation” has been referred to by various names: rewriting, appropriation, transmutation, transformation, translation, revisioning, rehashing (Sanders 2006), as well as, more recently, “a paradigmatic form of transtextuality” (Stam 2019, 67). Yet, despite its myriad referents, during its initial years as a field of study, the parameters of adaptation were narrowly set, being principally concerned with upholding the borders between literature and film, as well as principally focused on analysing the adaptations of literary works from the British and American canon – thus leaving out a spate of texts from diasporic writers, or those working from emerging economies.

Indeed, as Stam (2004) explains, adaptation, as a subject-area, was given short shrift in the academic field, being concerned principally with comparative methodologies in which film always seemed to come up short, was deemed inferior and unable to fully express the range of human emotions as well as the experiences conveyed in literary works. The often-quoted George Bluestone’s (1957) *Novels into Film* is often denigrated as having laid the foundation for such critical work, which favours fidelity to the (canonical) source text – whether through equivalencies (Andrew 1984) or the spirit of the original (Orr 1984; Boyum 1989). This approach was widespread, and for many years – well into the 1970s – critics were still attempting to classify adaptations according to how similar or dissimilar the adaptation was to the source text (Wagner 1975; Klein and Parker 1981).

These critical perspectives mirrored the privilege accorded to Romantic (and literary) conceptions of the author, in which the artist had full control over the meanings conveyed in the texts. This was nothing new, however, since film criticism, more generally, was (and, to some extent, still is) predicated upon Francois Truffaut’s *auteur* theory – the French New Wave *politique des auteurs*, as outlined in his famous article *A Certain Tendency in French Cinema* (1954) – in which the film director is deemed to be the master of (usually) his domain, and the visual work is seen as the result of singular, conscious, intent.

Yet, as the years have gone by, there has been a distinct change in perspective. Indeed, in describing the evolution of adaptation studies, Murray (2008) divides its development into three distinct schools, namely, a first wave presided over by fidelity theorists; a second wave focusing on narratological analyses; and a third wave privileging intertextual perspectives. Leitch (2017) describes a similar historical development: Adaptation 1.0 (1960s-1990s) centred on medium-specificity and fidelity to the literary source; Adaptation 2.0 (1990s-2000s), focused on intertextuality; and – updating Murray’s outline – Adaptation 3.0 (up until the present day) which focuses on the impact of digital technology.

These shifts have opened the field up to a more nuanced view of authorship. For instance, narratological analyses of adaptation allowed for a consideration of both conscious and unconscious meaning and – borrowing from psychology and anthropology – efforts were made to identify the different forms of intention through the study of thematic patterns and mythological schematics. Thus, influenced by Levi-Strauss and Russian Formalism, questions directly related to “the modifications and
permutation of the story” (Stam 2004, 35) were asked, with theorists, such as Chatman (1980) and Gunning (1991) pointing to what they viewed as shared, common narratology, since “narrative itself is a deep structure quite independent of its medium” (Chatman 1980, 436).

This perspective can actually still be seen in the way in which screenwriters, working in the mainstream film industry, position their craft today. Teaching manuals – such as the ubiquitous handbook, *Story* (2001), by Robert McKee, as well as Christopher Vogler’s *The Writer’s Journey* (2007), based on Joseph Campbell’s study of myth, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2008/1949) – are still widely used, particularly in Hollywood, and attempt to guide prospective film writers through elements of mythological structure, archetypes and “best practices” which, allegedly, are more likely to capture audiences’ hearts and minds (and therefore make profits at the box office). However, this closed system has been criticised for its universalising tendency, pushing forward a progressive narrative in which the hero of a journey must overcome obstacles to achieve what he wants – a story outline not dissimilar to the West’s teleological view of human history, as described by the postcolonial thinker, Edward Said (1993). Thus, Said says, Europe and the United States are cast as heroes in cultural representation, Orientalising the “other”, and cementing the Manichean dichotomy of East and West (Said 1986).

In his recent writings on world cinema, Stam (2019) also points to these “streamlined narratives” (66) as one aspect of mainstream Hollywood adaptations, but his concern is the way in which they have contributed towards the valorisation of fidelity in adaptation studies. Throughout his career, Stam (2004) has advocated for an intertextual approach to the field. Indeed, adaptation, in his view, refers to “the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in endless process of recycling, transformation and transmutation, with no clear point of origin” (9, my emphasis). This perspective, he says, allows for “analytical productivity”, opening the critic up to the “gains in translation” (Stam 2019, 66) – in other words, it allows for an analysis predicated upon how the film has been enriched by various textual influences, rather than how it has come up short when compared to the source text.

However, in focusing on the “endless process...with no clear point of origin”, the source text and the various authors of the work are relegated to the background, and, taken to the extreme, this perspective flies in the face of at least one well-known fact amongst filmmakers working in the field: in adaptation, audiences seek familiarity, within a new form, a repetition-with-difference, to use Hutcheon’s (2006) term. Put succinctly, adaptation becomes “the means of prolonging the pleasure of the original presentation and repeating the production of a memory” (Sanders 2006, 24). This means that the original cannot be discarded as just one influence amongst many, although neither is it hallowed ground, as the fidelity theorists would have had it.

Moreover, particularly in the case of postcolonial adaptations, the poststructuralist “death of the author”, to use Barthes’ (2008/1968) term, just won’t do, since it strips the possibility of agency – and, thus, of the power to speak – away from the writers and filmmakers who face systemic obstacles to getting their work made and distributed. This is acknowledged by current thinkers such as Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller (2012) whose work on postcolonial cinema includes a chapter on adaptation, in which they attempt to refocus the issue by arguing for a classification of postcolonial
adaptations into four groups, depending on the extent to which the film portrays a colonial – or anti-colonial – message, compared to the book: “film adaptations that are fairly faithful to the source and […] do not undermine its colonial and conservative message” (173); adaptations of classics told through a postcolonial lens; adaptations of “postcolonial texts transposed into film by the Western cultural industry” (173); and adaptations of postcolonial novels by interstitial filmmakers, such as the adaptation of *The Namesake*. In her more recent work, in which she acknowledges that there is currently no “structured theory of postcolonial adaptation” (155), Ponzanesi (2014) also adds a fifth category: Bollywood remakes of Hollywood films which, she says, often do not contain any postcolonial message. However, these categories are not discrete, as pointed out by Pisters (2009), who notes “the example of an Indian film that wins a Western film festival, which then opens up distribution facilities in India” (300). The film world is small, with overlapping interests.

Clearly, context is important for Ponzanesi. Her other work also focuses on the machinations of the global film industry as well as postcolonial literary production. She is full of praise for Simone Murray’s work, *The Adaptation Industry* (2012), for its refusal to get bogged down in the polemics surrounding the faithfulness (or otherwise) to the source text, in favour of an examination of the gatekeeping structures which impact upon the production and distribution of adaptations. However, Murray’s intervention is also significant because of its emphasis on a reconceptualisation of authorship, wherein she acknowledges the pivotal role of the novelist – whose prestige rubs off onto the adaptation – yet advocates for a shifting away from the Romantic conception of the solitary author, in favour of an understanding of adaptation as the product of collaboration.

Consequently, in her view, attention must be paid “to the intermeshing artistic contributions of a cluster of film professionals including, inter alia, the screenwriter” (136, my emphasis). Sherry (2016) is a definite advocate of this approach, focusing his attention specifically on the figure of the screenwriter and pointing out that, while post-structuralist tendencies in the field of adaptation opened the area up to other voices, thus dismantling the authority of a single author, the liminal screenplay – caught in-between the literary work and the film – remains an “area of neglect” (12). A review of adaptation literature from the past two decades further attests to this, although Sherry fails to point out that, perhaps, one of the reasons for such neglect is the difficulty in actually locating the scripts, and all its revisions, in the first place, a point which has been made by Peter Lev (2003).

An examination of the nature of adaptation, and the contested field of authorship, requires the various versions of the screenplay to allow the critic to gain insight into the evolution of ideas, elucidating the process by which some ideas from the literary work are kept, discarded or transformed in the screenplay, and the way in which these transfigured themes and images are transposed into the final filmic work. This requires a more nuanced view of the screenplay, moving away from strict definitions of the text as a singular blueprint, and towards an understanding of the process of adaptation, in which multiple scripts are created, with each subsequent version reformulating the film’s themes and imagery. Davies (2019) attempts to construct a definition of the screenplay in these terms, by casting it as a “boundary object”, a text which allows different individuals or groups – in this case, the various film departments and film creatives – to “cooperate towards a common goal by creating a ‘shared space’” (150), in
this case, the space of the film itself which undergoes transformation as the various collaborators leave their imprint.

Yet, what Davies (2019) fails to point out is that not all collaborators are equal. Indeed, the postmodernist thinker, Linda Hutcheon (2006), while also pointing to the form’s potential multiple auteurs – director, screenwriter, production designer, cinematographer, and costumier, among others – notes that these all leave their imprint on an adaptation, to varying degrees, depending on their creative distance from the adapted text. Indeed, following Hutcheon’s reasoning, the screenwriter and director – being closest to the source – have the greatest impact on any given adaptation.

Despite this, critical work on the adaptation of *The Namesake* has tended to elide the contribution of its screenwriter, Taraporevala, while also gravitating towards a comparative analysis of the transposition from novel-to-film – from the work of Lahiri, as novelist, to that of Nair, as director of the adaptation, thereby overlooking the liminal screenplay. This tendency is upheld even in criticism which adopts more open forms of analysis, influenced by Stam, such as Bakirathi’s (2012) intertextual readings of the novel, film and the photographic exhibition which was launched a few days after the film’s premiere, showcasing the images which inspired many of Nair’s shots.

In the case of Chakraborty (2014), such a novel-to-film comparison is to the detriment of Nair’s work, which is deemed to come up short. In his essay, Chakraborty criticises what he sees as Nair’s over-emphasis on the distinction between India – as a homogenous fixity – and the US, stating that by omitting details about the Bengali background of the Ganguli family, Nair “reverses” the “set of attachments that Lahiri investigates in her novel” (610). As a result, the identity of the family becomes rooted in a romantic nostalgia for India, in contrast to the novel which, he stresses, examines the cultural negotiations immigrants are forced to make in their rituals, practices and ways of living.

This is only part of the story, however, as Chakraborty is well aware, and several critics have pointed to the presence of Bengali cultural elements in Nair’s work (Das 2013; Setyaningrum and Hasparani 2018). Indeed, Trivedi (2009), while critiquing the use of non-Bengali actors in the roles of Ashoke and Ashima, notes the effective use of the Bengali language in Nair’s transposition, saying that the language becomes a motif due to the potentialities of film as an audio-visual medium (a similar point is made by Bahri 2007). Yet a look at the scripts reveals a more direct intention to weave Bengali material into the adaptation. There are frequent mentions of the Bengali language and culture in Taraporevala’s scripts: for instance, in the revised shooting script (TNSS-R) Gogol is described as someone who “eats like a Bengali” but “speaks like an American” (27)

To sum up, by means of their overemphasis on a comparative approach privileging the output of Lahiri and Nair – to the exclusion of the various versions of the script – critics have failed to acquire a deeper understanding of the intentions behind the transposition. In light of this, it is my contention that a contrapuntal methodology, which also takes Taraporevala’s work into consideration, can provide more nuanced insights into the process of adaptation, further elucidating the dynamics inherent in such a creative production.
A note on methodology

In order to analyse negotiated authorship in postcolonial adaptations, I, hereby, propose a hybrid methodology, tearing down the borders between postcolonialism, adaptation and screenwriting studies. To this end, examining the various versions of the screenplay – as well as the filmic transposition – allows for a better appreciation of the process and product. In this regard, Boozer (2008) identifies a minimum of two main scripts: the initial “spec” draft, used to acquire financing, and the shooting script, which members of the production utilise, later in the production process, to bring the story to screen, enabling the director to coordinate creative ideas. However, in actual fact, a single film produces multiple versions of the screenplay, as ideas change and mutate. Thus, this article will be looking at three script versions, graciously provided by Mirabai Films, which incorporate various revisions arising from the collaboration of Nair and Taraporevala over the course of the production. The table below offers key data, together with the reference code being used in the analysis.

Table 1: Screenplays Analysed for The Namesake (writer: Sooni Taraporevala; director: Mira Nair; production company: Mirabai Films)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Namesake Draft</td>
<td>12th May, 2004</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>TND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Namesake Shooting Script</td>
<td>10th January,</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>TNSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Namesake Shooting Script with Revisions (Blue, Pink and White)</td>
<td>18th March, 2005</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>TNSS-R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transcendental homelessness and the “third optique”

Theorists and thinkers have long decried the desire to erect boundaries and to propagate reductive stereotypical identities in postcolonial and migratory situations. Indeed, postcolonial writers have pointed to the lack of fixed identities within the diaspora, what Said, inspired by the philosopher George Lukács, refers to as a transcendental homelessness (Lukács, 1971), an embodiment of the need to reconstruct a revisionist identity over and over again, particularly relevant in a world of cultural cross-over and widespread migration. Bhabha’s (1994) ideas on postcolonial hybridity, an empowered cultural identity constructed within the “Third Space of enunciation” (37) and characterised by ambivalence and productive instability, also echoes this perspective.

In his writing on accented cinema – constituted by a “double consciousness”, that is, the overlapping of influences from cinematic traditions and from the condition of exile, diaspora or postcolonialism – Naficy (2001) takes this cue and states that the hybridised subject in film is constructed in ambivalent spaces. In his view, accented films are characterised by “a third optique” (31), employing multiple subjectivities, fragmentations, and ambivalences in their visual styles, themes, soundscapes, and – fundamentally – showing evidence of collective authorship. He classifies Mira Nair as a
diasporic filmmaker making such artworks, further stating that “her films are part of not only accented cinema but also Indian cinema” (70).

Indeed, Nair, whose working relationship with Sooni Taraporevala spans decades – the two have collaborated from the beginning of their careers, with Taraporevala writing the scripts for Nair’s first films, *Salaam Bombay!* and *Mississippi Masala* – uses cinematic techniques to translate ideas from the script into visual imagery, a process indicative of collective, negotiated authorship.

Montage, or editing, is one of the key capacities through which the director builds upon the work of the screenwriter, and this can be seen in the fragmented depiction of traumatic memories, as Ashoke repeatedly remembers the train accident which compelled him to leave India. This event haunts him in the novel, and Ashima is frequently woken up at night “by her husband’s muffled screams” (Lahiri 2003, 29), while the “times they have ridden the subway together and the rhythm of the wheels on the tracks makes him suddenly pensive, aloof” (29). Nair’s editing allows for this anxious repetition of traumatic memory through the structure of the film, as the event is recalled as an incomplete flashback at various points in the narrative. Indeed, while in all scripts under analysis, TND, TNSS and TNSS-R, the accident is recounted as a complete instance either at the beginning of the narrative (TNSS and TNSS-R) or in the middle (TND), the film slices Ashoke’s memory so that sections of it are recalled at different points in the story without full disclosure until the very end. This creates ambivalence, with the structure of the film embodying the notion of transcendent householdness through the split, revisionist repeatability of traumatic memory.

However, while Nair’s filmic translation concretises the impact of this memory on Ashoke, it builds upon ideas already found in the script, though these are conveyed through different techniques. Taraporevala’s work, therefore, also plays on the repeatability of trauma through, in TNSS-R, the specific sound of “a train […] on the soundtrack” (12) echoed in different scenes in the script. Moreover, in TNSS and TNSS-R, the rooms in Ashoke and Ashima’s house in New York, “lead into each other like railroad cars” (p. 7). In the film, this is translated into scenes which show Ashima and Ashoke trapped within the door frames of their flat, but these frames do not provide visual echoes to train carriages, as Taraporevala’s script seems to imply. This illustrates the way in which the screenplay and film may indicate parallel themes but through different methods, and at different points of the narrative.

The depiction of the Ganguli’s visit back to India – years after they first left, and now accompanied by their two teenage children – also reflects collaborative, negotiated authorship, using techniques that are reflective of the various media. In both Nair and Taraporevala’s adaptations, the Taj Mahal, with its intersecting arches and sophisticated architecture, reflects the myriad liminal zones in which the diaspora lives. Indeed, the liminal significance of the location is highlighted in the shooting script, TNSS-R, which describes the Taj as existing within mythic time – “silence and the ethereal beauty of the Taj Mahal that shines like a pearl in the rosy early morning light” (36) – while in Nair’s work, the Taj’s liminality is emphasised through borders and arches, with one leading onto the other to infinity (Fig. 1).
Yet the mausoleum, for Taraporevala and Nair, is also symbolic of the loss inherent in the experience of migration, and it is evocative of that which is untranslatable between cultures. Indeed, the scene, in both the scripts and the film, possesses intertextual echoes of Lahiri’s (1999) short story, The Interpreter of Maladies, in which the Das family – second generation Indian Americans who “looked Indian but dressed as foreigners did” (43) – take a tour of the Sun Temple in Konarak, accompanied by the local guide and interpreter, Mr Kapasi – a narrative thread which is echoed by the Ganguli family’s visit to the Taj Mahal in The Namesake. The parallels run deeper however, for, in Lahiri’s short story, the cultural divide between India, represented by Mr Kapasi, and the Americanised Das family cannot be bridged – Mr Das, his camera strung round his neck, is quick to bring the lens up to “a barefoot man, his head wrapped in a dirty turban, seated on top of a cart of grain sacs pulled by a pair of bullocks” (p. 49) – just as, in The Namesake adaptation, Gogol, and his family, are only able to look at the Taj Mahal through their touristic gaze.

This is evident from the very first shots of the Taj Mahal as the Ganguli family arrive, in which the tomb is filmed from the upper levels of the Great Gate – an image which has been replicated across the globe in tourism brochures of the site. This parallel, which is clarified when Ashoke brings the camera up to his face – echoing Mr Das – highlights the ambivalent, liminal position of the Ganguli family as tourists in India, an image which has its roots in Taraporevala’s script (TNSS-R), where the family decide to take a photo together in front of the monument. In Nair’s film, by means of images such as these, the viewer is also encouraged to look at the Taj through the prism of the outsider, to marvel at its sublime elegance, symmetry and tactile beauty. Indeed, the director seems to be well aware of her target audience – mainly film viewers in the West – and employs strategies of what Graham Huggan (2002) calls “strategic exoticism”, that is, the “self-conscious use of exoticist techniques and modalities of cultural representation” (32-33). These can be either reactionary, that is, used to draw attention to unequal power relations, or complicit in postcolonial relationships between West and “other”, as was pointed out by the Indian filmmaker, Satyajit Ray...
(1994) who warned against “pandering to their [the West’s] love of the false-exotic” (42). In this case, throughout the film, Nair seems to oscillate between these two polarities: aware of international audience’s preconceptions – which may mirror Gogol’s to a great degree – she infuses the text with images evoking the vibrant, hot sights and sounds of Kolkata, contrasted with the stripped back, cold aesthetic of New York, while, at the same time, striving to highlight the connections between the two worlds.

However, as we move through the Taj Mahal, guided by Gogol who serves as the audience’s proxy, we do so as visitors, while Gogol retains his position as outsider, yet one who lives in between places. To depict this, Nair makes use of fluid tracking and Steadicam shots, taken from between doorways and arches, framing Gogol as he absorbs the overwhelming emotions the palace inspires. The camera spins, changes focus and highlights the reliefs on the walls in line with Gogol’s wonder and discovery of this marble palace. Through the images presented, there is a fetishization of the Taj which limits a full understanding of the tomb’s significance as a place of loss; Gogol’s experience of the site is incomplete, despite its role in forming his ambitions for the future (as pointed out by Setyaningingrum and Hapsarani 2018). Indeed, the trauma of cultural translation, because of his in-between position, has resulted in regrettable losses in understanding across the cultural divide (for instance, connection with other Indian people, who are rooted to the landscape, is impossible because they exist on the edge of the frame as floor sweepers or dyers outside the walls of the Taj). As Fletcher (1999) insists, in his overview on Jean Laplanche’s theory of translation, “there’s always a remainder which Laplanche calls the à traduire, the yet-to-be-translated” (16) – elements which get left out in the translation process, and repressed, solidifying into stumbling blocks which hinder communication between cultures and peoples. In this case, these losses hinder Gogol’s ability to fully connect to his heritage.

This divide is only bridged when his father passes away and Gogol shaves his head, donning white robes in mourning; in effect, the repressed gets translated. Indeed, at this point in the narrative, in the final, revised, shooting script, the tomb of the Taj as representative of loss – and of the losses implicit in the experience of migrancy – is made clear when Gogol goes to Cleveland to identify his father’s body and on the fridge, in Ashoke’s rented apartment, he sees “a photo of Ashima, Gogol, 11, Sonia, 7. CU of the photo. They are standing at the Taj Mahal.” (66). The Ganguli family stand together as a unit, in their liminality, as tourists in the land of their heritage.

The memory of home: ambivalent sensuous geographies

Going hand in hand with the notion of the “third optique” (Naficy 2001, 31), work in the field of intercultural cinema has focused on the importance of the senses of touch, taste and smell as a form of resistance in postcolonial and accented film against the imperialism of the visual and aural senses. Indeed, the importance of tactile optics for those living in-between has been discussed by Morse (1999) and Naficy (2001) who illustrate the ways in which the concept of home can be evoked through the senses. The intercultural theorist Laura Marks (2000) also reflects these concerns in her evocation of “‘sensuous geographies’[…] or our sensory experiences of place” (129), in which spaces are remembered through haptic visuality. Indeed, in Marks’ view, sense-
memory, and, particularly, the sense of touch in film, is an absent-presence, for “cinema can appeal to senses that it cannot technically represent” (129). Indeed, she goes on to outline how synaesthesia – the evoking of one sense through another – works in film, wherein:

- sounds may evoke textures; sights may evoke smells (rising steam or smoke evokes smells of fire, incense or cooking). [...] the perception of one sensation by another modality, such as the ability to distinguish colors by feel [sic]. (213).

Thus, an analysis of haptic imagery in film may lend itself to an understanding of the multi-sensory experience of postcolonial cinema, allowing for an analysis of the photographic image expressing an ambivalence through synaesthesia. Yet, despite the productivity of this perspective, neither Morse, Naficy nor Marks mention if and how the film screenplay, itself, can provide the foundations for these evocative tones, and how these are later transposed into visual terms.

Leading on from this, in the various texts constituting the film adaptation of Lahiri’s novel, both Taraporevala and Nair imbue their work with sensual ambivalence, reflecting the novelist’s descriptions. Going back to the train wreck scene, this is described in Lahiri (2003) in grotesque terms: Ashoke “remembers the acrid odor of flames, the buzzing of flies, children crying, the taste of dust and blood on his tongue” (18). In the first version of the shooting script, TNSS, Taraporevala describes this scene as follows:

All around him is darkness and the sounds of people half-dead moaning & tapping [sic] on the walls of the train. [...] Blood drenches his chest. [...] There are mangled bodies everywhere. [...] It’s a surreal nightmarish landscape. Dark, smoky, windy. (2-3)

In the film, Nair’s use of a tracking shot, travelling through the borders of the mangled train, finally ending in a shot of a deathly metal structure, rising in the night sky, highlights the grotesque in visual haptic terms, imbuing the text with a ghostly fluidity, in which the perimeters between inside and outside dissolve, with shattering consequences.

However, the film – when contrasted with the various versions of the screenplay – also shows evidence of an enhanced ambivalence conveying the liminality of the hybrid state, living in-between two sensoriums. Indeed, while in TNSS-R, Taraporevala writes that the four-year old Gogol “looks through the frosted glass” (20, Fig. 2), Nair’s transposition is more textural, filmed through that frosted glass, representing Gogol’s distorted worldview, which has been influenced by his difference and his heritage, as was also pointed out by Setyaningrum and Hapsarani (2018).
Moreover, while in TND, TNSS and TNSS-R, Taraporevala indicates the changeability of identity and the transience of life through a reference to an “art installation of holographic images” (27), filling the screen as Ashima and Ashoke travel back to India when the former’s father passes away, these images, in Nair’s version, take on further significance. Their continuously changing forms give rise to a textural ambivalence, wherein it is unclear where one image stops and another begins. Indeed, this instability reflects Naficy’s (2001) insistence that sites of travel and transition are fundamentally significant to the diaspora and are symbolic of the physical, mental and emotional crossings made by members of migrant communities.

Yet, later in the film, border crossings between life and death are also depicted using liquid, uncanny visuals, indications of which are not necessarily found in the script. In TNSS-R, for instance, Taraporevala describes Ashoke – who is sick – “on the pay phone in the emergency room. In the background, we see the array of sick and injured people waiting for attention” (70). Nair translates this into a fluid representation of death, with Ashoke’s hand, indicating his life-line, placed on the screen of the phone booth while he occupies half the frame. In the other half of the frame, the unfocused world continues without him. At the end of the conversation, as he is hanging up, Nair uses racking focus to shift attention from the phone booth to the process of Ashoke’s dematerialisation in the image.

Within the interstices of time

For Bhabha (1994), the members of the diaspora have been placed out of time and out of place. “They embody the Benjaminian ‘present’ that moment blasted out of the continuum of history” (22) – the monadic moment. In the adaptation of The Namesake, this fragmentation of time is conveyed in the scripts and in Nair’s visual transposition, though with variations across the different forms.
Indeed, one can see how Taraporevala’s scripts set the foundations for Nair’s images. For instance, while the literary novel emphasises Gogol’s name as a bridge to the past, Taraporevala’s shooting scripts connect the past and the present by means of the Gangulis’ history, with an emphasis on the inclusion of photography to interrupt the movement of filmic time. Thus, photos become “written” memories, as can be seen in TNSS, in which a “still frozen image” (12) captures the newlyweds before they leave India, while in TNSS-R, Dr Gupta photographs Ashoke and Ashima as they leave hospital with baby Gogol for the first time. Moreover, also in TNSS-R, the frame “fills with snapshots of Kolkata relatives in color [...] amongst Ashima’s father’s hand-painted cards to Gogol.” (22) and, later, on a visit to India, Gogol “begins sketching what he sees through the iron window bars: the crooked skyline and roofs. He’s unaware that his grandfather used to sit exactly like that when he sketched (which we saw in an earlier scene)” (33).

These descriptions point to the work’s artistic future, the film, and cement the groundwork for Nair’s visual representation of the monadic moment conveyed through the alternation of stillness and movement. Thus, this “interruption of time by a movement going on the hither side of time, in its interstices” (Bhabha 1994, 22) is conveyed through various parallel still images of Kolkata and New York, inspired by the work of photographers such as Dayanita Singh, Jun Shiraoka and Manuel Alvarez-Bravo, as Bakirathi (2012) has pointed out. These images of the two cities echo each other, and are interrupted by a singular movement within the frame – birds flying in New York, for instance, or sheets flapping in the wind in Kolkata (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Mira Nair. The monadic moment in *The Namesake*. 2009.

This preoccupation with disrupted time reflects Lahiri’s novel (2003), for, here, time is fractured, and the diaspora live in one space, one chronology, whilst constantly thinking of another. Indeed, the distinction is made here between “American seconds” (4) and “Indian time” (47), which Ashima calculates using the watch her father gave her before leaving India.
Thus, in both Taraporevala’s script and Nair’s transposition, still images, which evoke the personal memories of the Ganguli family, are snapshots frozen outside of filmic time, disrupting movement and standard chronologies, yet connecting the protagonists to their past – visuals which also reflect the original source novel. These snapshots gain increased importance in the wake of Ashoke’s death, since they recall key moments in Gogol’s relationship with his father. This can be seen in the transposition of a scene directly taken from the novel, in which the liminal threshold between life and death is evoked at the beach. Here, in Lahiri’s (2003) imagination, “the waves flowed in two directions” and while the family forgets the camera, Ashoke tells the young Gogol:

All this way and no picture. [...] We will have to remember it then. [...] Remember that you and I made this journey, that we went together to a place where there was nowhere left to go. (187).

In Taraporevala’s script, TNSS-R, there is a photo of this moment – taken by a stranger on the beach and saved on the son’s computer many years later – which takes Gogol back to that day on the beach. On seeing the image, Gogol is reminded of that day, and a flashback is inserted in the narrative, conveying a sense of the elegiac, since, here too, the “waves flow in two directions. Ducks swim in the tide pools.” (107). In turn, Nair translates this into a series of static shots with the fluid, diegetic movement of the waves interrupting the stillness of the frame – a dislocation of time and space, experienced by those “in-between”, on the threshold between two worlds (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. Mira Nair. Fluid, diegetic movement of the waves in The Namesake. 2009.

The movement of time is also measured through the repetition of rituals. Indeed, as Said (2000) notes, the invention of traditions is a tactic practised by the hegemonic powers to suppress competing narratives and to cement a particular version of history. However, resistance and agency, through oppositional narratives, can be fostered through the creation of new rituals, or through the relocation of older ones in the newer spaces inhabited by the diaspora. For Spivak (qtd. in Landry & Maclean 1996), women, as subaltern subjects, play a central role in this process, and indeed, in the novel, The Namesake, Ashima is the carrier of her native rituals, transplanting them into the American environment, creating them anew. She is therefore the element of
continuity and community between one world and the other, the initial bridge between territories, as has also been noted by Richard (2017). This is expounded upon in the script versions and in the film, in which she becomes the representation of cultural displacement, while also being the upholder of Indian rituals in this new environment. For Ashima, these rituals are the knot tying two countries and two timelines. For instance, Ashima’s experience of Gogol and Moushumi’s wedding reminds her of her own wedding to Ashoke in India. In TNSS-R, Taraporevala notes that Moushumi “looks like Ashima did on her wedding day” while Ashima herself “is reminded of her own wedding day. She misses Ashoke” (91). And, while the script intercuts between flashbacks of Ashima and Ashoke’s matrimonial ceremony and Gogol and Moushumi’s, this is filmically realised in a disorienting montage mixing the two weddings together, conflating them into one: the close-ups of Moushumi’s hands become those of Ashima’s, the guests of each wedding interweave to form one large community.

**Conclusion**

53 This article has attempted to encourage a discourse intertwining adaptation, screenwriting and postcolonial studies by arguing that an analysis of the various texts constituting postcolonial adaptation – from the drafts of the screenplay, to the shooting script, and the film – elucidates the negotiated terrain of authorship. It has revealed that both the screenwriter and director leave their imprint on the final work, with the former’s ghostly echoes also reverberating on the cinema screens. The final film, then, becomes a palimpsestic work onto which the various conscious and unconscious intentions of those closest to the source are written and re-written. The analysis also reveals a multi-level complexity, which moves us away from the idea of the director as a single controlling authority over the film’s streamlined meaning, towards a more flexible approach which posits authorship as being split, contested, and ambivalent. Meaning in adaptation can, therefore, be said to be deferred from draft to draft, reaching its culmination in the film, where meaning is also deferred to the audience. Intentions between the players differ but are also deferred from one draft to the next, “always constituted by its opposite” (Brunette and Wills 1989, 58).

54 This can be seen to be the case in the work produced by transversal intellectuals, such as the screenwriter Sooni Taraporevala and the director Mira Nair. I have tried to show this through an examination of their transposition of *The Namesake*, which tells the story of two generations of the migrant Ganguli family, members of the diasporic community, living between and betwixt borders. Such an analysis, I have contended, allows for a deeper insight into the adaptation process, and into the work’s aesthetics, rooted in transcendental homelessness, haptic imagery and the representation of living out of time.

55 This article makes no claim to be exhaustive. Rather, more work is required to fully understand the dynamics of adaptation – within the context of postcolonial film – and how the industry can impact on the subaltern’s ability to speak. Efforts must also be made to analyse the creative contribution of other film collaborators, and especially, in my view, of the director of photography and the editor, whose work alongside the director ensures that the techniques of cinema are exploited in service of the material. Form and content are inextricable, but, in film, there are many who impact upon that
form and whose creative decisions, made in consultation with the director, are conveyed to the audiences.

The polemics of adaptation show little sign of abating, especially due to the central position it occupies within filmmaking, since, as Ponzanesi (2012) notes, filmmaking itself is a form of translation and adaptation, “an ongoing struggle, involving questions not only of language but also of power, meaning, and resistance to meaning” (1). Within this struggle, room must be made for the in-between, liminal script, in order to shed more light and value on the aesthetics of the screenplay, its politics and compromises as well as the process, practice and development of adaptation.\(^1\)

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NOTES

1. In the film industry, colours, as set by the scriptwriting software Final Draft, are used to distinguish between one revision and another. Thus, in order of distribution date: White Revision Feb 23, 2005; Pink Revision March 14, 2005; Blue Revision March 18, 2005.

ENDNOTES

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ABSTRACTS

The borders of adaptation studies are constantly in flux, with scholars keen to discover new perspectives and methodologies, examine new forms and push boundaries across disciplines. Despite these calls, however, there have been few inquiries which have actively analysed the liminal script, caught between and betwixt the literary work and the film. To this end, this article takes a contrapuntal approach – tearing down the boundaries between the disciplines of postcolonial, adaptation and screenwriting studies – to analyse the representation of the diaspora, the “borderline community of migration” (Bhabha 1994, 9), in the script and film adaptations of Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Namesake (2006). To do so, various unpublished versions of Soona Taraporevala’s screenplay, as well as Mira Nair’s transposition, are examined with reference to postcolonial tenets, to reveal a dual discourse, reflective of collective authorship, in which conscious and unconscious meaning is negotiated, and deferred from one successive text to the next.

Les frontières des études sur l’adaptation sont en constante évolution grâce aux travaux d’universitaires désireux de découvrir de nouvelles approches et méthodologies, d’examiner de nouvelles formes et de repousser les limites entre les disciplines. Cependant, malgré ces
tentatives, peu d'études ont analysé activement le scénario liminal, situé à mi-chemin entre l'œuvre littéraire et le film. Par conséquent, cet article adopte une approche contrapuntique - en abolissant les frontières entre les disciplines des études postcoloniales, de l'adaptation et de l'écriture de scénario - pour analyser la représentation de la diaspora, la " communauté frontalière de la migration " (Bhabha 1994, 9), dans le scénario et les adaptations cinématographiques de The Namesake (2006) de Jhumpa Lahiri. Pour ce faire, diverses versions inédites du scénario de Soona Taraporevala, ainsi que la transposition faite par Mira Nair, sont examinées à la lumière des principes postcoloniaux, afin de révéler un discours à double voix, reflet d'une paternité collective, dans lequel le sens conscient et inconscient est négocié, et reporté d'un texte à l'autre.

INDEX

Mots-clés: adaptation, paternité, postcolonial, écriture de scénario, scénario, Namesake (The), intellectuels transversaux, diaspora, frontières, intervention postcoloniale

Keywords: adaptation, authorship, postcolonial, scriptwriting, screenplay, Namesake (The), transversal intellectuals, diaspora, borders, postcolonial agency

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