



Imagination and Ethnography. Bridging the Gap of (not) Being There Through Film

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Abstract

Cinema can have great impact on how students understand reality, filter, and process information, and how they respond to teaching in class. Finding a way to use film and critically embed it in our teaching methods, can create a more productive engagement in class and foster a deeper comprehension of social anthropology's methods and theoretical premises on the part of students. Furthermore, exploring the use of feature films in teaching area studies, where cultural essentialism can be an innate problem, may sensitize students' imagination in more creative and evocative ways which serves to challenge stereotypes. This article postulates how films can help students comprehend and compare different historical and cultural nuances of the Black Sea region, by showing how much ethnography is a complex ongoing process not bounded to the spatial metaphor of the field.

Introduction:

In the 1970s, Clifford Geertz (1973) criticising functionalist ethnography for observing cultures at a distance considered deep immersion in cultural subject matter as a way for ethnographic texts to postulate the interconnected networks of cultural meanings and actions. He termed this thick description of ethnographic writing. In the same text, he underlined that culture can be found all around. Since then early 20th century film became part of culture, however film as a method to capture and represent cultural behaviour was something new. What Geertz had not foreseen was the degree cultural mediatisation would develop in the next decades after the publication of his paper. "Mediascapes Today", according to Arjun Appadurai (1996), circulate by generating complex, historically sensitive and interwoven imagined worlds, mediating our perception about "Weness" and "Otherness" and our understanding and experience of culture (see Hjarvard 2008).

This gradual mediatisation of culture has great impact on how students of anthropology understand reality, filter and process information, and respond to us in class. Finding a way to use and critically embed it in our teaching methods can lead to a more productive engagement in pedagogic practice and a deeper comprehension of social anthropology's methods and theoretical premises. Furthermore, exploring the use of feature films in the teaching of, say, area studies where cultural essentialism can be an innate problem might be able to sensitize students' imagination in more creative and evocative ways, which in turn could challenge cultural stereotypes. This discussion will postulate how films could help students comprehend and compare different historical and cultural nuances using the Black Sea as a case study. It also addresses the context to which ethnography is a complex, ongoing process not bounded to the spatial metaphor of the field.

Film and Social Anthropology

In the field of anthropology, the visual has been introduced since the Victorian era in order to provide extra testimony on facts collected in the field. Early ethnographic museum collections exemplified this shift towards the visual, which was also combined the mission of saving of endangered cultures and tribes through visual documentation (see Stocking 1987). The intention sounded noble, but it stemmed from the same colonial logic

of objectifying, categorising and representing what seemed important to the colonial authorities and the scientists. However, the introduction of a more prolific use of photography and film was impeded by the spirit of empiricism and positivism which felt intimidated by the rising popularity of the still and later moving images. This popularity contradicted the elitism of scientific knowledge expressed by the rigor of scientific writing and logos.

Constructing an actor-oriented take on culture was for Geertz an “imaginative act” (1973: 15) one, which did not differ from the writing a novel or a script. Both ethnographic and fictional representations are acts of “making”. As a result, what is represented (content) cannot be separated from the means of representation (mode), nor from the actors’ intentions. This take on anthropology had challenged the ‘objective status’ of empirical anthropology. Yet, it suggested that the discipline’s subject matter was not “social reality” but “scholarly artifice” (Ibid: 16). The troubled relation of social anthropology to film stemmed from this fear of staggering scientific premises. For Geertz, the answer for getting out of this impasse was found in the multi-layered and interlaced quality of the description which could unwrap the complexity of social reality by immersing in the latter and clarifying the unfamiliar and the unknown. Doing ethnography for Geertz provided the “vocabulary” through which this description could be generated (Ibid: 27).

The crisis of representation in the 1980s which befell anthropology shifted the attention to ethnography equally as writing and practice. The internal duality in ethnography had an impact on its relation to film, as it consisted of two interlinked parts: the practice of carrying out research in the field, which is always subjective, elliptic, as human experience always is, and the text (see Clifford and Marcus 1986). This resulted also in separating visual practice in the field (ethnographic film) from that of studying visual practices (text anthropology) (see Grimshaw 2005). In this context, anthropologists resorted to ‘new’ techniques, often borrowed from the early 20th century avant-garde art employed by surrealism, Dadaism such as montage, allegory, pastiche (see Clifford 1986: 98-122, Tyler 1986: 122-141). These techniques aspired to reproduce the more fragmented reality of the field, instead of ‘faking’ a skillfully wrapped up ‘objective’ whole (Marcus 1998). However, social anthropology’s endeavor into cinema as art and industry remained still sporadic. It also concerned mostly observational films which documented reality. For example, Peter Loizos (1992: 26-50) in his discussion of the modalities of observation films and how they can be used in anthropology, he saw them in opposition to “entertainment film”, which were identified with the practice of “going to the cinema” (Ibid, p.63). Entertainment films could not be part of anthropology as they are “one off”, “stand alone” experiences. In that sense, observational film creates interrelations whereas entertainment films seem to stand aloof in their own (filmic) world.

An exception to this dominant view was Steven Caton’s study of Lawrence of Arabia (1999). Caton developed a fruitful dialogue between the social, the cultural and the artistic in different historical periods from the 1960s to the 1990s, studying issues of travel and colonialism in fieldwork and filmmaking; orientalist representations of the Middle East and hetero/homosexual Otherness. In this way, the film shifted from being a text to becoming a context, a space which was not produced by bounded and homogenous territories, cultures and communities, but rather by the inter-dependencies of different and history-sensitive locales constructed by “complex systems such as colonialism or market economies” (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 91). The question I would like to take up here is: how can this shift strengthen our teaching in classes that are often not in distinct anthropological departments or programmes where the background of our students varies.

Teaching an ethnography of the Black Sea: Between Proximity and Distance.

Teaching in the field of area studies, especially when I began in the early 2000 has presented certain challenges tied to the history of the field. Area studies carried the burden of defining an ‘area’ in geographic and cultural terms produced in relation to imperial and colonial interests, local/elite agendas and the axis of power between North/South, West/East (see King 2008). This resulted to the objectification of regions. This objectification led to the ‘observation’ and ‘description’ of specific cultural traits and an almost timeless value for the production of a region as a research unit. As Fotini Tsibiridou, discussing the production of boundaries between the ‘West’ and ‘Islam’ argued (2017: 118), the contact between colonialism and western modernity generated hegemonic perceptions, stereotypes and conceptualisations with impressive impact among varied audiences (academics, politicians, NGO workers, artists, journalists) and endurance through the years. This objectification drawing from a tradition of scientific positivism and orientalism led to the representation of the Black Sea as a distinct region through a) its relevance to European interests (eg. silk roads and energy routes) its diversity cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious.

Introducing my students to the Black Sea brought to surface some of these stereotypes, which I grouped them below into two Othering tendencies, as I will discuss below. My class was in an MA programme regarding the History, Politics and Culture of the Black Sea. Most of the students, equally grouped in gender terms, had a background in Greek history and archaeology. This was their first class on social anthropology.

1. The challenges of proximity: The geographic and historical closeness of the Black Sea to Greece often generated in my students certain ideas about what they ‘think they know’ about the region due to the ancient Greek colonisation of the Black Sea, Christianity, the Ottoman and Russian imperial past as well as historical diasporas and present transnational mobilities, for example, the community of the Bulgarian, Georgian or Armenian labour immigrants in Greece. All these connections produced certain presuppositions of what the Black Sea is, the peoples included and where the region stretches to.

2. The challenges of distance: At the same time, the Black Sea for many students differed from their experience and remained at a distance. Diversity, regional cosmopolitanism and multilingualism were considered endemic in the region, turning it to an alleged laboratory of a traditional way of life. These features distinguished the social and political history of the area from bounded and represented homogenous nation-states of European history. Emphasis on bounded cultures and territories produced by Orientalist and imperial legacies and biopolitics, Cold War ideologies, global agendas and neo-exoticisation through various forms of branding generated and perpetuated difference and distance for ‘other’ areas such as the Black Sea.

As a result, both these two tendencies (proximity and distance) often enmeshed the danger of a bounded and homogenous almost colonising Self. This Self compared itself to a solid and compact Other overlooking the fact that this binarism was fashioned through asymmetries of power. For example, Grant and Yalçın-Heckman (2007) argued that, the imperial agendas (Russian, Ottoman, Persian among others) deployed in the Caucasus treated the region as an “absent presence”. In other words, the Caucasus was taken into account only as part of wider colonial ambitions. This unknowability stemmed from inequalities of power, Euro-centrism and ethno-centrism, civilizational missions as well as Cold War divisions and neo-liberal /global homogenisation. To different degrees, this argument could be extended to other countries from the Black Sea shores. Pointing out these degrees, the variations and the differences can help students to deconstruct their presuppositions and stereotypes. In this way, “the ‘subjective’ visions” of delineating regions (Humphrey and Skvirskaja 2014: 3) could be revealed. This subjectivity stems from academic traditions, and political agendas either from a distance (eg. outside the region) or from the inside.

In this context, the choice of using feature films to teach the ethnographies of the Black Sea was a way for me to bring my students in contact with the ordinary and the everyday (always partial and fragmented), to challenge the familiar and to deconstruct the unfamiliar, as it pertains to the “region”. However, this ‘local’ context should not be examined as homogenised or ‘value free’ (see Tsibiridou 2017: 118). Instead, the interconnections and interdependencies between local and global hegemonies could be addressed. In addition, through films, I aimed to acquaint with our discipline’s methods in a way that appealed to their learning habits. They could realize how the ‘ordinary’ and the ‘everyday’ were constructed not only through content but also through form, the mode of representation used, even when (or perhaps even more) realism was the predominant genre. The point is crucial for tackling scientific objectivism (the description of the facts and the reality) where scientific distance is considered a prerequisite.

One of the questions I had to address was what sort of films were appropriate for such a mission. I also had to deal with practical problems, for example, availability of films with Greek or at least English subtitles. At that time, films that had the ‘observational’ modality that Peter Loizos was searching were rare. Most of the documentaries focused in those years, on dominant themes that perpetuated the unknowability of the region, such as political conflicts and wars, traditions and customs. Moreover, the inter and multi-disciplinarity of the departments I worked at and the diverse background of my students, as I discussed, turned my attention to feature films where I looked for a certain quality of “ethnographicness” which Banks suggested (1992: 127). The idea of ethnographicness “is not a thing out there which is captured by the camera but a thing we construct for ourselves in our relation to the film”. I tried not to censor films according to my presuppositions about their inner anthropological quality. Let me, here, turn to an example of this practice in class.

Challenging the Tropes

i. Teaching Frozen Conflicts

One of the topics which is often presented in the ethnographies of the Black Sea is violence, especially when the regional focus turns to the Caucasus. Despite its small size the Caucasus has been home to no fewer than three major geopolitical and ethnic disputes: in Nagorno Karabakh (Armenia/Azerbaijan), in South Ossetia and in Abkhazia (Georgia). The so-called frozen conflicts, unresolved disputes over territory are often used as paradigms for regional violence. This representation tends to perpetuate evolutionary and modern presuppositions regarding violence as an endemic characteristic of specific societies, especially those with acephalous or weak statehood. Despite the more diversified understanding of violence in postcolonial critique (see Whitehead 2004), these perceptions are still evident in the ethnography of the Caucasus (Grant and Yalcin-Hekman 2007). Through the examination of the two films, I will present below a more nuanced approach to violence as a modality of regional representation.

The films selected for the discussion of frozen conflicts were *Mandariinid* (Tangerines, Zaza Urushadze 2013) and *Omi da Qortsili* (the War and the Wedding, 2010, Zaza Kolelishvili). The former related the story of three men who, due to the Abkhazian-Georgian war, became captive in a wooden house surrounded by a tangerine orchard in Abkhazia. The latter related the story of a couple who chooses to get married in south Ossetia on the day the war with Russia started in 2008. I proceeded the ethnographic exploration of frozen conflicts through these two films with three pedagogic steps:

1. Unpacking of descriptive categories
2. Unpacking of analytical categories
3. Exploring the ramification of the 'field' with global agendas (cultural critique)

This aspect raises questions of mediation but also of craftsmanship of the field. I think this is an important aspect of introducing students to the craft of writing. The first step was to explore the context, in other words, how meaning in the filmic world was constructed. The exploration of the film narrative brings students in contact with background information, histories and events that generate this world and characters. For example, in *Tangerines*, the film started with a question: "What an Estonian is doing here?" (see Sideri 2016). That the first person whom the students connected with in film asked a question the students themselves might have asked, challenged the duality of insiders' knowledge/outsider's ignorance. Meanwhile the *War and the Wedding* started with a middle-age man who seems tormented walking alone in the woods with a bottle of vodka. The man sits down on a bench and remembers the recent events that led him to his current state of loneliness. The immediate focus on the main character personalized the story and addressed the question regarding the nature of memory. In both films, the identity of the leading characters became the vehicle for navigation in the ethnographic/film cosmos. What differed, though, was the fact that in *Mandariinid* these identities were always a work in progress. On the contrary, in *Omi da Qortsili* the identity of the man, ethnic Russian born and raised in Georgia, was portrayed as intolerable. In the end he committed suicide on the same bench where the film started.

Starting from these content-oriented questions, the class could begin to navigate through issues such as imperial histories and Soviet Nationality Policy, categories of membership and the politics of their construction as well as real and symbolic boundaries (eg. immigration from the Baltic states to the Russian Transcaucasia after the Great Northern War, the presence of ethnic minorities in Georgia). The adopted role of the stranger or halfie -haven't we all as ethnographers been in those shoes (see Narayan 1993). This provides the class with an impression of 'being there' in a more immediate and emotional way. Characters are liked, pitied, or hated. This impression was supplemented with an experience of sounds, colours, and material culture.

In parallel, this step allowed the class to explore not only the content but also the form, how representation took place. Comparisons with our writing-the traditional mode of representation in ethnography social anthropology-could be drawn here. *Mandariinid*'s mise-en-scene produced by tight, character-centred shots, wooden and earthy textures, and low tone lights, except for the scenes in the tangerine orchard, generated a microcosm of intimacy that cried out humanity in its core and essence. As the camera moved at slow speed created a sense of fluidity. This intimacy seemed fragile and was interrupted by violence and death. On the contrary, *Omi da Qortsili* transferred the duality of the title in the mise-en-scene. The shots were divided between the Georgian, peaceful, tolerant world and the Russian violent world, depicted almost as caricature. This comparison helped

students understand how much the form could produce significance and cultural meaning involving more their own background, their home (symbolic or real), in the way they understood other cultures.

Then, I moved to the exploration of categories with an “analytical value”, for example, hospitality and captivity, tolerance and nationalism. *Mandariinid* is a Caucasian myth, in the sense that it negotiates the myth of captivity not in order to restore the binary oppositions of insiders/outside, locals/foreigners, hosts/guests, guardians/prisoners, but rather to deconstruct stereotypes. The film took an affective approach, as explained above, close to the ethnographic participations that focuses on social practices and informant’s agency. Affect encouraged students to overcome the unknowability of the region. For example, many establishing shots (which describe a situation, a setting or a dominant feeling) place Ivo, the Estonian host, within his environment by stressing textures, nature (wood, fire), objects (household equipment). This strategy of personalising home (ethnography as vocabulary according to Geertz) without naming increased the class’ identification to Ivo through setting, emotions and objects all humans can feel as part of their home. It also increased students’ chances to overcome their inhibitions to use jargon because they don’t understand it or to use it rhetorically without understanding. Using everyday language as starting point in order to understand the filmic text and the cultural subtext can be the way to grasp after that the meaning of jargon. Furthermore, affect produced by the screening can move students not from here to there, but from taking for granted to mediating and cross-cutting the experiences of hominess and strangeness.

In distinct fashion, *Omi da Qortsili* following the dualisms underlined in the title and the cinematographic comparison between the Georgian/Russian worlds naturalised the binarism between culture and violence. The former was interwoven with the Georgian (dominant male) tradition, the central scene of the film is the scene of the *supra* (the dinner party), which almost innately celebrated tolerance, peace and coexistence supported by a Georgian song that reminded a Byzantine, polyphonic, hymn. On the contrary, the Russian invaders did not respect the sacredness of the land or the culture. An example of an almost endemic barbarism was the fact that most of the Russian characters were represented as drunk throughout the film, but also the timing of the attack during the wedding which ended in a bloodshed. In this filmic world fixed identities did not allow any kind of negotiation. In comparison, *Mandariinid* too included moments of nationalist debates between the Georgian and Chechen ‘captives’. However, such a representation aimed to challenge them by stressing their absurdity. This negotiation did not have any position in the world of *Omi da Qortsili* where dualities were homogenised and did not allow for exploration of affective aspects of the characters. At the same time, both films addressed questions about historical ‘truth’ and ‘reality’. The first shot of *Tangerines* referred to the history of the Estonian community in Abkhazia whereas *Omi da Qortsili* was inspired by an incident of the war in South Ossetia. However, if the first film decided to pluralize the voices heard and hence, the histories, the second one followed the strategy of opposition. It validated the Georgian version whereas it ridiculed the other voices. Even in the case of the leading character who stood between opposing sides, he was ultimately led in the film to his death.

Finally, there was the examination of the film in the context of the modern European cinema or rather through an exploration of what this label meant today. This exploration brought students in contact with modern debates (creator’s intentions, audiences’ response) about the film industry, one part of European mediascapes and the EU agenda for a gradual formation of a European identity. *Tangerine’s* emphasis on affect and humanity refashioned the ‘Georgian’ (mainly the Georgian male) to provoke a wider dialogue with global audiences and markets. However, it opened the discussion of what is excluded from this kind of label. For example, *Omi da Qortsili* which was funded and support of the Georgian Ministry of Culture did not find distribution in Europe because the film flirted with propaganda. However, this very fact cause questions regarding of whence propaganda stemmed and how it was connected to historically shaped national stereotypes. Moreover, it showed that history was differently interpreted in the same country by different directors preventing reductionism about ‘Georgian cinema’ to become predominant in students’ minds. The validation of one interpretation over other by the European cultural mechanisms revealed the dominant paradigms produced even under the pretext of democratization and reconciliation. Excluding *Omi da Qortsili* as non-European might be seen an easy way to erase a tormented nationalist past and the accountability of Eurocentrism in the formation of such stereotypes.

ii. Teaching Corruption through Film

Another trope through which the ‘Black Sea’ is represented is corruption. Corruption is an ambiguous category to study. On the one hand, it was often treated through the lenses of modernization vis-à-vis Weberian tradition and its concomitant bureaucratic values which eradicated the socio-cultural ties and logics of pre-modern societies fostering corruption (Herzfeld 1992). This tradition was often reflected in the study of the ‘societies in

transition', former socialist countries which were expected to apply neoliberal economic and political blueprints in order to 'catch up' with western countries (Hann 1995, Verdery 1997). In this context, corruption was considered sign of a weak, porous state that could not fulfil its obligation to its citizens. On the other hand, there was another approach, where by corruption became the sign of social degradation and moral decay. Ethnographies following either approaches resulted in rich accounts of different understanding of the 'public' and 'private', 'national' and 'local', conflicting moralities embedded in solidarity, exchange of gifts, communal trust (Torsello and Bertrand: 2016). The two films chosen illustrated the variety of the meanings and scales of corruption de-essentialising the 'Black Sea'.

The first film is *Slava* (Glory 2016, Grozeva and Valchanov), a Bulgarian production. *Slava* relates the story of a railway worker, Tzanko, who finds a sum of money hidden near the tracks and turns it over to the police. At the same time, a scandal of corruption in the Bulgarian railroads threatens the career of the minister. His head of the communication office (Staikova) decides to use the good deed of Tzanko to disorientate the public opinion. The other film is a Romanian production, the *Bacalaureat* (Graduation 2016, Cristian Mungiu). The film relates the story of a middle-class family whose only daughter (Eliza) is about to finish school and go abroad to become a doctor. On the eve of her exams, the young woman is sexually harassed and hence, she fails in one of her exams, something, which threatens her scholarship. Her father (Romeo) will do anything he can so that the girl excels in her last exam.

Slava followed the structure of Omi da Qortsili in opposing different worlds like the class underlined in the discussion we had. But *Slava* did not use ethnic identities to oppose filmic worlds but differences in gender and class characters such as, the reclusive, staggering Tzanko from rural Bulgaria cannot get along with people, but gets along with rabbits and the hyper-active, always in fashion, careerist female head of the communication office. Apart from gender differences, the narrative structure illustrated two parallel worlds living in post socialist Bulgaria. One world lurks almost invisible reminding audiences of the glorious socialist proletariat past which it is frequently represented through strong masculine characters. Discussing about industrialisation and modernisation, time (past/present and future), gender roles in Bulgaria and the meaning of transition is done through the metaphor of a watch. The past still dominates Tzanko's life though the watch he inherited from his father. The movie starts with the watch. Tzanko keeps the railroad tracks in order due to that watch. The watch regulates Tzanko's life. The other world is the future, which tries to eliminate the past. Staikova takes the watch from him during the press conference because it is old. Then, she forgets both its existence as well as Tzanko's. So, life gets off track for both of them. Staikova visits a fertility clinic in order to have a baby when she is ready and saves her boss' position by bribing and discrediting Tzanko. She forgets Tzanko, his way of life and his (their) past. When she remembers it, it's too late. The moment she develops empathy, she loses her life. The film allowed students to get a feeling of how people talk (the vocabulary that fieldwork gives access to) through metaphors about the 'big issues', the categories of analytical value, corruption, modernity, transition and gender.

Similarly, in the *Bacalaureat*, the dominant metaphor was the breaking of a window. In an old soviet style block of flats, a stone broke the window of a flat. Romeo's family lived there. Romeo, a doctor, a man with principles, faithful to his Hippocratic oath, but unfaithful to his wife, tried to find who broke the window/law. Romeo's life work was to teach his daughter, Eliza, not to break the law, not to become susceptible to 'the sideways' of dealing with life in post-socialist Romania. His wife, a librarian, disagreed. She believed that they should teach Eliza how to survive; to stop living in a fantasy, like the perfect family they seemingly had whereas indeed Romeo had a parallel life with another woman, a fact that his wife knew and endured for Eliza's sake. When Eliza failed in one of her exams due to an incident of social harassment near her school, Romeo started to question his principles. As students pointed out in class, he is a father and fathers protects their children. In order to find justice for his daughter, he encountered an array of civil servants. Each one of them tested his principles. So both Romeo and students had to answer the question if means justify the ends? The film generated a series of micro-scale depictions of the Romanian state bureaucracy which called for petty decisions to deal with the exigencies of life and failures of modern states. How do these micro-scale circumstances connect to socialist/post socialism to corruption, morality and moral economy? What is the role of gender, as both films build their narrative through strong female characters, against stereotypes for the region in comparison to the Georgian films? These are some of the issues students raised in class.

Form, as the other two films showed, can contribute to the complex and rich accounts and narratives. Realism (often hyper-realism), natural light, sounds and setting, realistic characters and acting forced students to closely connect with the characters, their relations, micro-communication and feelings following the characters' pace of life as if they were there. *Slava* built its form through the characters' dichotomies, simple, slow rural life on the

one hand, fast, digital and mediated urban life on the other. The Bacalaureat followed a slow pace in widescreen generated by long, tight medium shots. In this way, students could observe, painfully sometimes, the agony, emotions and failures of the characters. They participate in the characters' decisions and pathos. For example, students gave emphasis on realism and documentary style of the two films pointing also out to the dialogue between the cinemas of the two neighbouring countries and their creators. This dialogue takes place in the context of the European media policies today. Both films are co-productions with European countries. Both films travelled through festivals and captured festival audiences.

The trope of corruption became paramount both the Bulgarian and Romanian films. Slava created a strong binarism which in the end arrived of a dead end. The lost past, the loss of roots, the loss of Slava (Glory, Tzanko's watch label) turned men into beasts. Tzanko killed Staikova in an outburst of wrath. The meaning was clear, maybe too clear and undisputed, as the narrative forgot the many nuances of everyday life in both film worlds (the 'rural'/ the 'urban'), something addressed by the Bacalaureat, in which every little choice for each character was a personal struggle between right and wrong, invested with emotions, which complicated life. In Bacalaureat's filmic world, "the modalities of the inconsistent truths that are found in ordinary old or new myths and narratives" (Tsibiridou and Palantzas 2013: 7) prevented essentialism and the construction of one, single hegemonic truth. The comparison between the two films allowed students to challenge regional fixity and stereotypes, and allowed for a study the construction or regional boundaries.

Conclusion

As Geertz emphasized (1973: 10)

Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript-foreign, faded, full of eclipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written, not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior.

This elliptic and fragmented nature of the field allows us to develop our imagination in order to fill in what is missing. In this context, exploration of possibilities stemming from what is seen (sensory), known (mind) and remembered (social) help student raise questions about places, peoples and cultures they read and learn about. Tim Ingold has urged us to reassess anthropology as a "forward-moving discipline dedicated to healing the rupture between imagination and real life" (quoted from Schäuble 2016). Imagination compels us, as well as students, to a critical dialogue with the world reshaping ethnographic experience. Humphrey and Skvirkaja (2014: 9) in their redefinition of the Black Sea region suggested that it should be defined as a "horizon", "an imaginary of the beyond" instead of a bounded fixed region.

In this context, the use of film could enable us to reassert the relation of representation the region without essentialising or, even better, by navigating and revealing various, competing, global and local interconnected hegemonic essentialisms and their legacies. The comparison revealed differences, various themes and tropes, different approaches, metaphors and vocabularies and similarities regional filmic traditions, common anxieties about the future, similar policy framework (economic blueprints, European media policies). Some of these similarities and differences drew from the past some other were formed by new exigencies. The development of affect and empathy with the filmic world and characters challenged these presuppositions in a way that students might well challenge the dominant idea about of proximity (being there) for understanding culture and the need for distance (watching it here) as an exemplary scientific practice (objectivity). Moreover, the use of film offers something else that is valuable for pedagogy, a playful aspect in teaching and learning, especially if we also use it as part of class assignments, such the creation of short films or photo stories, storyboards, scenario development etc.). It can be invigorating for our classes, for our students and ourselves as teachers. This aspect relates to what Edward S. Casey framed as "a special form of *self-entertainment*" (Casey 1976: 119) often missing from higher education.

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Notes:

ⁱ The film directed by Zaza Kolelishvili based on an incident which took place in Dzevera village, Gori district of Georgia's Shida Kartli region during the August 2008 Georgian-Russian war. A wedding was in process when Russians started bombing the Georgian village.