

## SECURITY MANIA: FILM AS A TOOL OF HEALING

Daniela Ingruber

- + Safety is comfortable, a human need.  
But security tends to be inhuman.  
Security takes away freedom.  
And it's usually the freedom of others that is taken.  
Security is never related to all. It excludes.  
Its policies injure and kill.  
As soon as security policies are introduced to make some feel safer, others are ignored, will be less secure; and less free.

Security is an obsession.  
Fighting terrorism directly led to a certain security mania. All those who do not fit into the pattern of the young prosperous white-skinned success or those who were born on the wrong side of the capitalist geography, come under the label "not-wanted": those, who might be criminals, terrorists or simply are different. Being different means an error message: it disturbs the security mania. It is seen as a criminal act, a threat to democracy and a danger for capitalism.

Like P., who is considered such a threat.  
P. was eleven years old, when he found his father killed by soldiers or those who pretended to fight for the security of his country – Somalia. All his relatives had been banished or killed before. Nobody was left to help the boy bury his father. Therefore P. decided to sit next to the corpse.

He sat there for days.

After one week his neighbours told him to leave if he wanted to survive. By sitting next to his assassinated father he had become a security risk for the entire neighbourhood. P. asked them where to go. Their answer was simple and helpless: “Go to Europe”, they said.

That’s what he did. That’s what he tried, for seven years.

It turned out to be a journey of hunger, violence and death. He got beaten by policemen, the military and people smugglers. Various times they stole the money he had been working hard for. He was sent back several times and always started again. He lost the majority of the friends he made on his trip. Some starved to death, others were murdered and the last ones drowned in the sea, some meters in front of the European border, where a “new” life was supposed to start.

In spring 2008 he finally arrived in “Europe”, actually in Ceuta, one of two Spanish enclaves in Africa, close to Europe, very close; he can see Europe, when he looks over the sea. A ferry could bring him there within 45 minutes. But nobody would allow him to enter a ferry. Until today the promised future has not begun yet, because he is different: he has the wrong colour of skin, wrong sex and the wrong story, though it is his skin, his story.

Being black, male, without money and education, he is considered a security risk, a potential threat to European society and economy. His character is not involved in the judgement. Being categorised a security risk reduces him to the minimum of life: no room for individuality left.

P. does not give up, still. Why should he? There is nowhere and nobody else where he could go.

At the moment he stays in C.E.T.I., a camp for unaccompanied minor refugees. His chances of achieving refugee status are tiny; he looks older than a minor. Seven years on the run have turned him into a man. Nobody would ever guess he is minor and there is no passport to prove it. Perhaps he has never been farther from Europe than today.

What he needs most after all those years is security. But this only exists for rich or successful ones. Being called a risk, there is no opportunity for P.

But who decides about chances in the capitalist world system? Surely not an asylum seeker, but those who build the walls to defend their wealth.

Security destroys those who need security most.

### **Only a fence**

Throughout history walls have been effective and politically powerful in hindering uninvited strangers from trespassing. Walls were and are made for keeping strangers out. What the builders of walls never understood is: they rather imprison themselves within the walls, like in a fortress. The European Union even seems to be proud of that fact.

Thus, it is only a fence; a fence between two countries, two cultures and finally two continents; only a fence, like in Melilla, another Spanish enclave in Africa.

Just a fence and one can look through it.

Pictures of people who tried to climb over that fence show something else: six metres high, armed with tiny knives, razor sharp wires, surveillance cameras, alarm systems and pepper-showers.<sup>1</sup> This is European security. On the other side of the fence, another security-tool: Moroccan soldiers, who tend to shoot before shouting. They help Europe to defend its border. What is defined as a fence in truth resembles an instrument of torture. More than that: a killing tool, a murder weapon, killing indirectly as well, because refugees seek other ways to overcome the border to Europe; they swim and drown, they run and get shot, they climb trucks and fall off after hours, they use boats that sink. The so-called high number of refugees reaching Lampedusa or the Canary Islands in boats or swimming is a small part of all the people who try. Many have to give up. The majority die on their way. The security-fence and its policy kill by pure existence.

Security assassinates without looking at its victims.

Human beings do not seem to matter in the discussion of security issues. But who feels safe in the end, if being human does not play a role?

Security is selective.

Security is blind.

Obsessions tend to turn people violent; so does the obsession for security; once started, this mania discovers enemies where there are none, it looks for dangers until it finds something to call a peril.

Security leads to paranoia.

Ironically, it never reaches its goal, as security issues do not disappear because of security policy. They simply get hidden or suppressed. Their energy increases through suppression and turns into violence. But violence does not lead to safety, it rather causes more security policies.

### Escaping or fighting security

The only reply possible to today's security mania is the artificial – art. The obsession can be escaped by dismissing the real. Art irritates. Art consists of irregularities. Nothing is so far from security as art; and of all types of the artificial, film is the most peculiar when it comes to security issues: the same technology can be used for both: security and film. The camera brings them together and separates them irreconcilably.

Through surveillance, the camera loses its magic attitude – in film it awakens to passion. In its surveillance work, the camera shows what it is supposed to show: the illustration of anonymous moving. This means an abstract, not a connection between different time levels. Nothing is left over, no surplus is kept, because even if set together, the different images do not mean anything but a nothing, a vacuum of human existence. The camera catches our shadows but never the original.

Used for art movies, the camera connects to the past and the future, it tells stories or even creates them. The interpretation of the pictures is left to the audience, who fill them with their thought and bring them back to life.

In both cases it is a camera, a technical tool, similar to each other though the technical data might differ. What makes the pictures so different?

*Little Alien* (2009), Nina Kusturica's latest documentary, demonstrates the disparity: the cold of a surveillance camera and the warmth of a movie-camera. Imagine a scene at the border between the European Union and Ukraine: A

surveillance camera records the movements of migrants, trying to cross the border. While the migrants do not see in the dark and therefore walk cautiously and clumsily, the infrared camera watches everything in clear view. The pictures do not only portray all the movements but also show the migrants as awkward people, being blind in the dark. The camera does not know any compassion. The camera in *Little Alien* (cinematography: Christoph Hochenbichler) follows the computer images and the face of the soldier who smiles while explaining that the refugees do not have the slightest chance to escape.

Another scene of the movie *Little Alien* shows a young man, who plans to flee from Africa under a truck going to Spain. This time the camera accompanies the migrant. No surveillance, a movie, telling the story of the young boy and still keeping all the necessary distance to keep him private. He is 16 years old and talks about the policemen who beat him up several times. His eyes show that he tells the truth. The audience of the movie does not need to see the violence itself. Everything is obvious. The camera does not have to go into surveillance or too much closeness. Nina Kusturica avoids talking about security, its winning and losing. It is obvious that she tries to deconstruct the state's obsession with security issues by showing who the so-called security threats really are – and she succeeds.

The European border-fence is also shown in her movie – and manifests itself by being technologically clean and distant. José Palazón, spokesperson of PRODEIN (Asociación pro derechos de la infancia), a child-care NGO in Melilla, describes how the deadly fence works; no pictures of injured or killed persons need to be shown: the movie exhibits the nonsense of such a fence by merely sticking to technology-images.

But the real power of this movie lies in its ability to follow unaccompanied minor refugees from different parts of the world and letting them decide how they want to be portrayed in the movie. They talk about their life, when they want to, they go to parties, but they also get angry with the system that does not provide them with any kind of answer why they are considered a security risk for the state. Those young people cannot be understood as helpless victims

or crying teenagers, nor as individuals whose fate makes the audience cry. The audience might cry – not for those refugees but with them: security does not lead to safety.

Security policies presume there is something to fight against that can be fought and regard this as the task of any hierarchical order. But security policies lie, if they assume they could hold the promise. They cannot, because security takes more than it gives. For hindering some in their criminal actions security blocks the entire society.

Security imprisons.

And security is cowardly. Its policies call for weapons even if there are none on the other side. Development cooperation, any kind of international peace initiative and the fight against hunger and poverty contain embedded security measures, mostly including the military or police. Journalists seem to agree and so-called civil society is involved far too much to judge the necessity of security policies at any moment.

*Little Alien* identifies the ridiculous obsession and gives language back to the protagonists, the refugees. The movie returns them something that all security tools have taken away: being itself, humanity, instead of spreading voyeurism. It is irritating and passionate.

Film irritates.

And film needs dialogue, whereas security kills any sort of conversation and discussion. What is there to be said as long as security policies do not give answers and cannot be disputed? As long as any kind of resistance is called a confession of guilt?

Security judges and punishes.

Film judges, too, but the judgement is open to interpretation of the audience. If the audience comes to distinct conclusions and criticises the movie, its strength stays untouched. Security issues on the other hand collapse, as soon as a doubt is concretised. Security is weaker than it pretends to be.

Still, the question whether film is a suitable method of resistance against the

security mania has not been answered fully. There must be something more about film – and there is: film creates creativity; it inspires the human mind and feelings. Film plays with the real by destroying its desert (Žižek 2001). Film is always political, especially if it tries not to be so. Political documentaries overtake the viewer's perception, sometimes manipulating, in the best case by replacing the real through a perceivable reality. What documentaries always do is create a universe that is not part of the movie but of its post-production process.

Film calls for dialogue.

Security stays tightened to technical tools.

Only movies can happen in our mind.

Security policies have to be proofed and repeated every day and mostly they need adjustment. However, film creates views. They might be uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous, but mostly they stick to the viewer's position.

So, finally the view of the spectator falls back on the topic. In the case of movies, this is part of the game and purpose: film supposedly gets re-created by being watched; whereas security mechanisms may get abrogated, as soon as the spectator decides to doubt its authority or necessity.

Reality plays a role in both: they ignore it and invent one that fits to their goals.

The camera looks for that reality. The difference is:

Film brings back imagination.

Film holds the power to heal – maybe even from the current obsession for security.

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**NOTES:**

1. <<http://www.umbruch-bildarchiv.de/bildarchiv/foto1/melilla/index.htm>>.

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