"...and Gypsies get many a beating...": On the Significance of Radu Jude's Aferim!

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Abstract: : The article offers an in-depth analysis of Radu Jude's 2015 film Aferim!. It considers the film as a revisionist take on the Romanian tradition of historical cinema. It discusses Aferim!'s originality as a depiction of the origins of contemporary Romanian anti-Roma racism. It analyzes Jude's artistic strategies—for instance, his lavish and playful deployment of literary and cinematic quotation. The paper also addresses the film's reception in Romania. It goes on to discuss two stage productions in which Jude has further explored issues of racism.
Keywords: Radu Jude, New Romanian Cinema, Aferim!, Ali: Fear Eats the Soul, The Controversy of Valladolid, anti-Roma racism, slavery, historical films.

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The very first Romanian feature film was a patriotic spectacular called *The Independence of Romania* (1912), directed by Grigore Brezeanu and Aristide Demetriade and glorifying the Principalities of Romania's involvement in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78.[1] Coming to be known in Romania as the "historical film" genre, this kind of patriotic pageant aiming at monumentality later became the preferred genre for Nicolae Ceaușescu's national-communist regime (1965-89), which oversaw the development of what was intended as „the national cinematic epic": a cycle of spectacular productions—most of them dealing with either mythic Thracian tribes or medieval warrior-statesmen—understood as a single narrative told in installments. In an English-language study of the genre,[2] Onoriu Colăcel has shown, among other things, how, in exhorting the paternalistic rule of providential leaders from the past, the films basically recruit those figures for the purpose of endorsing the current ruler; he has shown how the films argue that modern Romanians are, at least to some extent, the same as the first inhabitants of the Romanian territory, thus fostering the "dream of a[n] ethnically homogenous nation in charge of its destiny"[3]; he has also shown, for instance, how "[t]he myth of the besieged fortress, which was the cornerstone of social discipline during Ceaușescu's last years in power, is faithfully recorded in the language of the 1979 epic *Vlad Țepeș* [*Vlad the Impaler*]."[4] The basic historical narrative underlying this genre materialized itself in essentialist depictions of Romanian history as an uninterrupted quest for national unity and independence (and sometimes for ethnic homogeneity), a majestic fresco where glorious military rulers never waged wars for illegitimate territorial conquests, but always raised armies to defend their country, always to reclaim their already-theirs.

In addition to these epics (some of which drew enormous domestic audiences), the Romanian film industry of the time used to produce a fair number of historical adventure films—less monumental than the epics, but equally romantic. Some of those were set in the late eighteenth century or in the first half of the nineteenth century and were about romanticized *hajduks* or outlaws fighting against wealthy, aristocratic oppressors—or, even better, fighting against foreign oppressors like the Turks, for, while the Ceaușescu regime was building up its nationalist discourse of self-legitimation, the class-conflict component of period films was increasingly subordinated or subverted by the national-indigenist narrative.[5] During the Romanian communist regime, Marxism's career as a cultural hegemon was short-lived.

Therefore, both before and during the state socialist era, the historical film was mostly used as a vehicle of national mythmaking and almost never as a vehicle of demystification, nor for genealogical investigations of modern phenomena. In the 1960s and 1970s, neighboring countries like Hungary and Poland had filmmakers—Miklós Jancsó, Andrzej Wajda—who sometimes used the genre to interrogate their nations' histories, poking at historical sore spots. Romanian cinema had to wait until the 1990s for a film like that: Lucian Pintilie's *An Unforgettable Summer* (1994), an antimilitaristic "Balkan western" set in the 1920, when the kingdom of Romania—at the time "Greater Romania," having incorporated the provinces of Bessarabia, Bukovina, Banat and Transylvania in the aftermath of World War I—acted as a regional power.

A maverick filmmaker, Pintilie had previously clashed with the nationalism of the Ceaușescu regime: his *Carnival Scenes,* adapted from the work of "national playwright" I. L. Caragiale and filmed at the end of the 1970s, had been banned. Though not a historical picture, *Carnival Scenes* had been a period film, a "costume picture" set in the late nineteenth century. I. L. Caragiale had written satirically about the petty bourgeoisie living in the outskirts of Bucharest at that time. The representation of his world on stage (and film) had traditionally been hygienically stylized and depoliticized—a succession of crinolines, handlebar moustaches, and beloved actors giving ripe, ritualized readings of lines that were known to almost any Romanian who had ever passed through a schoolroom. In contrast to that tamed, sanitized, antiseptic Caragiale, Pintilie rendered the outskirts of the author's Bucharest as a squalidly naturalistic world of rat-infested shacks on muddy streets, teeming with hysterically lubricious human activity—what can only be described as the distasteful antics of a degenerate mob. Finally premiered in 1990, after the fall of Ceaușescu's regime, *Carnival Scenes* was enthusiastically interpreted as a transcendent critique of "Romanianness": "Romanianness" as an eternal condition—miserable, undignified, worthy only of derision.[6]

Still, a few years later, when Pintilie made *An Unforgettable Summer*, his exposure of Romanian military crimes from the 1920s against Bulgarian ethnics and his savage jabs at the ludicrousness of Romania's regional-imperialist ambitions were greeted with noticeably less enthusiasm.[7] Now his anti-nationalism was flying in the face of increasing nostalgia for the precommunist days of Romanian military-monarchic pomp and regional influence.[8] This could indicate that criticism directed against the nation and the people tends to be more easily accepted when it is offered as abstract self-lamentation, couched in moral or ethnic-essentialist terms; conversely, the more it refers to specific historical actions—actions that contradict or hurt the continuity, the legitimacy, the righteousness, the honor of the state, the imaginary respectability of the Romanian people—the more such criticism becomes intolerable. It is one thing to describe the Romanian people as contemptible, speaking as a Romanian and addressing your fellow Romanians; there's actually a long tradition of such descriptions, some of which—from Emil Cioran to Horia Roman-Patapievici[9]—have enjoyed great popularity among both intellectuals and larger audiences, and inscribed themselves in not-so-diverse historical narratives of cultural or civilisational backwardness "complexes." But referencing historical events that are largely forgotten (and forgotten for a reason) in order to illustrate the abominable behavior of the Romanian state towards other nations, or towards its own ethic minorities, is an entirely different matter—and more seriously transgressive. When it comes to the actions perpetrated against other peoples, Romanian identity becomes truly sensitive.

There were no other films like *An Unforgettable Summer* made during the 1990s. As for the post-2000 New Romanian Cinema initiated by Cristi Puiu, with Radu Muntean, Cristian Mungiu, Corneliu Porumboiu, and others (including the young Radu Jude of *The Happiest Girl in the World,* 2009) following quickly in his footsteps, it seemed more interested in exploring the post-communist present and the end of the Ceaușescu era (while also failing to tackle directly some of the political events that had played a defining role for the Puiu-Mungiu generation[10]). As no new historical films were being made, the older ones, very popular in their own time, became objects of nostalgia for many people in Romania.

At the beginning of 2015, when news broke that Radu Jude's new film, *Aferim!,* was set in early-nineteenth-century Wallachia (Southern Romania) and featured outlaws pursued by lawmen on horseback, the uproar it sparked was unusual for a new Romanian release. What went into that excitement was, partly, a nostalgia for the simplicities of the old historical films which had turned the national past into a safe haven the public could escape into and feel good about itself. Literary postmodernism, ranging from the lyrics of folk-rock ballads by Phoenix[11] to Mircea Cărtărescu's parodic epic poem *Levantul* [The Levant][12], had also fed an aesthetic appetite for premodern stages of the Romanian language—its richness, its exoticism, its Turkish and Greek influences, its distinctive vocabulary (largely discarded since) conjuring a world of sensuous pleasures. In an extraordinary balancing act, Jude's *Aferim!* (which the director co-wrote with novelist Florin Lăzărescu) addresses the nostalgia and feeds the appetite while refusing to indulge the escapist urge that comes along with it—the desire to see the national past in purely aesthetic, ornamental terms, as a safe region of fantasy. It is precisely this urge the film is designed to scourge. To the extent that *Aferim!* belongs to a tradition within Romanian cinema, it is the alternative, savagely unromantic tradition of Lucian Pintilie's *An Unforgettable Summer.* It is a revisionist historical film.

Depicting the Roots of Contemporary Anti-Roma Racism

Front and center of his picture of Wallachia in 1835, Radu Jude places the matter of slavery. Most of the slaves were of Roma ethnicity—"gypsies," as they were called then (and still are by many Romanian people). They belonged to the state, to monasteries, or to rich individuals—land-owning aristocrats called "boyars." As historian Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu,

who acted as consultant on *Aferim!,* wrote in her notes for the film's press kit, the idea of abolishing slavery was very new at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and only timidly advocated for by a few enlightened ecclesiastics.[13] Still, *Aferim!* is set at a time of significant change. Wallachia was still under Ottoman suzerainty, but, following the Russo-Turkish War (1828-29) and the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), it had also become a Russian protectorate. The Treaty allowed Wallachia (and Moldavia) to freely trade with countries other than the Ottoman Empire, while Russian military occupation brought a series of reforms. As Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu writes, those were "gathered in the Organic Regulations, a fundamental law that regulated the organizing and reorganizing of modern institutions." The six-year-long military occupation (1828-34),

> "with its French-speaking European military staff, contribut[ed] to the spreading of French fashion in all its aspects: clothes, language, music, dancing, literature. So far, the political elite [had] gravitated around Constantinople, but now Paris [became] the center of all emulation and inspiration. [...] The young [were] sent to complete their studies in Vienna, Paris, Berlin, and Geneva. They [came] back wearing a top hat and a tuxedo, with [revolution] on their minds."

The Russians had brought the West to Romania. Still, revolution had to wait until 1848. "[W]ith the active implication of young intellectuals around the 1848 movement, public opinion [would also] be shaped in favor of freeing the gypsy slaves." "The Law for the Emancipation of All Gypsies in Wallachia" was finally promulgated in 1856; a similar law had been passed in Moldavia in 1855. Still, most of the emancipated Roma population was left outside the social organization of Romanian society (Wallachia and Moldova were united in 1859 to form the United Principalities, later Romania). The Roma people remained second-class citizens, to whom opportunities for property, education and social mobility were largely denied (in spite of their having become taxpayers after the emancipation). Later, in the 1930s, as Romania slid into fascism, they were targeted, along with the Jews, by renewed explicit racism; the Axis-affiliated Antonescu regime would speak of the "Gypsy problem." They were direct victims of the Holocaust—tens of thousands of them were deported and murdered.

During the state socialist era, they continued to suffer major economic and educational disadvantages, while still being marked by moral stigma.[14] In the post-communist era, this racism erupted once again into the open. Racist prejudice against the Roma (also economically victimized by post-communist phenomena like unemployment, housing evictions, and the restitution of private property) could now be voiced publicly (even by state officials), to overwhelming popular approval, while the history of their centuries-long enslavement, followed by their relegation to second-class citizenship, remained half-repressed by Romanian collective memory.[15]

Aferim! was one of the first mainstream works of Romanian art—if not *the* first—to engage with this problem. It did so vigorously, by mobilizing a popular form (the picaresque adventure set in the early nineteenth century, with ties to those Ceaușescu-era cinematic yarns about romantic *hajduks*) in order to rub the viewer's nose in the half-repressed reality of Roma slavery. Hence the nervousness it seemed to arouse in Romanian audiences (along with an undeniable interest), judging from the many reactions on social media, which attempted to deny or tone down the polemical charge of the film, as if to reclaim only the apolitical pleasures of watching the horses and the landscapes, of listening to the sounds of an older Romanian language, etc. But the political charge packed by *Aferim!* is too explosive to be easily disavowed. The film engages with current Romanian anti-Roma racism—an extremely widespread phenomenon—by drawing an implicit genealogy of the oppression dynamics still present to this day. More simply put, *Aferim!* depicts the origins of contemporary racism.

The Past as Exotic, the Past as Familiar

Aferim! tells the story of a lawman, constable Constandin (Teodor Corban), and his son, Ioniță, who is also his deputy (Mihai Comănoiu), who are searching for a runaway slave, Carfin (Toma Cuzin), the property of a powerful boyar (Alexandru Dabija). The hills, fields, and forests they are crossing on horseback—the father hearty and rather peacocky in his Turkish fez, the teenage son rather gawky in his military uniform—do not resemble landscapes of early modernity; they could very well be medieval—a monastery, a scattering of mud huts and reed roofs, plenty of cows and goats, a primitive Ferris wheel in the middle of a fair, an inn where the travelers have to lie nearly on top of each other in order to sleep, with rats scurrying among them. It's definitely an unromantic depiction of the past—all poverty and promiscuity and wilderness, although it is not entirely un-picturesque as rendered by Jude and his director of photography, Marius Panduru, in lustrous black-and-white widescreen vistas. The director hoped that the use of black-and-white would function as an effect of distantiation, making the representation of the past more blatantly artificial, making viewers more aware of its artificiality. However, on some viewers it seemed to have the opposite effect, reminding them of period engravings and early photographs, and thus making the film more illusionistic, its representation of 1835 Wallachia more immersive.[16]

The film establishes a droll, jaunty tone befitting a picaresque yarn, as Constandin and Ioniță have a series of colorful encounters, none more colorful than the one with the spectacularly mean, vicious priest (played by Alexandru Bindea, an actor associated with popular cinema, TV sketch comedy, and iconic commercials[17]) who explains to them the origins of the Jewish race by weaving a fantastic tale of cursed giant creatures descended from Noah's son, Ham. The priest, who believes that most people on earth, "especially the crows [gypsies]," are "beasts that have to be tamed" and put to hard work, ends his lecture with a breathless, flamboyant catalogue of stereotypes:

> "Each nation has its purpose: the Jews, to cheat; the Turks to do harm; us Romanians, to love, honor, and suffer like good Christians. And each has their habits: Hebrews reads a lot, Greeks talks a lot, Turks has many wives, Arabs has many teeth, Germans smokes a lot, Hungarians eats a lot, Russians drinks a lot, English thinks a lot, French like fashion a lot, Armenians are lazy, Circassians wears many a lace, Italians lies a lot, Serbians cheats a lot, and Gypsies get many a beating."[18]

Constandin's obsequious show of gratitude to the priest for these "lovely thoughts" provides a punchline to this very theatrical, very playable scene in which the torrent of prejudice, the assault on modern sensibilities is both appalling and somehow bracing.

Radu Jude, who is interested in making the viewer's involvement as dialectical as possible, ensures that this past is both strange and familiar, and that his lawmen heroes alternately pull us in and repel us. As a sample of the past-as-exotic/familiar dialectic, let us reconsider the priest's rant: some of his notions are completely outlandish to a modern viewer (and hilarious because of that); others, on the other hand, sound more recognizable (for example, his belief that most people are little more than beasts of burden and should be tightly controlled sounds like something that can still echo in the twenty-first century, though not everywhere and perhaps not expressed so bluntly). One striking aspect of the world depicted in *Aferim!* is the characters' incessant use of proverbs and folk aphorisms (some of them monstrous-sounding to modern ears) to rationalize their condition—a condition that most of them have good reason to find oppressive. While always keeping the plight of the Roma slaves at the center of the social picture he draws, Jude is also very precise in drawing the other relations of domination, oppression, and exploitation—of women by men, of non-slave servants by their masters, and so on—at the heart of this brutally hierarchical, patriarchal, anti-Semitic, homophobic, and xenophobic social order. The proverbs and other words of wisdom uttered by these people tend to present their world as immutably God-given—and thus help them endure it. A woman who has been savagely beaten by her husband is comforted with these words: "This is how it's been from the beginning of the world—the man has the right to punish his wife like a man; that's why he's a man. That's our law." "Our law" is thus equated to natural law ("from the beginning of the world"). And the comforter continues, quoting a book of law: "Women shall be less castigated than men, as they are dimmer of wit and weaker before sin." A slave who has every reason to expect a ferocious beating from his master is also comforted with a bit of folk wisdom: "Where a boyar strikes, new skin grows." Almost the last words heard in the film—said by a father to his son—are: "This world will stay as it is. You can't change it, try as you might. We live as we can, not as we want."

The ironies designed here by Jude are very complex. On one level, the viewer is struck by how remote this early-nineteenth-century Wallachia is, although its inhabitants regarded it as eternal; for one thing, feudalism and slavery are long-gone, replaced by a regime of universal secularized formal freedom. On the other hand, we keep recognizing continuities between the past as depicted in *Aferim!* and our present—and even the possible future that some of us may fear: the racism, the misogyny, the homophobia, the corruption, the privatization of the police (constable Constantin is really working for the boyar). And we recognize the discursive clichés—the instinctive metaphysical fatalism, the national self-pitying: after trading a few insults with the rich occupant of a horse-drawn carriage, who berated him and Ioniță for having got in his way (a traffic altercation which, though happening on a forest path and involving horses, feels amusingly contemporary), Constandin starts bemoaning the Romanians' lot as a people: "That's our fate as Romanians: whoever rises earlier can drag you by your hair." In short, *Aferim!* keeps bringing out the continuity between past and present, while avoiding facile allegorical superimposition of the former upon the latter.

Alternately Drawing the Audience in and Alienating It

In the film, it is the character of Constandin who acts as the main repository and dispenser of this frequently hair-raising folk wisdom ("A father weighs more than twelve children," "Devils flock around priests," and so on), just as he functions as Radu Jude's main instrument for adjusting our distance to this world, alternately alienating and drawing us in. The first scene in the film provides the viewer with the first example of the constable's arbitrary and (to our modern eyes) appallingly callous use of his authority: having stopped an old woman on the road to question her, he suddenly gets the notion that she might be carrying the cholera, thereupon he starts abusing her ("Stupid cow, I ought to give your fat ass a whipping! Filthy plague rat!") for having come too close to him. (His son and deputy sullenly joins in the abuse.) There will be more instances of that in the course of the film: interrogating some slaves about the fugitive Carfin, the constable will promise money in exchange of information, and then petulantly refuse to pay; just as cavalierly, he will underpay a fisherman after making him sell his fish; passing through a camp of gypsy gold panners, he will magnanimously accept some gold—their tribute to him for not having crushed them. And it goes without saying that he is as obsequious towards his social superiors—the boyar who's his actual boss, and also a Turkish traveler who asks him for directions—as he is careless in the exercise of his power over peasants and slaves. He functions in the mid to upper reaches of a world that's all about everybody knowing their place—a horrible world in which the Roma slaves on the lowest rung of the hierarchy and the miserably poor non-Roma peasants occupying the very next rung are separated by an abyss of loathing and oppression: an old servant, eager to distinguish himself in the eyes of his master, hands the boyar the scissors for castrating a runaway slave; a servant girl openly enjoys her temporary privileges as the boyar's favorite and relishes the misery of the boyar's wife (who has

been savagely punished for her own adultery); the boyar's wife, too, protests that she's not a slave or a stupid peasant to deserve being beaten—being high-born should exempt her. In short, the world depicted in *Aferim!* does not consist of two neatly separated camps—oppressors and oppressed—with the latter camp proving to be invariably virtuous. The stability of the system is maintained by a capillarity of violence and injustice generating a great violent chain of being. Of all the practitioners of the everybody-in-their-own-place principle, of all the embodiments of individualism and corruption populating this world, the constable is only the most richly defined.

Still, Jude and co-writer Lăzărescu have not portrayed him as relentlessly repelling; they have given him several disarming moments and traits, so that he never completely alienates the audience. As we discover during the film, he is not completely lacking in awareness that, as a policeman, his duty should be to justice (in this case, to his idea of what a proportionate punishment should be)—not to the boyar. Faintly aware of a tension between the two, he is uneasy—an unease which, of course, resolves itself in a feeling of metaphysical impotence. His being played by Teodor Corban—an actor of great personal warmth and charm—goes some way towards making the constable somewhat sympathetic. Despite walking with a limp and suffering from fits of unexplained, ominous coughing, Constandin usually projects high spirits. Then again, his mood can abruptly switch to melancholia, intimations of death, mawkish (and sometimes hungover) soliloquizing about posterity and the vanity of all things; at one point, he even holds a skull in his hand while going into that. An incongruous Hamlet, he is on the other hand a natural Polonius—a sententious father continuously drowning his son in torrents of pompous advice. He is something of a coward—coming across the scene of a massacre (probably perpetrated by *hajduks*), he abandons a wounded man to his fate, prematurely wishing him to rest with God as he spurs his horse on. Around priests he has a sly, faintly impish curiosity—he prods one to elaborate on his venomously prejudiced views, he challenges another to answer a riddle. And, of course, he and his son make a pleasantly contrasting double act—in one shot they cross a marsh on horseback, the constable bitterly cursing the God who wanted him to get wet, while the young man wonders aloud at the beauty of the surrounding nature. When they stop at a fair, where the constable earns some money on the side by selling another runaway slave—a small child—whom he had captured, the son insists to ride the Ferris wheel; such moments of playfulness remind us that he's scarcely more than a child himself—for all his father's efforts at turning him into a fearless slave-hunter and military man.

Seriousness, Playfulness, Earthiness

Radu Jude's playful side—always coexisting with his socially responsible side—is very clear throughout the film. Take the film's use of both folk and authorial Romanian literature. At one level, as we have already noted, by insistent use of proverbs, spontaneous wordplay, oral verse-making and tale-telling, etc., Jude and co-writer Lăzărescu are building a subtle critique of the culture produced by the kind of social order they're depicting: while making up a sort of release valve for what's left of human freedom in a very oppressive world, the folk wit, wisdom, and linguistic verve are ultimately shown to justify that world as immutably natural or God-given. At a deeper level, the fact that a lot of the film's dialogue is made up of quotations from and allusions to many literary sources (Romanian high school classics like Ioan Slavici's *Moara cu noroc* [The Mill of Good Luck] and Ion Luca Caragiale's *La hanul lui Mânjoală* [At Mânjoală's Inn], and also Shakespeare and Chekhov) serves to foreground the inevitable literary mediation of all access to the past. In a way that is both modernist and post-modernist, the film's reconstruction of nineteenth-century Wallachia is insistently acknowledged to rely on texts and therefore to be artificial to a certain extent. But there's also a third level—that of playfulness for its own sake. The constable and his deputy find the two fugitive slaves—Carfin and the small boy, Țintiric (Alberto Dinache)—at the house of a basket-weaver (Victor Rebengiuc) who's hiding them and using them for work. Hidden under a trough, Țintiric comically betrays his presence by saying "Bless you" when the constable's son sneezes. The moment is lifted from a beloved children's tale, "Capra cu trei iezi" [The Goat and Her Three Kids], where it's a terrified baby goat who shouts from its hiding place "Bless you" to the Big Bad Wolf (and is consequently eaten). In the context of a realistic film about slavery, this is a highly incongruous literary reference; its slightly jarring presence in the film is the kind of effect that Jude, a risk-taking director, clearly relishes. Of course, the character of Țintiric serves to illustrate a crucial aspect of slavery—namely that the Roma were savagely exploited from a very young age. The constable, who is intent on making a little profit on him, makes him advertise himself by standing in the middle of a fair and shouting at the passers-by that he's a hard-working and obedient little slave. At the same time, Jude is careful to give this child a fullness of presence that exceeds his illustrative function in the film's exposé on slavery. When he starts to relax in the presence of his captors (who don't treat him too unkindly before selling him), Țintiric turns temporarily into an energetic kid, laughing at some of the grown-ups' jokes and acting as if he were entitled to sweets when he sees the constable's son being given some.

Before returning Carfin to the boyar, Constandin and Ioniță spend a night at an inn. As most of the film is set in forests and on open roads, this is an occasion to show us more of 'civilization'. There's the innkeeper who, upon inquiring about Carfin's crimes and being answered that he ran away from his master, mutters that, were Carfin *his* slave, he would be punished by having his eyes taken out and his legs cut off. There's another group of travelers amusing themselves with *their* Roma slave—he has to grab a coin perched on top of a burning candle with his teeth, while they heatedly egg him on. There's the woman whom the lawman buys for both his son and himself, for what is literally a roll in the hay: between rounds he submits her to a coarse examination in front of

everybody (he just dives under her skirt with a lighted candle), while omitting to warn her that he himself may have a venereal disease. There's the foreigner in elegant Western clothes—an Englishman apparently—who is chased away at sword's point from a table for presuming to "teach us ethics." The content of the Englishman's teachings remains unspecified, but the xenophobic outburst chimes suggestively with the words of the song being sung during this scene, for the revelers at the inn, by a group of Roma musicians: it is about the pain of a young Wallachian who has to endure Greek lessons with a Greek professor, although the language is gibberish to him, and he would rather go hunting. The presence of the Englishman also falls in line with a number of signs of early Westernization that Jude scatters in his picture of early nineteenth century, still heavily Ottomanized Wallachia. It is subtly suggested that the boyar's wife, Sultana (Mihaela Sîrbu)—who put the story in motion by sleeping with Carfin, so that he had to run from the boyar's revenge—is a woman entertaining relatively modern notions of romance; at one point she describes herself by using a Romanianized form of the French word *accablée*—stricken, afflicted—and this choice of words is enough to set her somewhat apart from the other characters, whose Romanian is heavy with Turkish and Greek influences. More blatant is the case of the Roma slave Carfin, whose horizons turn out to be wider than those of anyone else in the film. He informs his captors that in the past he had been a slave to more enlightened boyars from Bucharest (the names he cites—Bibescu, Văcărescu—belong to real historical figures and are very resonant in Romanian culture), who had taken him along on their travels in Western Europe. Asked by his disbelieving, yet fascinated captors about such foreign places as Paris, Vienna, and Leipzig, he describes them as "beautiful, not like here," adding that they don't beat their servants there. This association of the modern West with more enlightened attitudes remains very implicit—little more than a whiff—but, satisfying as it is to watch the slave give lectures on civilization, perhaps a little dialectical counterweight would not have been unwelcomed here: after all, slavery ended in backward Romania earlier than it did in the United States, not to mention the Belgian colony of Congo.

Back to the inn and the 'civilization' it depicts—with its cruelty and squalor and unsanitary backwardness—what enriches the depiction is the fact that Jude clearly isn't simply interested in moralizing. There's a ribald vein running through his films—from *Aferim!* to *Scarred Hearts* (2016) and *"I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians"* (2018), culminating in *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* (2021)—an interest in coarse or schoolboy humor, in bawdy antics. There's a palpable earthiness to these films alongside their high seriousness. In *Aferim!*'s inn episode, this translates into a sensitivity to the element of vitality in the squalor: the singing, the dancing, the big period hats (funny to contemporary eyes) swaying on the heads of the revelers, the red-faced constable switching from merriment to melancholy as he drinks and listens to the musicians and throws food to Carfin as to a dog and reminisces proudly about his youthful village-plundering as a member of revolutionary Tudor Vladimirescu's anti-Ottoman *pandur* militia of 1821.

Access to *Aferim!*'s nineteenth century world of slavery, bounty-hunting, and high road banditry is mediated not only through Romanian literature, or through music created or collected by the 19th-century Ottoman-born folklorist and composer Anton Pann, but also through a cinematic genre—the western. Radu Jude could have chosen to channel the specifically Romanian *hajduk* movies of the Ceaușescu era, but he chose to reference a more international cinematic idiom. The horses, the landscapes, a scene such as that of the lawman coming across the site of a recent massacre—these irresistibly call to mind the tropes and generic accoutrements of the western, while the basic story situation—the lawman having to find a fugitive and bring him back to justice—echoes specific westerns like Anthony Mann's *The Naked Spur* (1953).

As the lawman listens to the captive's story while they make their way back to the boyar, the tightening suspense can also recall that of another American film: Hal Ashby's New Hollywood classic *The Last Detail* (1973), which is not a western, but a contemporary tale of two Navy men escorting a third to naval prison. By the standards of his world, the constable Constandin is not cruel to his prisoner: could it be possible that he would eventually let him escape, or, if that's too Hollywood (and it is, especially coming from a filmmaker associated with the New Romanian Cinema), at least that he would interpose himself between Carfin and the boyar's revenge? Or maybe—given that a lot of *Aferim!* feels like a pleasurable yarn—the boyar's revenge won't be so terrible after all? The film's grisly denouement is perfectly judged to bring any such illusions crashing down with a thud.

Impact and Aftermath

At the 2015 Berlinale, *Aferim!* won Radu Jude the Silver Bear for Best Director (shared with Polish filmmaker Małgorzata Szumowska, who won for her film *Body*). It subsequently became an international critical hit—the biggest to come out of Romania since Cristian Mungiu's *Beyond the Hills* (2012) and Călin Peter Netzer's *Child's Pose* (2013). For some Romanian critics, Jude's earlier work had seemed to be insufficiently distinctive, fitting too generically within the New Romanian Cinema.[19] *Aferim!* made him stand out, establishing him as an artistically adventurous director.

Coming from a filmmaker associated with the NRC, *Aferim!* was deeply unusual not only in its nineteenth century setting, black-and-white visuals, picaresque narrative, literary playfulness, and general resemblance to a western, but also because it was—openly, unapologetically—a political film. And in Romania, its politics were as unpopular as could be—it was a film confronting contemporary anti-Roma racism, a condition endemic at all levels of Romanian society.[20] It earned Jude a certain amount of hostile notoriety (which his subsequent films, dealing with Romania's share in the Holocaust, would only consolidate). Even some of the laudatory reviews betrayed a certain uneasiness about its politics, a reluctance to discuss

it as an anti-racist film, a tendency to treat this aspect as inessential, a desire to see its drama—against all the evidence on screen—as timeless, as unshaped by matters of race and class. Not a few reviews expressed mild or not so mild irritation at the undue centrality of such topics—the enslavement of the Roma, present-day racism against them—in the discussion surrounding the film.[21] (It is difficult to determine if the discomfort was provoked specifically by the anti-racist take of the film or by Jude's art being so political.) Others blamed the film itself for obtrusively pushing a political agenda.[22]

However, the discussion could not be stopped. It is, of course, impossible to ascertain how much *Aferim!* contributed—if it did—to the strengthening of anti-racism activism in Romania, but opposition to racism has certainly strengthened in the last seven years[23], and it is not unlikely that *Aferim!* played a part, however small. Recently, the film itself has come to be questioned—though not yet publicly—as a case of appropriation of Roma subject matters by a non-Roma artist, who, although he uses Roma actors, tells a story of slavery in which the Roma are only supporting characters. (Of course, matters would have hardly been improved if Jude had attempted to usurp a Roma perspective.) These are important issues which need to be expressed, but it all comes down to the question of whether it's better or not—in the context of 2015 Romania—that such a film was made at all (even with a non-Roma perspective on events). Is it possible that it may have done some good? Yes, it is. Would it have been preferable that it didn't exist at all? Doubtful. Could it have possibly contributed to the repression of more legitimate Roma narratives, of Roma artistic self-expression? It seems unlikely. At the time, the Roma feminist theatre company Giuvlipen had just been established. It would shortly become a very important institution, forging a Roma political theatre unlike anything that had previously existed in Romania.

As for Jude, he would embark on a restlessly experimental phase, turning his back on the relatively traditional storytelling and character development that he had employed in *Aferim!*. He would experiment with filmed literature (in *Scarred Hearts*), with 'Brechtian' cinema (in *"I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians"* and *Uppercase Print,* 2020), and, time and time again, with montages of audiovisual (and other) documents (*The Dead Nation,* 2017; *Uppercase Print*; *The Exit of the Trains, 2020; Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn,* 2021; and also in the shorts *The Marshal's Two Executions,* from 2018, *To Discipline, To Punish,* from 2019, and *Memories from the Eastern Front,* 2022). In most of these films, as well as in theatre productions like *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (based on Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1974 film) and *The Controversy of Valladolid,* he would continue to explore racism. The films will be discussed in forthcoming articles, but first, a few words about this theatre work.

Ali: Fear Eats the Soul was Jude's second theatrical production, after his 2016 staging of Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage* at the Timișoara National Theatre. It was the inaugural production of an independent theatre from Bucharest, "Apollo 111," which opened in 2016. And it transplanted Fassbinder's *Ali*—a love story between a North-African Arab immigrant worker and a German cleaning lady—from Munich in the 1970s to present-day Bucharest. In Fassbinder's classic art melodrama, the oddly matched couple—the brawny young man (El Hedi ben Salem) and the small gray woman (Brigitte Mira) in her sixties—attracts the racist malevolence of a German community in which, thirty years after the war, the echoes of Nazism have not died down. Jude, too, stresses the continuity between Romania's fascist record—from the 1930s and then during the war, when Romanian Field Marshal and prime minister Ion Antonescu was a Hitler ally—and the racism that confronts his lovers in contemporary Bucharest. Unfortunately, Jude overworks the connection: in his adaptation, the heroine's neighbors, Mrs. Moța and Miss Marin, wear names associated with two of the Iron Guard's most notorious figures, and Jude blends in many other allusions to the 1930s and 1940s. And, in his stage production, racism seems to be on these people's minds all the time; it's racism as full-time job and obsession, always pitched at the same level of deranged shrillness, whereas in Fassbinder it was more like a reflex. Jude's adaptation doesn't take into account the high number of mixed marriages—between Arab men and local women—in post-communist Romania. It also dilutes Fassbinder's more subtle point about the pragmatics of living in a community: temporarily ostracized, the lovers in the film are eventually forgiven their transgression for the simple reason that the grocer across the street needs the heroine as a client, just as her grown-up kids need her as a babysitter to their children and her colleagues at work need her there; the enthusiasm for lynching recedes or moves on to other targets—the heroine joining her colleagues in persecuting the new girl at work, a refugee from Yugoslavia. Love itself is presented as not being above an urge to demean or dehumanize—at one point, the white woman shows off her black lover to her newly recovered friends, as if he were a toy, and he later punishes her by laughing with his mates at her age, in front of her, when she comes to the garage where he's working and pleads with him to come back home.

Jude picks up on this theme of the frailty of the lovers' bond, but, unlike Fassbinder, he is unable or unwilling to present their intimacy with any pathos or conviction, to allow it much dignity. Jude's discomfort with the romanticism of Fassbinder's couple, his inclination to deflate it, can be difficult to distinguish from an urge to ridicule the couple's physical mismatch. And this indistinction risks trivializing the entire enterprise. The comic component is also present on screen, but there it doesn't obliterate the rest—the man's warmth and courtliness, the woman's coiled emotional hunger—but instead heightens it. Jude's presentation of his lovers (the woman played by Liliana Ghiță, the man played on alternate nights by Kamara and Amir Shafizadeh) misses this delicate balance.

For *The Controversy of Valladolid* (2017), Jude worked again with the Timișoara National Theatre, for which he had staged his Bergman adaptation the year before. This time, he chose to stage a 1999 play (initially a 1992 novel) by French writer

Jean-Claude Carrière, a fictionalization of the 1550-1551 "Valladolid debate" in which Spanish scholars and priests, at the behest of King Charles V, argued whether the colonized Amerindians were fit for peaceful colonization and consenting conversion to Christianity, or whether war and annihilation were their deserved lot as punishment for their savagery and alienness. It's easy to see why the subject intrigued Radu Jude: the continuity with the exploration of racism undertaken in *Aferim!* is obvious. However, the way in which he chooses to present that sixteenth century debate—incessantly ridiculing it through his staging—does little to further or deepen the exploration. In *Aferim!,* the clowning and the responsible exposé on racism mesh beautifully. In *Valladolid,* as in *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul,* they don't. In *Ali,* the cartoonish treatment of racism is blown to monotonously hysterical proportions, at the expense of nuance and accuracy of observation. In *The Controversy of Valladolid,* the clowning comes across as facile, not very helpful condescension toward the unenlightened past—or, better said, the undead unenlightened past. *Aferim!'s* subtle dialectics of immersion and alienation, historicity and anachronism, are nowhere to be found here. Nor can we find anything like the discomforting ambiguity emanating from the clashes of political ideas (dealing with the recovery of the historical past) orchestrated by Jude one year later in "*I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians."* In Jude's staging of Carrière's play of ideas, the symmetries between the distant past and the present tend to come in the form of allusions to contemporary Romanian politics or as vignettes of coarse comedy (one of the theologians sexually defiling the effigy of the God Quetzalcoatl)—devices presumably meant to convey the everlasting life enjoyed by domination, exploitation, and dehumanization throughout human history. The theme of intellectuals as privileged agents of chauvinistic rationalizations is one that Jude would explore more engagingly in later works. Putting aside Jude's production, the play itself bypasses the stakes and complexities of the major historical event that was the "Valladolid debate," the controversies surrounding the right of conquest and the justifications of the Spanish expansion. Behind the smoke screen of an unequal combat between giants—timeless common-sense and benevolence versus timeless, all-powerful superstition—and behind the ludicrous, almost inexplicable obscurantism that *The Controversy of Valladolid* associates with theological debates, stood, as a matter of fact, the clashing interests of the European empires over the domination of the newly discovered territories, the peculiar position of the papacy, and also the insurgency of the colonists, viciously resisting the attempts of Charles V to (moderately) protect the local populations against exploitation and destruction. Because this historical context is obscured, the oscillation all along the debate between arguments for exploitation and ideas about conversion, and the eventual decision of the papacy to acknowledge the full humanity and the rights of the Amerindians, feel at the end of the play arbitrary or incomprehensible.[24]

Notes:

1. This foundational mixture of filmmaking and nationalism is the subject of Nae Caranfil's *The Rest Is Silence* (2007)—a semi-satirical epic about the making of the 1912 patriotic chest-thumper. Caranfil's comic version of the mandatory epic battle scene pitting Romanians against Turks is an apt piece of parody (which may actually be the best-directed epic battle scene in Romanian cinema).
2. Onoriu Colăcel, *The Romanian Cinema of Nationalism: Historical Films as Propaganda and Spectacle* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2018). For another study of the genre, written in French, see Aurelia Vasile, *Le cinéma roumain dans la période communiste* (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2011). The genre also receives a lot of attention in two Romanian-language books: Cristian Tudor Popescu, *Filmul surd în România mută. Politică și propagandă în filmul românesc de ficțiune (1912-1989)* (Iași: Polirom, 2011); and Bogdan Jitea, *Cinema în RSR. Conformism și disidență în industria ceaușistă de film* (Iași: Polirom, 2021).
3. Colăcel, *The Romanian Cinema of Nationalism,* 138.
4. Colăcel, *The Romanian Cinema of Nationalism,* 132.
5. "A discourse about unity and continuity—the nation—overwhelmed one about differentiation and change—Marxism." Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 12. During the Ceaușescu era, as Verdery shows, state-sponsored nationalism put increasingly more stress on indigenist definitions of Romanian identity and on the local Romanian ancestors, the Dacians—"a significant addition to a politics whose referents had long been overwhelmingly external." Verdery, *National Ideology*, 39.
6. Among the 1990 Romanian reviewers who put forward this influential interpretation of *Carnival Scenes* were writer Dan Stanca and literary critic Nicolae Manolescu. The latter enjoyed enormous prestige at the time in Romanian culture for having defended the principle of art's autonomy against the nationalist-communist agenda of the Ceaușescu regime. See more about *Carnival Scenes* in Gabriela Filippi, "Comori ascunse. Receptarea după 1989 a filmelor interzise în perioada comunistă," in *Filmul tranziției. Contribuții la interpretarea cinemaului românesc nouăzecist*, eds. Andrei Gorzo and Gabriela Filippi (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2017), 24–30.
7. The critical reception of Pintilie's *An Unforgettable Summer* is explored in Andrei Gorzo, *Viața, moartea și iar viața criticii de film* (Iași: Polirom, 2019), 159-200.
8. See Andrei Gorzo, "Lucian Pintilie (1933-2018)," *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 10, no. 1 (2019): 72–74.
9. Horia-Roman Patapievici is one of the established public intellectuals in post-communist Romania. He begins his career in the early 1990s as a political essayist in a Cioranian vein, with a violent, sententious, and essentialist rhetoric of anti-Romanianness. He soon evolves into

an early apostle of neoconservatism, anti-political-correctness, and economic libertarianism, while his charisma, the intense mediatic exposure, and strong cultural and institutional alliances convert the former scandalmonger into an influential intellectual figure (as well as an expensive guru for corporate audiences).

10. The post-communist reality of competing political parties and competing visions of a new society had come as a great shock in 1990, instantly dividing society, splitting families into enemy camps (usually along generational lines), etc., as political options were recast in terms of economic and cultural identities. Some of the magnitude of this shock is captured in a riveting observational documentary by Laurențiu Calciu, *After the Revolution,* shot on the streets of Bucharest in early 1990 and only released in 2010.
11. Phoenix was a Romanian rock band which achieved great local success in the early 1970s by "creating a form of ethno-rock elaborating on the authentic or allegedly archaic elements of Romanian folklore." See Caius Dobrescu, "The Phoenix that Could Not Rise: Politics and Rock Culture in Romania, 1960-1989," *East Central Europe* 38, no. 2–3 (2011): 255-290. Dobrescu writes that this ethnic self-styling was meant to counteract "the hostility towards Western pop music of the new aggressively nativist direction of the Ceaușescu regime's cultural policies," partly accommodating that nativism. On the other hand, Dobrescu quotes band leader Nicolae "Nicu" Covaci's assertion that he had been exploring the possibilities of the local folk tradition long before the Communist Party's turn to grandiose nationalism. In any case, it is worth mentioning here that, as Dobrescu puts it, "even at the peak of this phase of the Phoenix history one could hear a sound that did not fully concord with the general ethnonational atmosphere." The sound referred to is that of a work called "Mica Țiganiadă" [Little Gypsiad], in which "the band celebrates the magic worldview and the inner freedom of the Roma people in a manner that makes one wonder why the Romanian hippies have not been tempted to connect their Bohemianism to the culture, still surviving in Romania, then as now, of Roma nomadism. But it remains a fact that they did not, that they hardly felt any interest for a population both oppressed by and instinctively resistant to bureaucratic rationalization [...] It is relevant that the Romanian hippies could connect to the black Americans, to their music and their call for civil rights, but they massively ignored their Roma countrymen. This is a clear indication that the ethnic self-centeredness promoted by Nicolae Covaci's brand of rock [notwithstanding the note of cultural relativism brought by 'Little Gypsiad'] was quite in tune with the spirit of his whole generation." However, in the 1975 album *Cantafabule,* Phoenix would temporarily overcome the system of reference of their ethno-rock phase, "deploying images and symbols coming from Hellenistic, Latin, Byzantine, or Oriental catalogues of esoteric monsters." On a side note, the lyrics to many Phoenix songs are co-credited to future documentary filmmaker Andrei Ujică—who would go on to direct *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu* (2010)—and poet Șerban Foarță.
12. Mircea Cărtărescu (born in 1956) is Romania's most celebrated contemporary writer. His *The Levant* (1990) is a postmodern masterpiece retelling the history of the Romanian language and that of Romanian literature as a collage of parodies that is also a mock-epic poem about patriotic nineteenth-century Romanians fighting the Ottoman Empire.
13. *Aferim!* international press kit, http://bigworldpictures.org/films/aferim/Aferim_presskit.pdf, last accessed on May 17, 2021.
14. Significantly, there were almost no representations of Roma culture in the Romanian popular cinema of the state socialist era—not even the kind of romantically exoticizing depictions of perpetually singing and dancing "gypsies" (*Fiddlers, Gypsies Are Found Near Heaven)* that brought a certain success in the 1970s to Soviet Bessarabian director Emil Loteanu (born in the 1930s in what was then the Kingdom of Greater Romania and is now the Republic of Moldova). There was one beloved revue actor who became indelibly associated with Roma characters during the Ceaușescu era. His name was Jean Constantin (1927-2010) and his ethnicity was Greek-Romanian—not Roma. He usually played variations on the stereotype of the small-fry thief or crook whose heart is basically in the right place; his character served as comic relief in action and adventure films—the buffoon riding next to the big masculine (and unambiguously white) hero. Apart from comic Roma characters, he also played comic Turks. There were a few occasions in his career to temporarily escape this typecasting, but basically he had to wait for the post-2000 wave of Romanian directors for a really good opportunity to make a strong impression on screen in a part which was more than a patronizing stereotype (in Cătălin Mitulescu's *How I Spent the End of the World,* from 2006). Ștefan Bănică (1933-1995) was another enormously popular actor, singer, and entertainer who was widely assumed to be of Roma ethnicity. He never confirmed it. A television skit from 1974, featuring Constantin and Bănică in a spoof of the Ali-Frazier boxing duel and including a number of racial allusions (Bănică describing Constantin as too sunburnt to be acceptable as a leading man, etc.), can be watched on YouTube (in Romanian): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjgouWlDB14.
15. Romas, depicted in artistic representations as—at best—picturesque and romantic figures, were also for a long time essentially left aside by mainstream historians: "In traditional approaches, the history of Romania could be written without reference to the Gypsies. (....) Even when writers of Romanian social history came to regard the masses as being in the vanguard of history, they paid but little attention to those on the margins of society, where the Gypsies were largely to be found. (...) Nonetheless, the Gypsies have been a permanent presence in Romanian history. From the second half of the fourteenth century onwards, this population (...) has been present in the social and ethnic landscape of the Romanian lands." Viorel Achim, *The Roma in Romanian History* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1998), 1.
16. See Christian Ferencz-Flatz, *Incursiuni fenomenologice în noul film românesc* (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2015), 126.
17. For Jude's continuous use of actors associated with the Romanian vaudeville and revue tradition, see Andrei Gorzo and Veronica Lazăr, "Radu Jude's Satirical Studies of Male Rage and Self-Pity," *Transilvania* no. 4 (2022): 1–5.
18. With *Aferim!* and *"I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians"* (2018), Jude acquired something of a reputation for broad anticlerical satire in Romania. This makes him unusual among mainstream artists in post-communist Romania, where the Orthodox Church has great influence and the overwhelming majority of the population identifies as believers. (In addition, in 2018 Jude was perhaps the only established Romanian filmmaker who publicly spoke and marched against the initiative of the Coalition for the Family to make homosexual

marriages unconstitutional. Although the Romanian Orthodox Church is not usually known for its ecumenism, in that case it had sided with neoprotestant movements backed and financed by neoconservative lobby groups to support the Coalition for the Family; and this is not to mention the several far-right organizations which also joined the Church and the Coalition in that particular crusade.) In this context it may be especially worth pointing out, for its contrasting sympathy and delicacy, Jude's portrait of a priest in the 2013 short film *Shadow of a Cloud.* The film describes a day in the life of a priest (played by Alexandru Dabija—the boyar from *Aferim!*) who lives in contemporary Bucharest (as in *The Happiest Girl in the World* and *Everybody in Our Family*, events unfold in the course of a single, very hot summer day), and is called upon by a friend to attend to a very sick, obviously dying woman. *Shadow of a Cloud* is about the difficulty of acting with dignity as a priest (and dignity is important for its protagonist, who is a serious person) in a secularized, yet superstitious late-capitalist world—a world of supermarkets and undertaker services with names like "Stairway to Heaven"—in which a priest is just a provider of services. The theme recalls that of Robert Bresson's 1951 *Diary of a Country Priest*—a *Diary* recast for a twenty-first-century urban setting—and Jude makes the homage explicit: his protagonist even utters in passing the words "All is grace," which—while being unsual in the mouth of a Romanian Orthodox priest—are, of course, the last words of Bresson's hero.

19. For example, critic Anca Grădinariu saw *The Happiest Girl in the World* in those terms—see Anca Grădinariu, "Nefericirile celei mai fericite fete," *Adevărul,* May 20, 2009. Critic Tudor Caranfil was similarly unimpressed by *Everybody in Our Family*—see Tudor Caranfil, "Un film însăilat din prefabricate de Nou Val," *Cațavencii,* April 12, 2012, https://www.catavencii.ro/un-film-insailat-din-prefabricate-de-nou-val/, last accessed on May 28, 2022.
20. Romanian film theorist Christian Ferencz-Flatz believes that Jude's use of the past to comment on the present is a more effective political strategy than a direct anti-racist view of our present-day society could have possibly been. What Jude does to his intended audience is immerse it in a world where what we perceive today as horrifying racism and sexism was established social norm, a discourse indistinguishable from practice, where corporal punishment was seen as a lark, etc. According to Ferencz-Flatz, this intended audience is neither one of anti-racist militants nor one of rabid racists (of the kind that goes into a fit of rage on the Internet immediately upon hearing of the existence of a film like *Aferim!*): „it is rather an audience of crypto-racists who otherwise abide by the strictures of political correctness, disavowing their racist reflexes and condemning racism on principle; showing contemporary racism to such an audience means only showing it particular cases which the audience can promptly condemn while remaining untroubled and continuing to deny its own feelings of hostility, disgust, fear, or condescension towards the Roma. [...] The shock of the film comes from the clash between the latent racism of the viewer—a racism which is prudent, aware of social stigma—and the manifest, socially accepted, even buoyant racism animating the world shown in the film. The destabilized viewer is not given the opportunity to discharge his or her feelings of unease: he or she is not allowed the comfort of reflex moral indignation, nor that of laughing everything off (a tempting route of evasion). *Aferim!*'s effect of immediacy consists in the discomfort of this clash. And it is an effect achieved by the film not despite its being set in the past, but precisely because of that." Ferencz-Flatz, *Incursiuni,* 131–132.
21. An example: Mircea Morariu, "Despre *Aferim!* sau când alb-negrul capătă nuanțe," *Adevărul,* March 19, 2015, https://adevarul.ro/cultura/arte/despre-aferim-alb-negrul-capata-nuante-1_550a9976448e03c0fdb36b37/index.html, last accessed on May 28, 2022. The discussion about *Aferim!* had been initiated in Romania months before the film's Berlinale premiere, with an enthusiastic review-essay (published as a chapter in an edited volume) focusing on the film's political significance: Veronica Lazăr and Andrei Gorzo, "*Aferim!*—ceva nou în cinemaul românesc," in *Politicile filmului. Contribuții la interpretarea cinemaului românesc contemporan*, eds. Andrei Gorzo and Andrei State (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2014), 301–311.
22. For instance, Doru Pop, "Excesul de ideologie dăunează grav cinemaului," in *Adevărul,* March 15, 2015, https://adevarul.ro/news/societate/excesul-ideologie-dauneaza-grav-cinemaului-1_55054eec448e03c0fd920e60/index.html, last accessed on May 29, 2022. In this review of *Aferim!,* Pop unfavorably contrasts Jude's film with the already classicized NRC of Cristi Puiu and Cristian Mungiu: any politics in their films tended to be covert, whereas Jude's political agenda from *Aferim!* is in the open, where, according to the crude art-versus-message-art binarism deployed by Pop in his critique, it can only work to the detriment of artistic quality. Rather inconsistently, Pop would soon go on to write a principled defense of politically committed cinema—see Doru Pop, Ioan-Pavel Azap (eds.), *Amintiri din epoca ecranului de argint* (Bucharest: Uniunea Cineaștilor din România, 2018).
23. In April 2020, celebrated Romanian-American historian and public intellectual Vladimir Tismăneanu posted a meme on his Facebook profile, in which Roma were compared to crows—the Romanian word for "crows," *ciori,* being widely used (as *Aferim!* attests) to refer to Roma and African people; Tismăneanu's post described the joke as "very cool." In an article on the affair, written for *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, Alison Mutler quoted Margareta Matache, director of the Romany program at the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University: "Romania has not made a break with its anti-Romany past and the sins of the enslavement and the Holocaust. Many Romanians, from writers to policymakers, journalists, medical doctors, and teachers continue to embrace and practice, implicitly—and most often explicitly—anti-Romany racism." This statement of the situation is, of course, exact. Nevertheless, Tismăneanu's action was swiftly condemned, on Facebook and elsewhere, by many individuals and a number of institutions (including the University of Bucharest and the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania). Tismăneanu eventually issued a full apology, expressing the hope that others will learn from his example—from the strong reaction to his post—that such jokes are unfunny and hurtful to many. It is doubtful that, say, ten years ago, public outcry in Romania over such an action would have been so strong. Racism is still overwhelmingly widespread, but it seems that there's a little more opposition to it. See Alison Mutler, "Depiction of Roma as Crows Exposes Deeper Racism Within Romania," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty,* April 16, 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/depiction-of-roma-as-crows-

exposes-deeper-racism-within-romania/30558933.html, last accessed on May 18, 2021.

24. As Stephen Greenblatt perceptively observes, "imperialism is by no means the opposite of Christianity but neither is it simply identical with it. For like the legal formalism at which we have glanced, Christian faith could empower radically opposed positions: if in the name of Christianity, Queen Isabella could decree the use of force against the Indians 'whenever conversion to the holy Catholic Faith and allegiance to the Crown were not immediately forthcoming', so too in the name of Christianity, Bartolomé de Las Casas could bitterly condemn the entire Spanish enterprise." Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, University of Chicago Press, 1992, 70.

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