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Clandestine Translocation and the Representation of Bare Life

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1. Introduction

In this essay, I wish to exemplarily discuss the problematic of representing ‘illegal’ immigrants by investigating two very different attempts to capture their predicament in British film. Human ‘illegality’ is not a marginal phenomenon; in summer 2005, the British government estimated that around 430,000 people lived in Britain entirely off the records, while the number of registered asylum seekers was put at roughly another 750,000.¹ Building on these figures, the London School of Economics estimated in 2009 that Britain hosts around 750.000 ‘illegals’.² Despite the fact that Britain and other European powers have rigorously stepped up measures over the last two decades to deter clandestine migration while encouraging so-called ‘managed’ immigration of the non-Western elites, these figures indicate, people will continue to live ‘illegally’ in Britain and throughout the West. A great number of illegals do not enter Europe in the back of a lorry or on fishing boats as the media often suggest, but overstay regular visa or enter with forged documents. But clearly, also clandestine migration is very unlikely to decrease anytime soon under the current economic world system and its reverberations for societies and ecologies in the South. According to several estimates, already more than 100,000 people try to clandestinely enter the European Union every year via the Mediterranean Sea

¹ See Press Association, “430,000 illegal immigrants in UK,” *The Guardian*, web, 30 June 2005.

² The LSE suggests that an amnesty of illegal immigrants would lead to a benefit of up to three billion pounds for the British economy. See BBC, “UK immigrant amnesty ‘worth £3bn’,” *BBC News*, web, 16 June 2009.

alone, often in hazardous boat voyages which many do not survive.³ Obviously, ever new measures of force and fortification have done nothing to scare off those desperate enough to risk immanent deportation or, ultimately, death.⁴

Illegal immigration into Europe and Britain is hardly a new phenomenon, yet in post-war Europe, when immigrant labour was in demand and few refugees reached European shores, they still had a relatively secure standing.⁵ This changed rather dramatically with the establishment of a new world order after 1989 (and particularly with the ensuing Balkan crisis) which, together with the effects of (neoliberal) globalisation, lead to a sharp increase in clandestine migration and asylum claims. The legitimacy of political asylum has been systematically discredited in most Western European countries ever since, and the chances of obtaining asylum began to be effectively minimalised. In this increasingly hostile context, the year 2001 marked another significant caesura in British discourses on illegality. In the run-up to the general election in June, the issue of immigration and asylum for the first time became a central weapon in the campaigning of all political parties, but most notably of Labour who denounced it as one of Britain's main economic problems. Such populism followed one of the most widely publicised tragedies of illegal people smuggling, when in summer 2000 58 Chinese immigrants were found suffocated in a sealed container in the port of Dover. But of course, it was especially the events of September 11 which added a new dimension to the perception of illegals. Detailing "the impact of anti-terrorism measures on refugees and asylum seekers in Britain" in 2007, the Refugee Council UK not only confirmed the construction of an immediate link between asylum and terrorism in political debates and media reports in the wake of 9/11, but also testified to the rather draconian effects of the ensuing anti-terrorism legislation on refugees – such as extended stop and search rights, detention rights and ludicrously accelerated asylum procedures.⁶

It is probably no coincidence, therefore, that the illegal migrant took hold as a veritable figure in British literature and film basically between 2001 and 2002. It is

³ James Kirkup, "EU plans flights to deport illegal immigrants," *The Telegraph*, web, 29 October 2009.

⁴ A 2009 *Telegraph* report claims that the number of illegal migrants detected in lorries on British soil more than doubled in the last two years. See David Barrett, "Rise in illegal immigrants entering Britain," *The Telegraph*, web, 7 February 2009.

⁵ Didier Fassin, "Compassion and Repression: The Moral Economy of Immigration Policies in France," *The Anthropology of Globalization*, eds. Jonathan Xavier Ina & Renato Rosaldo (Basingstoke: Blackwell, 2008): 212-233.

⁶ Anja Rudiger, *The Impact of Anti-Terrorism Measures on Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Britain*, Refugee council research report, web, February 2007.

remarkable, at least, that it is precisely this period which saw the publication of widely reviewed novels about illegals by Abdulrazak Gurnah (*By the Sea*, 2001), Benjamin Zephaniah (*Refugee Boy*, 2001) and, slightly later, Caryl Phillips (*A Distant Shore*, 2003), and of films by directors as notable as Stephen Frears (*Dirty Pretty Things*, 2002) and Michael Winterbottom (*In This World*, 2002). Apart from the latter example, all these texts and films present fully fictional versions of illegality which have served to counter and complicate the medial demonisation of clandestine existence in post-9/11 Britain. What I am interested in in this essay, however, is less predominantly fictional presentations, but representations which purport to more or less *factually document* the lives of those who live among us “visible but unseen,” as Salman Rushdie famously put in *The Satanic Verses*. My assumption is that the task of documenting the ‘unseen’ presence of illegals presents a particular challenge from two intersecting angles: one *political* and mostly familiar from the field of postcolonial studies, the other *conceptual* and rather familiar from the field of media studies, as I will outline in the following. I will then proceed to discuss two filmic representations in order to illustrate some of the chances and discontents of recent documentary approaches to illegal existence.

2. Documentary Representation and its Discontents

Let me begin then by cursorily outlining some of the fundamental difficulties involved in the task of representing, or documenting, the existence of those who, on paper, do not exist. It is useful in this context to briefly draw on Giorgio Agamben’s work in *Homo Sacer* (1998) and, more recently, *State of Exception* (2005), which in retrospect uncannily prophesied for instance Silvio Berlusconi’s declaration of a nation-wide state of emergency over the arrival of more than 10,000 boat people on Italian shores in the first half of 2008. Agamben’s political philosophy is built around a distinction between what he calls “bare life,” i.e. pure biological existence (*zoé*), and “qualified life,” i.e. socially and politically involved and sanctioned existence (*bios*), which he traces from Aristotle’s *Politics* to notorious biopolitical practices in the 20th century. Crucially, Agamben sees “bare” and “qualified” life as interlinked in a genealogical dialectics, whereby sovereign power constantly needs to define itself against “bare life,” and thus relies on the possibility to expose subjects to it as an act of self-definition. “The production of a biopolitical body,” Agamben famously argues with reference to Foucault, “is the original activity of sovereign

power.”⁷ Without being able to do justice to the complexity of Agamben’s argument, it should suffice to note that the qualification of “bare life” (and its politicisation in modern discourses) largely applies to the figure of the ‘illegal’ migrant. Once illegals have managed to slip into Europe and destroyed their documents of identification, as most illegal migrants do in order to delay deportation upon detection, they are indeed reduced to “bare life.” They are persons living among us from whom by definition civil liberties are withheld, and who have no agency to inscribe themselves in the discourse formations of the social and political.

This, of course, has profound consequences for any project trying to document the lives of illegals. Without access to discursive power and in constant danger of discovery and deportation, illegal subalterns ‘cannot speak’ or represent themselves, but will necessarily be represented by others. This, as I will try to show in relation to documentary film in particular, puts a huge amount of responsibility on those who mediate the experiences of ‘bare life’ to predominantly Western audiences, and calls for creative strategies which acknowledge the viable role of the mediator. The problem of representation, here, applies in the sense of ‘stepping in for’ or ‘speaking for’ (as in the German *Vertretung*), in a situation where the documented subject is almost entirely at the mercy of the filmmaker and his or her crew. As I will argue in the following, filmmakers increasingly deal with this problem by reflexively questioning the mimetic principle of documentarism itself, i.e. by exposing the fictional elements and their own mediating position in the documentary process.

In this way, of course, they simultaneously respond to an intricately related and much larger problematic which has haunted cultural and media studies more generally, namely the problem of representation as ‘mediatising’ or ‘staging’ (very much in the sense of the German *Abbildung*). The familiar argument, here, is that the pretension of the documentary mode, namely to represent the thing *as it is* without medial distortions, is a fallacy in the first place. There is no such thing as the innocent gaze, and what is more, in the thoroughly mediatised world of the 21st century, our perception of the ‘real’ is by definition always prefigured by previous medial discourses. The precarious ‘reality’ of illegals is thus not exclusively challenged by their biopolitical exclusion in Agamben’s sense, but further complicated by the fundamental problem of deferral by mediatisation.

⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP): 1998, 6.

Let me briefly turn to Slavoj Žižek and his famous post-9/11 piece “Welcome to the Desert of the Real” to elaborate on this dilemma.⁸ Žižek proceeds from Alain Badiou’s (debatable) observation that the 20th century is characterised by a “passion for the real.”⁹ This passion is “strictly correlative to the virtualization of our environs,” as Žižek puts it, and has resulted in compensatory excesses of physical destruction, read by Badiou and Žižek as acts in pursuit of the ‘bare’ Real which is increasingly lost in an everyday world of simulations. Žižek famously goes as far as to proclaim that “one can effectively perceive the collapse of the WTC towers as the climactic conclusion of the 20th century art’s ‘passion for the real’.”¹⁰ Personally, I find this type of psycho- rather than sociological argumentation slightly simplistic, not least in its glossing over concrete political and material processes. What I do find useful in Žižek’s analysis, though, is the reflection upon how material and political processes are overwritten by mediatised images in such a way that our perception of them is inevitably refracted. Žižek’s core argument in this context is precisely not that 9/11 shattered the West’s fantasies about itself, but rather its fantasies about the rest of the world. He writes:

it is prior to the WTC collapse that we lived in our reality, perceiving the Third World horrors as something which is not part of our social reality, as something that exists (for us) as a spectral apparition on the (TV) screen – and what happened on September 11 is that this *screen fantasmatic apparition entered our reality*.¹¹

In the age of post-9/11 anxiety, this implies more generally, there has been a tendency in Western medial discourse to acknowledge the clandestine global flows of human beings as a precarious reality whose “visible but unseen” presence in the West is of consequential – and at times only too real – effect. Žižek’s “desire for the real,” I would therefore argue, is also a desire to eventually get to ‘really know’ those spectres, those *homine sacri* haunting the affluent West.

Not only, then, do documentary projects which give in to this desire and attempt to document illegals bear the ethical weight of having to speak for a voiceless Other, they are

⁸ Cf. Slavoj Žižek, “Welcome to the Desert of the Real,” *The Symptom 2* (spring 2002), web. For Žižek’s ambivalent reading of Agamben, see his “From *Homo sucker* to *Homo sacer*,” in Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002): 83--110.

⁹ Alan Badiou, *The Century*, tr. Alberto Toscano (New York: Polity, 2007): 115. I find the postulation that the excessive violence of the 21st century directly correlates with a progressive virtualisation of the environs and is thus a compensatory phenomenon slightly dubious, not least as it seems ignore the colonial difference (Mignolo) and the excessive, often genocidal historical violence outside of Europe.

¹⁰ Žižek, “Welcome to the Desert of the Real.”

¹¹ Žižek, “Welcome to the Desert of the Real.”

simultaneously confronted with the refracting quality and distancing thrust of medial representation itself, in an overall medial context that is already fraught with the distortions of sensationalism and paranoia. My central thesis is again that the documentary genre can only confront this situation by admitting to, and indeed manifestly capitalising on, its own medial constructedness in various ways. I will in the following investigate two examples of “new documentary” approaches to filming illegals and try to showcase their potentials and limitations.¹² The first is Sorious Samura’s TV feature *Living with Illegals*, shot and first screened in 2006.

3. Sorious Samura, *Living With Illegals* (2006)

Sorious Samura came to Britain himself as a refugee from Sierra Leone in the late 90s, and has lived and worked in London for the last ten years, now holding a British passport. He made his breakthrough as one of the most celebrated documentary film makers of our time with his coverage of the brutal climax of the Sierra Leonean civil war in January 1999, staying behind as the last remaining journalist in Freetown filming the unspeakable atrocities committed by RUF rebels whilst capturing the capital city. The CNN-produced *Cry Freetown* won him, among other things, an Emmy and Peabody award in 2001, yet perhaps more importantly, it is said to have led to the establishment of a UN peace keeping mission in Sierra Leone. Samura has been an established presence on CNN international and Channel 4 ever since as a senior spokesperson for the plight of Africa and the Third World. The feature which I wish to discuss in the following is part of his documentary series “Living with.” As the press release claims, this series establishes

a new kind of journalism which not many others can do. It’s ‘real’ reality TV – stories that offer a unique perspective into the lives of people facing terrible situations.¹³

The underlying concept is that Samura, for one month, lives the lives of the people he documents; thus he assumes the identity of a refugee in Darfur in *Living with Refugees*, that of a starving Ethiopian villager in *Living with Hunger*, or of an orderly in a *Zambian*

¹² Eckart Voigts-Virchow & Christiane Schlote, eds, *Constructing Media Reality: The New Documentarism*, special issue of *ZAA* 56.2 (2008).

¹³ “Living with Refugees,” *Insight News TV*, web, 2009.

hospital in *Living with AIDS*. In *Living with Illegals*, he accordingly lives the life of an illegal immigrant for one month.

The DVD blurb text gives a rough idea of the content of Samura's feature, yet it already also highlights a peculiar conceptual blurring of the boundaries between fictional staging and 'real' experience on the level of story:

In "Living with Illegals" award winning journalist Sorious Samura *becomes* an illegal immigrant trying to break into 'Fortress Europe'. He undertakes an epic journey, travelling with other immigrants from Africa through to Spain and France and finally crosses the Channel to Britain. He lives *in exactly the same conditions* as they do and smuggles himself illegally across borders. [...] Once Samura reaches 'dreamland Europe', he is surprised to find living conditions and scenes of desperation as bad as those in Morocco. He learns the 'tricks of trade' required to survive, he begs, he sleeps rough, sells cheap goods on the streets and has to deal with unscrupulous smugglers to reach his destination.¹⁴

On the level of filmic discourse, the blending of fictional and documentary strategies is even more pronounced. Much of the material is shot with handheld digital camera, or alternatively, undercover filming gear installed by Samura himself, clearly aiming at an aesthetics of the clandestine and authentic. Other sequences, however, unmistakably imply the presence of a camera team filming Samura on his journey, ultimately providing the external perspective that is indispensable in the 'Living with'-concept, which after all requires to portray documentary filmmaker Samura as the protagonist of his own feature. Authenticity-claims are thus constantly paired with acknowledgments of the constructedness of the story. Even if one never sees a camera of a film crew, Samura repeatedly mentions them in his voice over narrative (e.g. in lines like "now my crew more or less waved good bye, they gave me 10 Euros and I am hoping to beg around and see how much I can raise").

The result of this is a stunning double movement. On the one hand, *Living with Illegals* stubbornly stakes its claims to the real: Samura "becomes and illegal immigrant," experiencing "exactly the same conditions" and is thus able to truthfully document what 'bare life' is like. On the other hand, the set-up is also evidently fictional, with celebrity auteur Sorious Samura, once a refugee but now a British national leading, in Agamben's terms, a fully 'qualified life', in the undisputed lead role. An exemplary scene which illustrates this strange oscillation between fact and fiction is this: Picture Samura in a French train to Calais without a ticket, locking himself in the toilet. Speaking to the

¹⁴ Sorious Samura, dir., *Living with Refugees*, DVD, Insight News TV, 2006, blurb, my emphases.

microphone of a secretly installed camera, hear Samura's voice on diegetic sound -- the experiencing I, if you like -- whispering: "Someone has tried to open the door. I do not know who the hell it is. Everytime the door goes, this scares me. It is like your heartbeat misses a beat." Once Samura is found by the ticket inspector, listen to his voice-over comment, or narrating I, matter-of-factly explaining: "I just got caught without a ticket a third of the ways to Calais. The crew had to buy my ticket for the rest of the journey. But it is feasible an illegal immigrant would have to jump many trains to get here." Like so many others, this scene shows that, first, much of the 'reality' documented in *Living with Illegals* is a carefully staged one, second, that Samura readily acknowledges this in the filmic discourse, and third, that the film nevertheless steadfastly insists that this staged reality is as authentic as it gets.

What, then, is the rationale behind this slightly twisted logic? If we believe, as I do, that Samura has a genuine agenda and is ultimately interested less in his own medial presence than in the concerns of actual illegal immigrants, it must be this: Following Žižek's observation that Western audiences are prone to simply shrug off the fates of the third world poor as "a spectral apparition on the (TV) screen," Samura seems to believe that by representing his own self-conscious simulation of the real thing, as a celebrity mediator between first and third world, he will provoke a more empathetic response than by merely representing the thing itself. This logic is in many ways nothing less than an inversion of Baudrillard: for Samura, the simulation of a simulation does apparently not lead to infinite deferral, but ultimately provides the necessary bridge to the original model.

4. Michael Winterbottom, *In this World* (2002)

Unlike Samura's *Living with Illegals*, Michael Winterbottom's highly acclaimed feature film *In this World*, winner of the Golden Bear at the Berlinale in 2003, is not officially labelled a documentary, but falls within the genre of cinematic fiction. It tells the story of two Afghan cousins, Jamal and Enyatullah, who embark on an epic overland journey from Pashawar at the Afghan-Pakistani border to Europe. The basic plot is that Enyatullah is sent to London at considerable cost to help provide for his extended family in Peshawar. As he speaks no English, his orphaned younger cousin Jamal, who lives in the refugee camp of Shamshatoo, accompanies him as an interpreter. Their odyssey leads them through Pakistan and Iran to Turkey, from where they are shipped in a sealed container to

Italy. Only Jamal survives this leg of the journey in a filmic sequence which must count among the most harrowing ever shot. He then continues on to Sangatte in the north of France, and finally crosses the English channel in the chassis of a truck. The story closes with Jamal calling Enyatullah's uncle from a London café where he found work as a dish washer, telling him that his nephew did not make it but is "no longer in this world."

In this World is in this sense much more self-consciously fictional than Samura's documentary allows itself to be, as all the cast in the film are acting, whereas in *Living with Illegals*, only Samura really does, and probably would not even quite call it that himself. Nevertheless, Winterbottom's film stakes its claims to the real almost as rigorously, and in a not entirely dissimilar fashion. Concomitant strategies of authentication can be traced both on the level of story and on the level of discourse. On the story level, Winterbottom and his screen writer Tony Grisoni adamantly tried to 'keep it real'; the opening sentence of the 'making of'-feature of the DVD accordingly states: "I think it is worth saying that we did not make anything up for the film."¹⁵ Based on the information gathered from Afghan refugees living in Britain, Grisoni and Winterbottom embarked upon a research trip from Peshawar to Istanbul in October 2001, travelling, not unlike Samura, as refugees would, on lorries and pick-ups with the help of fixers and smugglers, meeting most of the people who would later play themselves in the film. Two months later, they returned to Pakistan with a minimal film crew, cast their lead actors Jamal and Enyatullah among the thousands of Afghan refugees in Shamshatoo camp and the town of Peshawar, and retraced their earlier trip with them, shooting the film with the actual fixers, police officials, café owners etc. they had met before. Winterbottom comments on the resulting layering of fiction and reality:

The first person we met was Imran, a travel agent from Peshawar, and he became our fixer for the research trip and then again the fixer when we were filming. And he also acted the fixer in the film. I guess that is the relationship between fiction and reality we tended to forge: It is not a documentary; it is a fiction; people are acting; but generally, we found people who play themselves in the film.¹⁶

On the level of discourse, the film's anchoring in reality is strategically supported by a number of further techniques. This concerns, again, the use of digital video to create an aesthetics of the raw and authentic. The most ingenious twist, however, is the creation of

¹⁵ Tony Grisoni in "the making of" Michael Winterbottom, dir., *In this World*, DVD, The Film Consortium, 2002.

¹⁶ Michael Winterbottom in "the making of" Winterbottom, dir., *In this World*.

opening and closing sequences which self-consciously establish a documentary frame of reference. Thus, *In this World* opens with coverage of the Shamshatoo refugee camp, using voice-over narration which crops up again some 12 minutes into the film, and then disappears. The factual tone and text clearly nod to the documentary genre:

53,000 Afghan refugees live in Shamshatoo camp in the city of Peshawar in Pakistan. The first arrived in 1979 fleeing the Soviet invasion of their country. The most recent came to escape the US-led bombing campaign which began on October 7, 2001. Many of these children were born here, like Jamal ...¹⁷

This type of narrative is set to frames which crucially show children who directly interact with the camera, something that is absolutely taboo in traditional cinematography which insists on the invisibility of the filming process. One way of reading this type framing device is to follow Winterbottom himself, who remarks that

it is easy to forget that Afghan refugees are just as interested in us as we are in them. [...] And so the idea of us being present and making a film was something we tried to include in the film itself.¹⁸

Given the fact, however, that after the opening sequence, the camera becomes ‘invisible’ again until the very final shots which take us back to Shamshatoo, the full effect is slightly trickier. What the sequence additionally does is clearly conditioning the viewer into surreptitiously also perceiving Jamal and Enyatullah’s subsequent odyssey in the documentary mode initially established, even if the film does little to hide that this journey is in fact a fictional simulation.

This strategic blurring of faction and fiction, again, should not be read as a playful device of defamiliarisation or deferral; like Samura, Winterbottom makes use of his strategies to paradoxically both admit to the vanities of documentary realism, *and* to insist on the representationality of his film. The fact that he triumphantly succeeded in the eyes of his critics and the wider public, however, ironically has to do with a final twist that did not lie in the filmmaker’s own hands. In a strange case of life imitating art, Winterbottom’s fictional protagonist Jamal decided to use the earnings he made with the film to retrace his trip to London shortly after the shooting ended and he was returned to Pakistan. Back in Britain, he immediately appealed for asylum (which he was denied by the British government, yet given permission to stay until his 18th birthday). Much more

¹⁷ Michael Winterbottom, dir., *In this World*.

¹⁸ Michael Winterbottom in “the making of” Winterbottom, dir., *In this World*.

convincingly than Samura who claims to have ‘become’ an illegal migrant, Jamal thus literally ‘became’ in many ways the illegal he acted in the film.¹⁹

5. Conclusion: The Politics of Respresenting Bare Life

What is my verdict, then, about the two approaches to filming illegals by Winterbottom and Samura? In order to come to some sort of conclusion, let me return to my earlier remarks about the twofold problematics of representation. My point was, first, that there is a prevailing desire to know the Other living in our midst in the age of post 9/11 anxiety, but that catering to what Žižek calls the “desire for the real” is inevitably complicated by the fact that any medial representation is just a simulation, a screen apparition, that may lead us away from the real thing, rather than closer to it. Both Samura and Winterbottom have clearly reacted to this challenge by disrupting the naïve identification of the filmic image with reality, and by employing, in Brechtian terms, alienation techniques which in different ways admit to the constructedness and fictional elements of the documentary process. In Samura’s case, this mainly concerns the semi-fictional doubling-up of the filmmaker himself as an illegal migrant to bridge the chasm between Western audiences and the screen apparition of ‘real’ illegals. In Winterbottom’s case, we have an even more self-conscious and elaborate layering of fiction and faction on the story-level, and a highly intricate blending of documentary and fictional modes on the level of discourse. In both cases the ‘desire for the real’ on the part of the audience is thus not easily gratified, but instead in a first instance disrupted, complicated and returned to the viewer. Both filmmakers seem to assume that this type of bouncing back the ‘desire for the real’ encourages and helps Western audiences to see through the medial construction to the realities of ‘bare life’. Ultimately, though, I believe that Winterbottom is much more successful in this vein.

This finally has to do with the second aspect of representation concerning the political dimension of documenting those who, as non-persons, have little or no authorial

¹⁹ That fact that this twist was turned into one of the film’s main marketing coups, ultimately vouching for its ‘realness’, should give us pause. But there is also something genuinely affecting about the reciprocity between reality and fiction, here. As Winterbottom recounts, when Jamal joined him and his crew to their great surprise in the postproduction process, it was almost uncanny to watch Jamal watching himself playing himself leaving his little brother behind at Shamshatoo camp whom he had in the meantime left for good in real life.

agency themselves. The major difference between Samura and Winterbottom, here, is that Winterbottom facilitated a film that admits to the presence of a Western film crew, but still primarily attempts to let the illegal migrants speak for themselves. Even if these migrants merely *act* their own lives as *potential* immigrants into Europe, the underlying impression, at least for me, is still that the film is mainly in their own voice. In contrast, Samura's choice of doing the acting himself runs the danger of drowning, rather than amplifying, the voices of the 'real' illegals he films. In other words and perhaps slightly over the top: Whether through him his audiences see through to the realities of illegal immigration, as Samura hopes, or whether reception habits work more along the line of reality TV-shows such as *I'm a Celebrity – Get Me Out of Here*, based on the comic sensation of first world celebrities volunteering to 'go native', is a difficult question to answer.

But these may be academic qualms. Surely, there are few others who, like Samura, reach as many viewers (including policy makers) via his wide exposure on Channel 4 and particularly CNN International whose journalistic conventions in many ways structurally prefigure his films. While I hold Winterbottom's take to be the aesthetically and conceptually more successful attempt of representing bare life, it is difficult to say which film has done more to eventually help those who are represented. Given the current political climate throughout a Europe still shaken by ongoing economic 'crises', there is little evidence that either (self-reflexive) art or political journalism have had much impact on the continuing biopolitical production of bare life in our midst. Still, should such an impact be at all possible, it seems that it is precisely through a creative marriage of the two that it may be brought about.

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