

### 3. Zemiperiphery Matters

#### Immigration, Culture, and the Capitalist World-System

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Stephen Shapiro

A lot of people are off the mark about world-system analysis because they haven't bothered to read it. The theory's broad enough to give you the space to do a lot of creative things, and it's also a perspective that's open to change because it's politically oriented, and it's changed a lot with time. Wallerstein's gotten criticism about neglecting things like culture. Well, culture's integrated now and gender's integrated now. It doesn't mean it's perfectly done, but I know of lot of theoretical perspectives that never change.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Anxious that world-systems analyses should not fall into the trap of rigid and aggressively-guarded orthodoxies, Immanuel Wallerstein shifted from calling these a perspective (rather than a theory) and began speaking about a world-systems knowledge movement.<sup>2</sup> The change in keyword emphasis was driven by a desire to both empower younger scholars who wished to continue unthinking prior orthodoxies and as a reply to an emerging reaction or resistance to world-systems' decolonial and emancipatory motivation. Those interested in exploring and utilizing world-systems approaches, especially those colleagues who are institutionally located within the social sciences, often encounter resistance that seeks to pigeonhole world-systems as an old, and thus super-

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- 1 Wilma A. Dunaway, "Revisionist with a Cause: Interview with Wilma Dunaway," *Appalachian Journal* 31, no. 2 (2004): 176.
  - 2 Immanuel Wallerstein, "World-System Analysis as a Knowledge Movement," in *Routledge Handbook of World-Systems Analysis*, eds. Christopher Chase-Dunn and Salvatore Babones (London: Routledge, 2012), 515–521.

seded, intervention. By no means! World-systems viewpoints are currently experiencing a renewal, beyond the circles of scholars whose names are known as having made key contributions alongside Wallerstein. Within this resurgence, topics that were previously little treated are now being considered through a world-systems optic, and the familiar terms of earlier efforts are being tested and applied in experimental ways to see how they might generate new research directions.

In this light, I wish to make five main claims about using world-systems approaches as a way of considering questions about immigration (transhumance). First, while the concept of the semiperiphery (from here on called the *zemiperiphery*, for reasons explained below) has been one of the signal contributions of a world-systems approach, it still needs to be expanded beyond an application that works only at the level of an integral nation-state or its borders. Second, while the *zemiperiphery* was initially conceptualized as lacking distinctive features of production, these regions are not simply ones of regulatory transit but are also places of tremendous social and cultural innovation, often creating and registering new lifeworld relations in advance of the core.

Third, the *zemiperipheries'* social and cultural production emerges from the particular presence and role of semiproletarianized (and, likewise with the above, now called *zemiproletarian*) labor, which is not fully waged, and households. As these features are highly dependent on the factors of gendered and ethno-racialized labor, the *zemiperipheries* are sites where status identities become incorporated within class ones. The social reproduction of class relations is often grounded on status distinctions, which becomes the avenue toward the social realization of capitalist accumulation. Fourth, the *zemiperipheries* are not merely unilinear way stations between the core and the peripheries. They also function as a circulatory realm linking one *zemiperiphery* to another. Rather than one *zemiperipheral* space existing in separation from another, as midpoints between core and periphery, they are also entangled and co-constitutive with each other. This knotting together of the *zemiperipheries* as their own realm means that they operate as a particularly apt site to gain insight into the capitalist world-system as a whole, especially as they record its temblors of crisis.

Lastly, by examining two different visual representations of women, Christian Petzold's *Gespenster* (Ghosts, 2005) and a set of 1930s and '40s images by or about Frida Kahlo, I seek to highlight different registrations of the *zemiperiphery* as a non-binary arena. My intention here is not to insist on identical responses but to sketch out a spectrum of concerns, or set of different aes-

thetic strategies, that might otherwise be imperceptible from the window of either the core or the peripheries. These illustrations seek, in turn, to suggest new themes in migration studies.

## Zemiperiphery Matters

One challenge for migration studies is to shift focus away from the alpha and omega of transhumance – origin and intended destination – and not consider intermediate locations as either inconsequential or sites of incompleteness and blockage. This simplifying opposition endures partly because there is a truth in its framework, often even within the narratives by human agents about their migration and, of course, State legislation that frequently conceptualizes the regulation of immigration in terms of national origin and sought-for place of settlement. Here I want to explore an alternative view of migration, one that does not consider “incomplete” movement as outlier data or a lived experience of failure. The motivation for this turn is two-fold. First, to reconsider the discussion of migration towards the telos of citizenship, as that which is meant to erase the prior (traumatic) experiences and lifeworlds of human subjects. The category of the citizen as a legitimate and incorporated actor of a nation-state has haunted the discussion of migration. While citizenship has been involved as the civil therapeutic solution to the perceived social disability of foreignness, the unremarkable equivalence of the citizen makes its own structure of inequality. What was once used in radical and social circles as a non-hierarchical and internationally inclusive term – “To citizen Maurice la Chaitre” writes the now London-based Marx to the Parisian publisher of the French edition of *Capital* – became a key instrument to manage the tempo of historical transformation and the inevitable rise of popular governance (“democracy”) by the swiftly dominant form of centrist liberalism. As Wallerstein argues:

When inequality was the norm, there was no need to make any further distinction than that between those of different rank, generically between noble and commoner. But when equality became the official norm, then it was suddenly crucial to know who was in fact included in the “all” who have equal rights, that is, who are the “active” citizens. The more equality was proclaimed as a moral principle, the more obstacles – juridical, political, economic, and cultural –were instituted to prevent its realization. The

concept, citizen, forced the crystallization and rigidification – both intellectual and legal – of a long list of binary distinctions which have formed the cultural underpinnings of the capitalist world-economy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: bourgeois and proletarian, man and woman, adult and minor, breadwinner and housewife, majority and minority, White and Black, European and non-European, educated and ignorant, skilled and unskilled, specialist and amateur, scientist and layman, high culture and low culture, heterosexual and homosexual, normal and abnormal, able-bodied and disabled, and of course the ur-category which all of these others imply – civilized and barbarian.

To be sure, the concept of citizenship was meant to be liberating, and it did indeed liberate us all from the dead weight of received hierarchies claiming divine or natural ordination. But the liberation was only a partial liberation from the disabilities, and the new inclusions made sharper and more apparent the continuing (and new) exclusions. Universal rights turned out in actual practice to be somewhat of a linguistic mirage, an oxymoron. The republic of virtuous equals turned out to require the rejection of the non-virtuous.<sup>3</sup>

As these binary distinctions link to other ones forged by liberalism, not least of which are the public/private sphere distinctions that E.T.A. Hoffmann (*The Golden Pot* – *Der goldne Topf*) and Marx (“On the Jewish Question” – “Zur Judenfrage”) critiqued from their respective Romantic and radical perspectives,<sup>4</sup> what might an alternative categorical framework be to evade the trap of liberal citizenship?

My second motivation is to propose denizenship as an alternative category of access to resources of social dignity based on physical presence without regard to natal origin, State recognition, or work status. In other words, *les misérables*. The project of a theoretical alternative to debates around citizenship is grounded in the urgency for all those “interrupted” in the transit stations that are neither ones of origin or ideal destination – such as Calais, Lampedusa, and the ones alongside the US-Mexican border. Marc Augé introduced

3 Immanuel Wallerstein, “Citizens All? Citizens Some! The Making of the Citizen,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 4 (2003): 652.

4 E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Golden Pot and Other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1975), 211–241.

the notion of “non-places” to describe the similar presence of locales, such as the ATM machine, that are simultaneously ubiquitous and nowhere, since their deterritorialized voids are based on the capitalist practices of creating spatialized equivalences, much as money-form operates.<sup>5</sup> Though Augé’s description of these hollowed-out realms was not meant to consider “incomplete migration,” the metaphor captures both the zones of precarious encampment found throughout the capitalist world-system and the emptying out of political and cultural representation for those subjects in these realms. By failing to develop a better terminology and framework for life in these camps, other than through slogans of necrotic bare life, we perpetuate an un-knowledge that reinforces the prior denial of these human subjects’ existence. The concept of denizen-ship thus means to cement rights for those *in situ*, but not within State recognition, be they in quasi-detention camps or living without papers within the core nations.

An initial alternative may be that provided by the world-systems knowledge movement and its geography of the capitalist world-system: core, periphery, and zemiperiphery. World-systems perspectives are most closely associated with Immanuel Wallerstein’s historical sociology, but this touchstone often obscures the valuable and varied uses of world-systems by Wallerstein’s associates and later inheritors. Initiated as a way to counter developmental theories from post-war centrist liberal political economy as well as stage theories from party-affiliated Marxism, world-systems analyses seek to break free from 19th-century social science paradigms, which buttressed the separation of academic disciplines in ways that often endorsed Eurocentric versions of cultural superiority. An initial move in what today we might call decolonizing our knowledge formations (Wallerstein called this move “unthinking” the assumptions) was a world-systems approaches’ use of core-periphery distinctions taken from South American theorists like Raúl Prebisch and Andre Gunder Frank (“the development of underdevelopment”),<sup>6</sup> who initially argued against Ricardo’s notion of comparative advantage among nations by indicating that non-industrialized States remain structurally disempowered

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5 Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995).

6 Immanuel Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science: Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Walter L. Goldfrank, “Paradigm Regained? The Rules of Wallerstein’s World-System Method,” *Journal of World-Systems Research* 6, no. 2 (2000): 150–195.

even after titular decolonization. The notion of a core and periphery was used to highlight continuing inequality within the global marketplace.

The difference between the core and its peripheries is easily said. The world-systems core is composed of stable nation-states who recognize each other's sovereignty and control of tax and security borders. They are typified by having a greater proportion of their workforce in higher-waged labor, which is often composed of the secondary processing of commodities or in consumer services, including domestic logistics. Core regions have a heterogeneous palette of production processes and multiple industrial sectors, which may co-exist in various states of expansion or decline in ways that allow for overall systemic stability, despite declines in one industry. Peripheral regions typically have weak State functions, especially with regard to civil society aspects that do not explicitly depend on police intimidation or military force. Laborers in the peripheries are usually tasked with lower-waged work that is frequently unwaged and involves greater personal risk and industrial accidents. Unlike the varied kinds of commodities exchanged in the core, the peripheral zones have sectors treating a smaller range of commodities, and their labor markets are often dominated by extractive industries or monocultural crop production. Peripheral regions often lack free choice in accessing the global market as they face pre-established constraints to trade in ways that usually direct their markets to their former colonizing power so as to continue their historic subordination and dependence.

A world-systems approach differs from older "development of underdevelopment" models with its contribution of the category, the semiperiphery/semiperipheries. As Wallerstein conveyed it, semiperipheries are often states that seek entry into core-status while also fearing their decline into the rank of the peripheries.<sup>7</sup> The move from a binary core/periphery model to the tripartite core/semiperiphery/periphery one is one of the signal accomplishments of a world-systems analysis as it allows for a greater degree of analytical options so as to avoid debates over what category different places are to be shoe-horned into and to allow for a historical transformation of nations in ways that does not assume consequential primacy. The core-periphery model flattens out time and space, as it does not easily allow for an analysis of competitive hierarchies among nation-states outside of the core and depends on assumptions that each nation-state is homogeneous in nature. Here a world-

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7 Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 28–30.

systems approach incorporates the core/periphery framework but escapes its rigidities by introducing the concept of the zemiperiphery.

Yet even this move has often still remained caught within the legacy undertow of the older political sociology that it otherwise seeks to avoid. For example, Wallerstein insisted that there was no distinctive semiperipheral mode of production, unlike the core or the periphery. The zemiperipheries were regions that simply mixed production aspects of the core and the periphery together so that their function in the world-system was presented as sub-imperialist, where they enact policies and policing on the peripheries that the core did not wish to engage in directly, much as a manager controls employees for the sake of their distant, corporate owners.

If the zemiperipheries are presented as absent of unique economic processes and known more in terms of political processes that are supplemental to the core and the peripheries, they might seem to be analogous to the spheres of distribution in the total circuit of capital that are considered “unproductive” of surplus-value and thus ignorable. Rather than consider capital in the keywords of spheres of value’s production and spheres of circulation, it is better conceptually to speak of capital’s spheres of value’s production and its realization, or manifestation, to underscore the systemic necessity for the presence of the spheres not strictly listed as ones of production, especially as these spheres of circulation are the ones where multiple commodity chains become entangled in ways that change each individual one’s shape and produce a new aggregate compound of social relations. Similarly, when people move from the hinterland or periphery in order to seek access to the core, they must move into or stay within the zemiperiphery, such as when South and Central Americans looking to the United States do so through the Mexican zemiperiphery. Within these zemiperipheries, however, the lifeworld of those in migration alters culture in ways that create a new social compound.

In this spirit, the zemiperipheries act in ways that are greater than simply being a baffling corridor between the core and the periphery. As I have previously argued, these are the zones that enable the systematicity of the world-system.

Because the social action of the core region is too incommensurate with that of the periphery, the world-system requires a calibrating zone that can mediate and “translate” the cultural and commodity economies of each sphere to one another. It receives, monetizes, and forwards two kinds of commodities: the core’s “fictional” ones of credit, insurance, and contractual prop-

erty and intellectual rights and the periphery's labor-power and natural resources. As the "transistor" space where two different segments of a commodity chain become articulated and receive their first pricing, the semiperiphery is the contact zone that makes it possible for the core and periphery to transmit value to each other, especially as both the rural dispossessed of the hinterlands and the factors of the core's jobbing interests congregate there, one to commodify their labor and the other to finance and insure the material apparatuses that will consume this labor-power.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the zemiperipheries are not only zones that react to pressures between the core and periphery, they are also the spheres that are highly *productive* of new social and cultural phenomena that often occur *in advance* of either the core or the periphery. These are the locations

where political economy receives its greatest cultural inflection and amplification, the semiperipheries are the sites where the experience of trauma by peripheral peoples and the speculative entrepreneurship of the core collide to produce new forms of representation, especially as it receives both the oral, folk beliefs of the periphery and the core's printed matter and institutionally consecrated notations, objects, and behavioral performances. ... As semiperipheries mediate the experience of violence and coercion in the periphery and in the core's institutions of cultural valorization, ... [they stand] as the locale of a heightened globalizing structure of feeling, producing affects and artifacts often in advance of these experiences' concrete articulation by agents at either end of the system.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, "if the semiperiphery is the zone of transculturation and transvaluation, then it stands as a privileged region for registering the sociocultural formations of each phase in the world-system."<sup>10</sup> As Chase-Dunn notes, the semiperipheries stand as a "fertile ground for social, organization, and technical innovation," and "the most interesting thing about semiperipheries is that interesting political movements are more likely to emerge in them."<sup>11</sup> For instance, Wallerstein argued that Tsarist Russia was zemiperipheral, and he

8 Stephen Shapiro, *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World-System*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 37,

9 Ibid., 37–38,

10 Ibid.

11 Christopher Chase-Dunn, "Comparing World Systems: Toward a Theory of Semiperipheral Development," *Comparative Civilizations Review* 19, no. 19 (1988): 31; Christopher Chase-



endorsed Trotsky's analysis that combined and uneven development was a leading factor in catalyzing the Russian Revolution: "A Leninist strategy could succeed only in a semiperipheral country" because while they might not have strong capitalist-proletarian confrontations, they do have strong instances of combined and uneven development involving the collision of peripheral lifeworlds with core technologies and capitalist maneuvers.<sup>12</sup> In this way, world-systems approaches revise 19th-century Marxist claims that the core, urban centers of the industrialized West (England, Germany) would be the places of capital's greatest contradiction and, consequently, the catalyzing sites of revolution. Instead, it may be more accurate to say that it is within the zemiperiphery's tangles that we may best find the emergence of cultural and political opposition to the capitalist world-system.

Furthermore, these new cultural productions are not only transferred between the core and the periphery but are also laterally transmitted elsewhere to other zemiperipheries. In this way, the zemiperiphery also functions as

the world-system's internal arterial matrix: the geocultural "system form" of the world-system. Since the world-system lacks a centralized point of regulation and command, it requires a circulatory system that allows all the world-system's regions to communicate with each other. As the zones of transmission where peripheral goods and peoples enter one node of the semiperipheral network to be translocated to another one closer to the core, the semiperipheral nodes also form a coherent matrix unto themselves, a realm with distinctive features shared among all the other semiperipheral templates.<sup>13</sup>

Yet changes in the organization of the world-system cannot be seen simply through a flat, two-dimensional map of nation-states, since the zemiperiphery is more akin to a multi-dimensional matrix. A better understanding of the zemiperiphery's topography comes as Christopher Chase-Dunn explains that the world-system is nested, so that "the core/periphery hierarchy is a system-wide dimension of structured inequality, but at the same time it is also a re-

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Dunn, *Global Formation: Structures of the World-Economy* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 213.

12 Immanuel Wallerstein, *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World-System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 88.

13 Shapiro, *Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel*, 38–39.

gionally nested hierarchy.”<sup>14</sup> Nation-states are not “internally homogeneous,” and “many of the developments which we study at the level of the world-system also occur within countries.”<sup>15</sup> Additionally, some of these strata operate even without reference to the nation-state but in a relationship with other analogous nodes, such as with Saskia Sassen’s claim for a world-systemic network of cities and financial markets that have a dynamic that exceeds the nation-state. I have previously argued that

the difference between periphery and core should not be conceptualized as simply between static boundaries, since these terms represent spatialized relations more than geographic demarcations. Each spatial level (area, national, regional, urban, familial) contains its own core-periphery differences. Individual nation-states have their own internal corelike and peripheral zones (north/south and urban/agrarian divisions), and they often have a “city-system,” where some cities dominate others. Cities likewise have their own “Manchester-effect” of class-differentiated regions, such as the core sectors where elites live and work and the peripheral slums housing the manual labor force. The patriarchal family or a racialized society can also be conceptualized as having white men as its core and women and nonwhites as peripheral actors. None of these levels is either wholly independent of the others or mechanistically determined by them. They often intersect each other in unpredictable ways because the relations of one level are not necessarily analogous or contiguous to each other.<sup>16</sup>

The zemiperipheral sites of combined and uneven development are also ones where zemiproletarianized labor is more prevalent, along with their increased presence of and reliance on household structures. For Wallerstein,

a typical household consists of three to ten persons who, over a long period (say thirty years or so), pool multiple sources of income in order to survive collectively. Households are not usually egalitarian structures internally nor are they unchanging structures (persons are born and die, enter or leave households, and in any case grow older and thus tend to alter their economic role). What distinguishes a household structure is some form of

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14 Chase-Dunn, *Global Formation*, 209.

15 Ibid.

16 Shapiro, *Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel*, 33–34.

obligation to provide income for the group and to share in the consumption resulting from this income. Households are quite different from clans or tribes or other quite large and extended entities, which often share obligations of mutual security and identity but do not regularly share income. Or if there exist such large entities which are income-pooling, they are dysfunctional for the capitalist system.<sup>17</sup>

Within these, there are five kinds of income: wage-income, subsistence activity, petty production, rent, and (generational or interfamilial) transfer payments. Hence the zemiperipheries increased variation of income inputs consequently means that much of their labor is defined as female (or ethno-racial).

In the current moment, migration studies should especially incorporate zemiperipheral matters for several reasons. As urbanization has increased throughout the world, it magnifies zemiperipheral experience, whether or not this transhumance crosses national boundary lines. Second, the downward B-phase of an on-going Kondratieff wave in conjunction with rapidly increasing ecological destruction means that attempted migration from peripheries to the core nation is increasing. Yet given that many, and perhaps most, origin-destination migrations remain “incomplete,” migration studies needs to acknowledge the constitutive significance of the movement into the zemiperipheries, whether these result eventually result in arrival in the core or not.

If the world-system’s zemiperipheries are increasing in size and the composition of the zemiperipheries foregrounds “women’s work” in both un- or weakly-waged labor, then, consequently migration studies need to take seriously the role of gender-sex, as well as ethno-racial distinctions. Furthermore, if the zemiperipheries form as a means of cultural production and communication amongst other zemiperipheries, then rather than consider migration as a feature of older, male attainment, we need to perceive how a world-systems culture of migration emerges from feminized, ethno-racialized, and younger generational households. From this perspective, the (modernizing) experience of “contemporary” is not simply to be found in the core metropolises and core institutions of these metropolises but in spaces and forms previously discounted as “semi” or developmentally indistinct.

Consequently, in order to avoid the developmental connotations of “semi-,” I propose calling the semiperipheries, the *zemiperipheries*, to highlight their su-

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17 Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis*, 32.

turing of the world-system's locations, as well as their increased presence and role of households in labor economies. In this sense, the zemiperipheral matrix is the one that is most apt for discussions of migration as it can provide an analytical mechanism to consider both the para-urban worlds of what Mike Davis has called "the planet of slums": the barrios, favelas, bidonvilles, shantytowns, and slab-cities, be they in either the peripheries or the cores in zones of immigrant arrival as well as the camps of migration for those without papers.<sup>18</sup>

Here I want to take up the challenge of this project less from the vantage point of quantitative social sciences and more from the cultural side of non-literary media to suggest a set of formal registrations of zemiperipheral experience. To sketch out this initial question, I want to take what may initially seem as a paradoxical or catachrestic pair, Berlin-based German filmmaker Christian Petzold's *Gespenster*,<sup>19</sup> the second in his so-called *Gespenster* trilogy of films about transient women, alongside paintings by and a photograph of Frida Kahlo treating the artist's place in the United States. The goal here will be to use a limited set of evidentiary material to consider registrations of the zemiperiphery as a means of modeling one way that the world-systems knowledge movement may take further steps forward.

## Petzold's Ghosts

At first glance, Christian Petzold's cinema seems mismatched to any consideration of zemiperipheral cultural production. Even in an age of European cross-funding, Petzold's work remains resolutely German in its artistic lineage, geography, and casting. A leading exemplar of the so-called Berlin School of post-Wall filmmakers, the (West) German-born and Berlin-trained Petzold has a body of work that seems to follow the prior generational one of Wim Wenders, as both share a dedication to slow-paced "road movies" that scenify existential tristesse. Yet perhaps due to Petzold's lifelong collaboration with his former teacher, Harun Farocki, his work is more intentionally politicized than Wenders's and socially critical, primarily of post-Wall Germany's embrace of bourgeois self-satisfaction in the aftermath of the Cold War. Here his work links more loosely to the male theatrical lineage of Brecht, Heiner Müller, and Thomas Ostermeier. However, Petzold can be criticized for depicting an almost

18 Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006).

19 Christian Petzold, dir., *Gespenster* (Berlin: Schramm Film Koerner & Weber, 2005).

entirely white Germany, one absent of multicultural presences. The ethnically diverse world depicted in director Fatih Akin's Hamburg seems entirely distant from Petzold's Berlinscapes.

Petzold's thematic pursuits often combine the genres of crime procedural and road movie to convey how the contemporary German experience-system is caught in a listless stasis because of its continuing amnesia about various past historical thresholds. This failure of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* results in the return to bourgeois pettiness, the meanness and willingness to sacrifice those not willing to adapt to and seek the comforts of normativity within dominant middle-class society. What makes Petzold distinctive in this critique is that his tales are ones usually centered on female trauma where women's anguish embodies the faults of a collective history.

Over the course of his career, Petzold has developed a visual syntax to convey these concerns. Foregoing complicated trick shots or expensive crane work, his films usually depend on a limited cast, few locations, and rarely exceed the 90 minutes that stand as the typical limit for films to be seen on German television. Nearly all of his films are plotted through scenes set in mixed public/private realms of nowhere-ness, tables in outside cafes or hotel lobbies. They convey the disempowerment of indeterminate location by frequently using use over the shoulder shots of someone driving along anonymous motorways or walking down mundane footpaths or empty streets as well as instances of a voyeuristic gaze, either with police-like grainy CCTV video or a quarter-angle noir-film downwards view. The films have slow dialogue that is voided by gaps of silence, a loss of expression that is often compensated for by scenes of the characters turning on sound-producing instruments to introduce diegetic music, usually pre-rock and roll American soul or early jazz standards, as a nod perhaps to the Allied reconstruction of postwar Germany.

These formal elements are used to convey a zemiperipheral structure of feeling, as seen in *Gespenster*, a film within Petzold's so-called Ghost trilogy about women whose liminal or spectral place in society is exemplified by their wandering through life with little direction or social cohesion. Like Wenders's *Himmel über Berlin/Wings of Desire* (1987), *Gespenster* places nearly all of its action within a tight perimeter around Berlin's Potsdamer Platz and the Tiergarten, in order to indicate that its events are entangled within the undertow of German reunification. The movie begins with Nina, a young woman wearing a hi-vis jacket, who is seen picking up trash from the Tiergarten's grass as part of some (coerced) youth program. Seeing a woman being chased, Nina slowly follows, but not before she picks up a dropped earring. She then sees a half-undressed

woman, Toni, being punched by men who flee the scene once they notice Nina watching them. Whether Nina has just seen a mugging or a sexual assault is not clear to the viewers. After giving Toni one of the two t-shirts she is wearing, Nina watches her walk away. Nina is then yelled at by the youth crew's older manager, who accuses her of lying about working by filling her mandatory collection bag with trash from the waste bins. Emptying Nina's bag on the grass, he tells her to pick up the trash for real this time.

The suggestion here is that the newly re-unified Berlin has cut corners to achieve its "park" beauty, its "poor but sexy" allure, and that it has not really done the work of picking up its trash of history, or that the city's authorities have forced this labor onto populations who are themselves considered disposable, such as the State institutionalized Nina, housed in something like a borstal or youth supervisory hostel. Nina's depicted aimlessness and frequent mute refusal to respond to accusations of insubordination suggests that she is without narrative agency, unable to express herself in the language of the core's dominant society.

As a result of exclusion from these privileges, Nina becomes the target of two other female desires that seek to define her in a particular way. On the one hand, there is Francoise's pursuit of Nina. Francoise is an older and very wealthy French woman visiting Berlin, who says that she believes that Nina is her long-lost child abducted while she had left her infant untended in a shopping cart. Francoise pursues Nina and encourages Nina to identify or reveal herself as that child. On the other hand, the itinerant, and more street-smart, Toni sees Nina as a means of gaining money from others. Here Nina is caught in a vortex. She is uncertain whether to believe Francoise and thus join a narrative about a fragmented family that might be regrouped and reconstructed. This fantasy can be seen as an allegory about the two German nations' reconnection and return to the embrace of a more amicable European Union.

On the other hand, Nina is persistently attracted to Toni. When Toni wants to be cast in a movie called *female friends* [*Freundinnen*], she brings Nina to the casting call and tells her to fabricate an origin story about the two women's friendship. Nina remains silent until she is directly asked to speak by the male director, and then hesitatingly speaks about having dreamt beforehand of Toni being stripped naked and raped while Nina stands watching. The viewer is left uncertain about whether this is a fair account of what had actually happened off-screen in the park at the film's beginning, or if it is a fabrication by Nina. Regardless of what happened or not, Nina has finally spoken a truth about her actual erotic desire for Toni. For all her prior affectless brooding can retrospec-

tively be seen as her struggle to articulate and make public her sexual preference identity.

In this sense, her social ghostliness represents LGBTQ existence in heteronormative society. On the other hand, an inter-textual reference exists in Petzold's casting of Julia Hummer for the role of Nina. Hummer had previously worked for Petzold in his *Die Innere Sicherheit* (The State I'm In),<sup>20</sup> where Hummer plays the daughter of a former RAF couple on the run. That film ends with Hummer's character being the only family survivor of a car crash. Is Nina, as a ward of the State and bearing a jagged scar on her leg, the daughter from *Die Innere Sicherheit*? Is she also the female embodiment of the defeat of 68-er alternatives as a result of reunification, a loss represented by Nina's slumping posture as an anti-*Siegessäule* (the gold Berlin statue to military victory seen fleetingly in *Gespenter*)?

Nina is thus caught then between a desire for a core bourgeois happy end, a national allegory represented by reintegration within a wealthy family, and one for erotic connection with a member of the precarious, floating, and peripheral underclass. In the end, both choices are denied her. Toni abandons Nina after they have slept together, and Francoise is taken away by her husband after he reveals that she repeatedly enacts a delusion about finding her abducted child as an older woman, even while she also knows, in fact, that her child had died as an infant.

The film ends with Nina walking back to the park trash bin where Toni had previously thrown Francoise's wallet that she had stolen from her. Nina sees there a picture of Francoise's lost child on a long strip of paper folded over into quarter sections. When Nina expands the turned-over units, like a film reel's movement, it reveals frames of the dead child's possible development, leading to an illustration that looks like Nina, who stares at these images and then angrily throws them back in the rubbish. The film ends with a static camera recording her walking away on a park path.

One reading of the scene is that Nina remains caught in directionless movement, as she is literally not able to "see" herself as belonging to any sequential history, thus not being able to imagine herself represented in any narrative form. Neither allowed the comfort of the core, nor willing to sink back into the periphery, Nina's tale is a zemiperipheral one, a tale that is highly

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20 Christian Petzold, dir., *Die Innere Sicherheit* (Berlin: Schramm Film, Hessischer Rundfunk, and ARTE, 2000).

gendered and weakly-waged, as her compulsory labor seems to be more disciplinary than vocational. Despite Petzold's lack of ethnic characters, Nina's position mimics that of a migrant or "guest-worker."

*Fig. 1: Nina examines her imagined development in Petzold's *Gespenster**



Here Petzold's cinema upholds a familiar tale told about the *zemiperiphery* as a place lacking significance or meaning and one that is incapable of unique self-identification. An entirely different strategy, however, is seen in the earlier work by, and about, Frida Kahlo, daughter of a German immigrant to Mexico.

## **Frida Kahlo's America**

Kahlo might best be viewed as a *zemiperipheral* Mexico City – rather than simply peripheral Mexican – artist who resists core North Americanism and the European high art tradition by schooling herself in the patterns and palette of regional Mexican vernaculars that she herself does not know and must learn since she belongs to a metropolitanized formation and not a hinterland peasant one.

Kahlo's consciously world-system work begins with a pair of 1930s canvases that directly address the relation between Mexico and the United States as existing in a core-periphery opposition. Kahlo's *Self-Portrait on the Borderline*



*Between Mexico and the United States* positions her on a podium between two national spaces, one configured as a brown-tinge and underdeveloped Mexico whose glory days have receded and the other as a metallic and industrial USA.<sup>21</sup> Given that the podium is off-centered and closer to the American side, the canvas is guardedly optimistic about immigration, with its suggestion that for all its seeming mechanical coldness, the USA stands as a modernizing freedom from the nightmare of peripheral obsolescence. The USA-space is composed of vertical skyscrapers and vaguely anthropomorphic metal vents. The lower field of the American side has womblike speakers and machinery with sun ray-like lines that seem to be the emissions of sound or electricity. Despite her recent miscarriage, Kahlo presents the USA as a place of large-scale productivity, not entirely barren of vibrant life, since the pastel coloring of the buildings matches that of her pink, stiff dress. The American side's serial smokestacks each have a letter that, taken together, spell out "Ford." But as smoke plumes from these towers uphold an American flag in the sky like a baby, the industry is presented as fertile. While Kahlo paints her self-representation in a guarded fashion, with her arms crossed protectively over her lower abdomen, perhaps as one might hold a wounded place, the cigarette she holds in the hand on the American side links its smoke to that of the factories in ways that present the manufacturing metropolis as a place of personal fulfillment, erotic satisfaction, and the possibility of renewed biological and artistic creation.

Conversely, the Mexican side, registered by a draping flag held in her other hand, has darker shades, and its field is strewn with obsolete detritus from the Mayan or Aztec eras. The American skyscrapers' verticality is contrasted by the Mexican's horizontal and squat temple that is supervised by a drooping quarter moon and demonic sun, depicted with downward flames. The only color is provided by a jumble of plants with visible deep roots, which cross over to the American side in order to link to its energetic machinery. Kahlo seems to be suggesting that the promise of peripheral beauty may only flower and be realized in the North's opportunity and modern promise. Here the movement of the individual from the periphery to the core is idealized, not entirely unlike many immigration dreams that arrival in the core can valorize the periphery's agents.

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21 Detroit Institute of Arts, "Self-Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States, Frida Kahlo, 1932," *Google Arts & Culture*, [https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/self-portrait-on-the-borderline-between-mexico-and-the-united-states-frida-kahlo/JwHDw-\\_2L73NZw](https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/self-portrait-on-the-borderline-between-mexico-and-the-united-states-frida-kahlo/JwHDw-_2L73NZw).

Fig. 2: Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States* (1932)



Within only a year, *My Dress Hangs There* has lost this optimism.<sup>22</sup> In this painting, Kahlo draws no representation of her own body, which is indicated only by the outline of a dress hanging out to dry. As the garment's colors are those of the Mexican flag, the peripheral subject is presented only as an absence, a body lost and seen only by the traces of a worn dress left dangling within a degraded world of the core's trash and commercialized gaudiness.

The North of the United States is pictured by neoclassical architecture, with two columns upholding objects, an open toilet and an over-glorious trophy, as though to say that the idealized American republic has only delivered waste and cheap self-glorification. In this canvas, only the dress's lower green half is lively, since even the Hudson River's water is colored as dark and seemingly polluted. The perspective of Liberty Island and Manhattan is skewed to make them seem equal, but the Statue of Liberty is covered by soot, and its base is

22 Fridakahlo.org, "My Dress Hangs There, 1933 by Frida Kahlo," *fridakahlo.org*, <https://www.fridakahlo.org/my-dress-hangs-there.jsp>.

made to look carceral in ways that suggest free and mobile spirits being imprisoned. The canvas is frankly dystopian. The towers and metallic body-shapes of the prior canvas appear, but they are squeezed into a vanishing corner, as if to suggest the modernizing ideals associated with them are being squeezed out and expunged from the frame of vision. The dreams about the American promise as delivering personal fulfillment seen in Kahlo's painting in the prior year are extinguished.

*Fig. 3: My Dress Hangs There (1933)*



The spirit of failure embedded within the 1933 canvas can be seen as made possible only by the limited choices provided by a core-periphery model. A decade later, however, Kahlo's self-presentation is radically different, and this is because it has broken out of core-periphery conceptualizations to include a realization of the zemiperiphery as a space of unique possibility rather than one simply as one in-between, moving from the periphery to the core.

*Fig. 4: Nickolas Muray, Frida on the Rooftop, New York (1946)*



In *Frida on the Rooftop, New York*, a stylized photograph of Kahlo taken by Hungarian-American Nickolas Muray, Kahlo wears indigenous Tehuana clothes, which are displayed in order to form a visual contrast and confrontation to Manhattan's skyscraper glorification of capitalist power.<sup>23</sup> The blouse's patterns both repeat the blackened windows of the towers while also being distinguished by their florid colors. Yet this binary difference is literally grounded on a zemiperipheral space, the rooftop of a "bohemian" Greenwich Village building, a zemi space that situates Kahlo as neither between rural

23 Brooklyn Museum, "Frida in New York," *Brooklyn Museum*, <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/197205>.

Mexico, represented by the clothes, not the urban core, represented by the background's commercial, Midtown towers, but in a location that grounds her. The rooftop's tiles, cemented at a 45-degree angle create a formal diagonal "z" that cuts between the rectilinearity of Kahlo's dress and Midtown's erections. While the 1932 canvas used a binary core-periphery model that produces Kahlo's defensiveness by Kahlo, seen with her crossed, self-protective arms that guard her body against the viewer, Muray's photograph captures a different tone entirely. Kahlo's arms are open, and her slanted head and semi-enclosed eyes imply a greater sense of empowered autonomy that is comfortable with risking the vulnerability of semi-sleep.

The self-control represented in this image suggests a new approach to issues of culture, migration, and revolutionary desires as it highlights the zemiperiphery as a place of creativity and connection to other zemiperipheries. Here, this space represents a location within the capitalist world-system that allows for different possibilities than either the path of the core's development or the periphery's experience of the underdevelopment of development.

By over-idealizing the core's emancipatory potential in the 1932 painting, Kahlo sets up the fall and despair over its failed promise in the 1933 one. Yet by Muray's 1946 photograph, neither the euphoria of mechanical modernity, nor the degradation of its cultural industry is given the final word. Here a zemiperipheral non-space, a liminal rooftop becomes a way to stage the intersection of a feminized Mexican dress in the bohemian North in ways separate from either the peripheral countryside or the financial core. Questions of transit, origin, and trajectory are not even asked as the zemiperipheral time and space has its own substantive status.

Here, Muray's photograph solves a problem that Petzold's cinema did not. Petzold's work presents the zemiperiphery as an aimless void, since its vision continues to rely on a binary model of time and space. On one side lies a self-congratulatory and amnesiac bourgeoisie. On the other float those who have been shunted to the margins because of their inability or refusal to be submerged within the wake of contemporary German history. No third place is conceptualized, so that the female zemiproletarian is left without community, without vibrancy, without direction. Like the ghosts of the movie's title, Petzold's cinema presents the liminal as rarely able to disturb the everyday norm. Kahlo's 1930s paintings are similarly caught in the nowhere-ness of this binary. Muray's later photograph, however, depicts the zemiperiphery as a site lacking the core's power, but not one empty of resilience and creative possibility. While Kahlo is alone in the image's frame, the setting implies the possibility of

others soon joining her for an impromptu fiesta, perhaps one that talks about revolution.

## Conclusion

My juxtaposition of Petzold's movie and the images of Kahlo is meant to highlight three larger points about migration and the zemiperipheries. First, each zemiperiphery can formally register its particularity as well as linkages to other zemiperipheries. Second, migration to the zemiperipheries needs to be considered as structurally linked to the core and peripheries, but they must also be seen as spaces capable of realizing social and cultural aspects that neither the core nor the peripheries can see or present. Lastly, migration to the zemiperiphery is a rich resource for tapping into the experience of the subjects within it, of those people who may suffer but are also able to forge radical alternatives. When considering the energies of political change in the present moment, it will be the linked zemiperipheries that may stand as domains requiring our attention. Zemiperipheries matter, then, for any anti-developmental and socially emancipatory Cultural Studies.

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