

Remaking identities and stereotypes: How film remakes transform and reinforce nationality, disability, and gender

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Abstract

When films are being remade, they undergo several transformations, including changes related to (the representation of) national, disability, and gender identities. By drawing on the case of the Flemish film *Hasta La Vista* and its Dutch remake *Adios Amigos*, this article critically investigates the (dis)similarities on these levels through the prism of the film remake. Both films are popular road trip movies dealing with the adventure of three friends with disabilities who overcome boundaries in multiple ways not only by figuratively (and almost literally) escaping their parents and their disabilities but also through traveling, exploring sexuality, and eventually by dying. Although the films deal with almost exactly the same themes, their interpretation and contextualization differ considerably. Our findings show that as a consequence of the localizing processes embedded in film remakes, subtexts which were 'originally' ingrained in the source text were ignored or even withheld in the newer version. As the involved filmmakers built on particular stereotypical visions and myths about these specific cultures and national identities, often with the purpose of recreating a socio-cultural context, such narrowed perceptions were occasionally subverted but also reconsolidated. Finally, we argue that, through the remake process, some ableist and patronizing representations of, respectively, disability and gender identities were subverted, while others were kept or even reinforced. Our results show that such transformations point toward specific socio-culturally defined disability and gender identities but also toward a shared and almost universally shaped disability and gender culture.

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Introduction

In 2006, Asta Philpot, a 24-year-old American living in Leeds (United Kingdom) made a trip to Spain, totally unaware of the impact this journey would have on his future life and, perhaps more importantly, on the lives of many others. Philpot was born with arthrogryposis, a disease which causes muscle shortening, resulting in impairment of physical abilities. This disease, as he explains, has a considerable effect on his sex life, since it is very difficult to find a partner to be intimate with. To cope with this, he decided to travel to a brothel on the Costa Brava with the goal of losing his virginity. This trip eventually ended up being a life-changing experience, not only because it involved his first sexual experience with another person, but also because Philpot became a famous international advocate for the human right to have a sexual life. In the aftermath of his journey, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) approached Philpot to collaborate on a documentary, *For One Night Only* (BBC One, 2007), (re)telling (and in a sense re-enacting) his story of traveling to Spain, together with two other people with disabilities, all sharing the same goal of having their first sexual experience. The documentary quickly gained international acclaim. After having seen the documentary, Flemish¹ film producer Mariano Vanhoof decided to adapt the story into a road movie.

The resulting film, directed by Geoffrey Enthoven and entitled *Hasta La Vista* (English title *Come as You Are*) was released in 2011. The film follows three young men with a disability who travel to Spain with the goal of losing their virginity. *Hasta La Vista* won several prizes at international film festivals and was, overall, critically acclaimed. This led to theatrical releases in Russia, Brazil, Ireland, and Hong Kong, hinting at the story's international appeal. Yet, a few years later, Dutch director Albert Jan van Rees remade the film into the Dutch *Adios Amigos* (2016). One might question the need for a remake, given the apparent international appeal of the source text. Moreover, the Dutch remake is particularly remarkable since it is a 'monolingual remake'; both films adopt the same language, Dutch. This seemingly paradoxical situation illustrates the film remake's intrinsic tension between universality and locality, or sameness and difference.

This article aims to unravel cross-cultural adaptations and interrogate the various dynamics and aspects involved in the making of different film versions² that vary in terms of culture, dialect, and esthetics. Livingstone (2003) asserts that such 'comparative research is challenging because one must balance and interpret similarities and differences while avoiding banalities and stereotypes' (p. 491). The nature of the remake helps a lot in this process of comparison. It is, nonetheless, of paramount importance to embed our findings in a specific socio-cultural context, not least to avoid the pitfall of reaffirming stereotypes. Furthermore, we draw on the idea that film remakes can offer an exclusive insight into films both as cultural artifacts, nourished with a myriad of meanings and preceding intertexts, and the cultures in which these films were produced (e.g. Forrest and Koos, 2012; Mazdon, 2000; Verevis, 2005). Here, we have a particular interest in

identity issues (particularly related to gender and disability), which are at play in both versions, and the way these are interconnected with the spatial and, thus, socio-cultural and national contexts in which they came about.

We will mainly focus on the representation of nation, gender, and disability identities in both films, and how these relate to cultural stereotypes. By applying the concept of nation to popular films, we also answer the pertinent calls for the study of nationalism within popular cinema (Dyer and Vincendeau, 1992; Hayward, 2005). The power of nationalism lies in its seemingly natural or essential nature, giving the false impression that national identity is intrinsically connected to the human being. This essentialist notion of national identity is strikingly similar to the fixed assertions of both gender identities and (disabled) bodies. In line with the postmodern notion of gender identity (see Butler, 2007: 191) and the social model of disability (Mogk, 2013)³ – which articulate both identities as hybrid, non-essential, and socially constructed – the film remake, being an intrinsically hybrid text, could be considered as an antidote to fixed notions of nationality, gender, and disability. Indeed, the narrative and formal explorations and modifications that are inherent in the film remake reflect the instability, performativity, and non-essential nature of all sorts of identities (Mazdon, 2000). Hence, the notion of identity (construction) is not only central to the narratives of both *Hasta La Vista* and *Adios Amigos* but also to the transformations the remake underwent through cultural adaptation. In this article, we adopt the film remake as a prism through which to analyze, and consequently elucidate, notions of national identity, gender, and disability by focusing on the differences and similarities in *Hasta La Vista* and *Adios Amigos*. More particularly, through comparative film analysis, we will explore how filmmakers from different regions represent a more or less identical narrative through the use of specific cultural stereotypes. Before focusing on the comparative textual aspect, it is important to discuss the broader social, cultural, and political context in which these films emerged.

Monolingual remakes in the Low Countries

The official language in both the Netherlands and Flanders is Dutch, with minor regional differences in dialect and vocabulary. As such, most Dutch and Flemish people perfectly understand each other and ‘do not need to switch to another language variety to be understood’ (Impe et al., 2008: 102). In addition, the neighboring regions partly share a cultural and political history (De Cuypere et al., 1995: 183). The linguistic and cultural proximity, in combination with the fact that both film industries are known for their small scale (as well as for their limited domestic market – together, the Netherlands and Flanders have 23 million inhabitants), resulted in, among other things, a structural collaboration between the Dutch and Flemish film funds. Albeit limited in scale, the Dutch–Flemish film policy collaboration that came into being at the end of the 1960s can actually be considered as one of the most durable culturally motivated co-production partnerships in Europe (Willems, 2016: 5). Even so, Dutch films find it hard to find an audience in Flanders, and vice versa, which explains why the Flemish critical and popular success *Hasta La Vista* was remade instead of being released in the Netherlands.

In this context, Verheul (2016) argues that ‘if popular Flemish films fail to find an audience in the Netherlands, and vice versa, it is predominantly due to the language barrier and the negligible transnational appeal of Flemish and Dutch film stars’ (p. 329). The author claims that the accents (or dialects) in Flanders and the Netherlands differ so much that they are seen as ‘incommensurable’ (Verheul, 2016: 329). As there have been some films in the 1970s and 1980s that did well in both regions, it is improbable that not understanding each other, or indeed, the existence of a linguistic barrier, is the sole (or primary) source of this alienation. We argue that it is instead a combination of many different factors (i.e. commercial, media-related, and perceived identity issues) that is at the heart of this cultural indifference, of which the linguistic barrier forms only one aspect. We partially agree with Deprez (2012: 412), who relates the disinterest between both regions with differences in identity and mentality, which are (historically) shaped by differences in religious background: a largely Calvinist (or Protestant) Netherlands and a Catholic Flanders (see also De Cuypere et al., 1995: 183). This contrast ‘between a Catholic South and Protestant North is probably the best-known and most deeply rooted distinction between the two halves of the Low Countries’ (Frijhoff, 2011: 47).

Historically, the Netherlands never had one dominant group and was, therefore, characterized by a ‘pillarized’ society comprising of Catholic, Protestant, liberal, and socialist pillars. As a result, the Netherlands is known for its ‘politically quiescent society, with a live-and-let-live mentality’ (Kennedy and Zwemer, 2010: 261), which resulted in a high degree of tolerance toward a diversity of groups and subcultures, ‘ranging from tiny religious groups to homosexuals’ (Verstraten, 2018: 127) and people with disabilities. All of this stimulated the famous ‘myth of Dutch tolerance’ (Verstraten, 2018: 127), that is, the Dutch ‘air of satisfaction [...] of living in the finest, freest, most progressive, most decent, most perfectly evolved playground of multicultural utopianism’ (Buruma, 2006: 11). Belgium (and thus Flanders) has known a similar pillarization process, but around the 1960s followed a distinctly different path: while the Netherlands broke down the religious and sociopolitical barriers, Belgium was characterized by its intact Catholic organizational network. The latter resulted in a more bipolar structure (Catholics on the one hand, socialists and liberals on the other) in Belgium, which contrasts with the multipolar and pluralist arrangement in the Netherlands (Hellemans, 1988: 49–50). Deprez (2012: 412) adds that the history of the Flemish struggle for cultural autonomy caused Flemish people to experience difficulty identifying with the Dutch language variant spoken in the Netherlands. Furthermore, Willems (2014) argues that in the context of Flemish identity construction, the Netherlands (or the Dutch) have always been an important ‘other’ (p. 51) to distance oneself from and thus create one’s own (Flemish) identity: being Flemish is not being Dutch.

Apart from commercial explanations, such as the lack of good distribution networks and promotional opportunities, the indifference toward films from across the Dutch-Flemish border can also be explained through a broader cultural shift. Indeed, as another consequence of this perceived and constructed difference in identities, the Netherlands and Flanders simply stopped sharing the same cultural space, including the mediascape.⁴ This contention also qualifies Verheul’s claim that Dutch film stars are not appealing to Flemish audiences, and vice versa, simply because the respective audiences have probably never heard of them. Since the 1990s, the relationship between both regions has been

characterized by a drastic decline in interregional contact and cultural exchange, as well as by an extensive decrease in accepting and recognizing each other. This is reflected in sharing fewer and fewer cultural products: not only cinema but also literature, radio, newspapers, and television (Cajot, 2012: 53). In addition, the undeniable indifference toward each other's films is also in line with the broader context of European cinema. European films experience many difficulties in crossing national borders (Higson, 2015: 138), regardless of a film's popular domestic success. Remaking European films is, therefore, an answer to this deadlock, as is shown by our example of *Hasta La Vista* and *Adios Amigos*. Both films are in fact part of a larger phenomenon that we call the Dutch-Flemish remake practice (Cuelenaere et al., 2016: 1). Since the turn of the 21st century, film production in the Low Countries has witnessed popular Dutch films being remade in Flanders and vice versa. From 2000 to 2018, 11 Dutch-Flemish remakes were released – a high number, considering the small size of the Dutch and Flemish film industries.

It appears that it is not only a linguistic barrier that stands between both regions but also a constructed difference in identity that impedes cross-cultural contact. We argue that it is precisely the experience of this identity barrier that results in, among other things, a different judgment of each other's accents and dialects, and by extension each other's films. In the following analysis of *Hasta La Vista* and *Adios Amigos*, we will focus on perceptions of differences in national identity, show how these relate to other identities of gender and disability, and elucidate how such identities are defined by the reaffirmation and creation of specific stereotypes and myths.

Films 'about' (crossing) nations while crossing cultures

Hasta La Vista and *Adios Amigos* as wheelchair road movies

Our case studies are films of the road movie genre, or, more specifically, of the 'wheelchair road movie' genre. They both deal with three friends with disabilities who overcome boundaries in multiple ways, not only by figuratively and almost literally escaping their parents and their disabilities but also by means of traveling, sexual exploration, use of humor, and eventually by dying. This is an often-used trope that typifies the genre. As such, the crossing of national and linguistic borders represents a kind of escapism or liberation from the banal everydayness of their lives, while also symbolizing the wish for an 'ordinary life', free from any kind of disability.

Both *Hasta La Vista* and *Adios Amigos* set forth a combination of disabled bodies and the desire of loss of virginity of the three main male protagonists, Philip, Lars, and Jozef/Joost, as the premise of the narrative. The fact that they are male and young (roughly in their twenties) is not striking since disabled characters in coming-of-age narratives are rarely female (Waltz, 2016: 105). All three still live with their families; paraplegic and electric wheelchair user Philip is a coarse young man who is the only child of his parents. Lars, the most handsome of the three, is terminally ill because of a cancerous tumor in his head and is, therefore, not only dependent on his parents and little sister but also on his wheelchair. Jozef/Joost is almost fully blind, still lives with his loving mother, and walks with a cane. Although they live outside the 'classic' institutions of monasteries,

hospitals, and other caring facilities, their everyday life takes place within an imposed organization where ‘their social function as “son,” combined with their respective disabilities, does not enable them to rebel against their parents’ (Grebe, 2016: 176). The film centers on the three men experiencing great difficulties in finding (physical) contact with women, due to their disabilities. Indeed, disability is presented here as ‘necessarily creating a barrier to sexuality and romance’ (Waltz, 2016: 97). In *Hasta La Vista*, the protagonists feel that the solution is to make a trip to Spain to go to a brothel staffed by women who specialize in assisting people with disabilities to have sex. In *Adios Amigos*, on the other hand, they want to find ‘drunken chicks’ in a club who are ‘very willing’ to have sex and are convinced that they will find this in Salou, Spain. In conclusion, both films tell a rather progressive story about the sexual experience of men with disabilities, while simultaneously recounting a very traditional and even patronizing story of men who want to ‘conquer’ women.

Eager to escape the confines of care and ‘total institution’ of their families, the Flemish friends in *Hasta La Vista* decide to disguise their journey to a brothel as a wine trip through France, while the Dutch friends do not have to hide anything. As they cannot leave on their own, they arrange for a specialized camper, as well as for an experienced male assistant who is also chauffeur. This happy arrangement is, however, quickly canceled when Lars receives the bad news that his tumor is steadily growing, reducing his lifespan to only a few weeks. Lars’ parents do not want to let him go, but he is determined, and convinces his buddies not to follow the rules and find another assistant. In the Dutch version, they contact a sketchy mentor, Lub, via a secondhand web shop, while in the Flemish version they call their previous assistant who redirects them to an ex-colleague of his, Claude. As such, their escape transgresses many different boundaries; first, because they are about to lose their virginity, and second, because they decide, contrary to the insistence of their parents, to go on a road trip to Punta del Mar. Philip, Lars, and Jozef/Joost can never fully surmount their disabilities but deal with them by accepting assistance. In both narratives, the parents symbolize the moral model of concern and patronization, but the boys refuse to accept their ‘limitations’ and are willing to fight them. Therefore, both versions represent the social model of disability studies (which argues that disabilities are not ontologically but socially and discursively defined (Kama, 2004)), instead of the prevailing medical or moral model. The latter considers disability as a deficiency or health issue (Elcessor and Kirkpatrick, 2017: 5), which would mean that a person with a disability is always fully dependent on the care of those in one’s close environment or assistants.

On the day that the three friends secretly leave their houses and wait for their assistant to arrive, it turns out that the hired assistant is actually a woman, which was not only unexpected but was apparently also unwished for. The gender issue fits in with the overall sexist thoughts that the three protagonists share. The fact that their assistant is a woman (who, incidentally, does not fit the stereotypical standards of beauty) might jeopardize their male adventure – that of finding sexually exciting, exotic, and beautiful women to have sex with. Eventually, the female assistant (Claude/Lub) will evolve from initially being set apart to eventually being part of the gang and even to being the love interest of Jozef/Joost. The story, therefore, both subverts and reaffirms the films’ conservative take on gender. Initially, Claude/Lub is finally accepted as a member of the

all-male group, but later on in the films, it is specifically Jozef/Joost, the character with blindness, who falls in love with her, which is probably not coincidental given that she is defined as physically unattractive by the others.

Both films can be labeled as ‘quest road movies’ (Grebe, 2016: 179), in which the three main characters leave their socially appointed, thus semi-confined, spaces to start an adventure which strongly deviates from societal guidelines and beliefs. This quest is not only literally but also figuratively the ‘transgression of visible and invisible boundaries’ (Grebe, 2016: 179). Gott and Schilt (2013) claim that the road movie is an ideal genre to explore themes of identity issues in a specific cultural context, given ‘the border-crossing inclinations of the genre [that] generate an often polyglot battery of films that tackle identity questions from a transnational perspective’ (p. 3). In accordance with Fraser (2016), this article aims to answer questions like,

Should we be wary of a tendency to compartmentalize disability as definable only within the boundaries of certain national, cultural and/or linguistic contexts? Or should we be suspicious of approaches to disability that take cross-cultural similarities for granted and tend to ignore the specificities of embodied space/place? Are there, in fact, commonalities in how disabilities are conceived, perceived and lived cross-culturally? Is there evidence of a universal disability culture? (p. 1)

We claim that these questions about identity, cultural significance, and ideology are even more pertinent when studying different versions of a single road movie narrative, as the practice of remakes generally involves an alteration of the cultural context. Hence, although *Hasta la Vista* and *Adios Amigos* deal with the same themes, their interpretation and contextualization differ considerably.

Universal framework with a local interpretation

As Billig (1995) claims, nationalism is not to be reduced to the palpable or obvious (e.g. propagandist) appearances or articulations of nationalism. With his concept of ‘banal nationalism’, he refers to the ‘ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced’ (Billig, 1995: 6). Applying the latter concept to film, Hjort (2000) coined the term ‘banal aboutness’ to describe banal reproductions of national identities in a film, without the film being explicitly nationalist regarding its central themes. This banal aboutness is grounded in features such as language and *mise-en-scène*, which are often overlooked by both domestic and international audiences. Instead of filmmakers making use of certain national symbols to produce a specific (national) identity, they ‘choose’ (whether consciously or not) to embed their stories in a certain cultural or national context to produce a socio-cultural reality or verisimilitude. Hence, decisions are made to produce films that resemble a certain reality (Hjort, 2000: 108), with which audiences can identify.

When comparing two film versions of an almost identical narrative, one of the first things that immediately catches the eye is the changing of the cast. Indeed, both film versions starred different local actors, although the filmmakers of the Dutch remake looked for actors who physically resembled the original actors. This finding suggests an interesting balance between universal structures, in this case, the similar visual

appearance of the characters, and a 'local interpretation', that is, using famous local actors. When confronted with the question as to why the directors did not cast actors with disabilities, both argued that they tried, but that this was too difficult a task (Cinevox, 2011; Rook, 2016). One has to add that all actors were also white, whereas the BBC documentary of Asta Philpot starred a non-white protagonist. This reaffirms the findings of previous research that the role diversity of actors with disabilities is still very limited (Erevelles, 2011). A combination of practical, commercial, and identification issues is, therefore, at play here. As mentioned, there are almost no film stars that are appealing to both regions, which explains why the cast in both versions is different. On top of that, given that both films are targeting a mainstream audience who highly value a recognizable verisimilitude, the use of famous local actors instead of less famous actors with disabilities was clearly commercially driven.

Second, our attention is drawn toward the change in spaces and specific locations. Although this might seem very logical and even pragmatic, one should not underestimate the power of (re)defining spaces, which is laid bare through the remake as a prism. Moreover, for road movies, locations are a quintessential element since they generally symbolize a (mental) state (Aitken and Lukinbeal, 2002: 351–352). One of the established tropes of the genre is the idea that the protagonists leave their initial home or place (representing the current negative situation they wish to escape) for the countryside (as a metaphor for liberty, potential change, and optimism). Dargis (1991) argues that in the road movie, the road 'defines the space between town and country. It is an empty expanse, a tabula rasa, the last true frontier' (p. 16). In the cases of *Hasta La Vista* and *Adios Amigos*, it is surprising to see how these (in-between) spaces are defined. Indeed, these roads or spaces have been changed in the different adaptations of Philpot's initial journey. As there are no explicit titles displayed on the screen that state 'Belgium', 'Flanders', 'the Netherlands' or other paratextual location markers, and as there are no well-known cityscapes or landmarks shown, we do not know exactly where the story takes place. As a result, a universal structure (now in the form of spaces) is put into place. This universality is, however, again accompanied with a specific local interpretation. In this case, the directors preferred to 'localize' their stories more implicitly using a variety of cultural markers that can be linked to Flanders/the Netherlands. These markers become very legible when comparing the remake with its source text. Take, for example, the trip's destination: in the Dutch version, the three friends want to go to Salou (Spain), instead of going to Punta del Mar. Youth holidays to Salou are a cliché within Dutch youth culture, and, according to Pisters (2011: 227), one of the characteristic elements that define the national cinema of the Netherlands. Hence, not only do the protagonists' own spaces define who they are (or want to be) but also the spaces they frequent. The typical vacation to Salou (known for its 24/7 party scene, young people, and binge-drinking activities) makes the road trip easily recognizable.

Another example of the balance between universality and localization is found when the three friends are awaiting their mentor to pick them up and start their adventure. In the Flemish version, we can see them waiting in front of a typical Flemish house, while the Dutch version shows them waiting in front of a classic (modern) protestant church. The latter is typical of the Netherlands, known for its reformist religious background (Fokkema and Grijzenhout, 2004: 26). This also explains the difference in

depicting the outcome of both films, namely, the death of one of the protagonists, Lars. In *Hasta La Vista*, there is a scene that shows a small-scale funeral. *Adios Amigos* does not have a funeral scene but shows the two other friends, together with their mentor Lub, next to Lars in front of the sea. An important distinction is that in the Dutch version, there is a frontal shot of Lars' corpse. This representational difference can be linked to the specificities in Catholic/Protestant funerals (being used to respectively closed/open coffins), or even to a difference in law between Belgium and the Netherlands, since the latter demands the funeral to be a minimum 36 hours after death, while Belgian law allows the organization of an earlier funeral. These examples are symptomatic of banal appearances or articulations of nationalism.

(Stereotyped) national identities and 'others'

The idea of perpetuating one's own national identity by creating a contrast with locations that are clearly foreign and 'exotic' is magnified in a specific scene in *Hasta La Vista* when the three Flemish friends visit a vineyard in France. Shortly after arriving and still optimistic and cheerful, a group of older Dutch people shows up and sits down at a table close to the three friends. They greet the Flemish protagonists by shouting 'bonjour' in a very bad French accent. The Flemish friends do not seem to be delighted with their presence, as Philip, for example, says 'Fuck, Dutchmen'. Lars starts making fun of them in quite an arrogant way by mocking their Dutch accent and vocabulary. Moreover, he makes a sexist joke about one of the Dutch women (commenting loudly on her breasts). This antagonistic behavior toward the Dutch group is enhanced by their obvious stereotypical representation; a coarse accent, very loud in their speech, eventually quite upfront and even aggressive. We contend that this intercultural contrast – on the levels of iconography, narrative, and dialogue – between the characters' 'Flemishness' and the others' 'Dutchness' accentuates the former's Flemish identity. This reflects both the ideas that identities can only be defined by referring to the differences with 'others', which is why they depend on the creation and conservation of boundaries (Dhoest, 2002: 6–7), and that the Dutch might still be important 'others' in the Flemish identity construction.

Another important 'other' in *Hasta La Vista* is the accompanying mentor, Claude, who is French speaking instead of Dutch speaking. The first time Philip, Lars, and Jozef meet Claude, they all (except for Jozef) do not seem very pleased that first, she is a woman, and second, she speaks French and not Dutch. Although this animosity toward her changes over the course of the film, the way she is treated and represented speaks volumes. Again, Philip is the first one to make a hostile comment on her origin: 'Hey, don't you speak Flemish?! Clappez Flamance?! [sic]', to which Claude responds: 'No. No Flemish'⁵ Philip responds harshly in Dutch (thinking that she does not understand): 'Always the same, they want our money, but speaking Flemish is too much to ask!' What we do not know at this point is the fact that Claude actually does speak a bit of Dutch, but that she is annoyed by Philip's behavior and decides to act ignorant. This crude assertion by Philip (which does not align him with the stereotypical image of the 'good cripple' (see also Grebe, 2016: 180)), about Walloon people only wanting money without wanting to work for it, fits into a stereotypical Flemish discourse about French-speaking Belgians (Willems, 2014: 65).⁶ Wils (2005: 292) claims that stereotyped

representations of the Walloon and Flemish regions have a polarizing effect. This, in turn, can consolidate one's own national identity. What is striking about this scene is that, for a Flemish audience, such stereotypical assertions of Walloons are highly recognizable, and generally fit in with a humorous discourse. However, in an interview, the director of *Hasta La Vista* acknowledges the existence of a cultural barrier by saying that 'there is still a towering [mental or cultural] wall between Flanders and Wallonia. It does not matter how hard we try to deny it' (Cinevox, 2011). Hence, what the Flemish director indirectly does is building on specific stereotypes of Flemish and Walloon people for identification purposes, but while doing so, a specific and *in se* essentialist (and highly stereotyped) notion of national identity is reestablished. However, as the film progresses, a more united Belgian discourse that strives for solidarity with Wallonia surfaces. *Hasta La Vista* suggests that Flanders and Wallonia should communicate with each other, get to know each other better, assess their different opinions and get rid of their mutual prejudices. While at first Claude and the three friends seem to despise each other, it becomes clear that they are in fact interdependent. The story of three Flemish friends gradually getting along with a Walloon mentor thus also acts as a microcosm, symbolically representing a unitary vision of Belgium, which culminates in the relationship between Jozef and Claude at the end of the film.

In *Adios Amigos*, the 'other' is changed from a French-speaking 'other' to an Eastern-European 'other'. However, this alteration does not explicitly carry a political motivation. The decision to opt for a Croatian woman is related to the pragmatic fact that they wanted to change the film locations from Spain to Croatia (this Balkan country is known for its studio facilities allowing high-end film production at lower costs).⁷ Even so, the representation of this character is less stereotypical and does not carry overt political connotations, at least not in Dutch society. These observations, however, do not mean *per se* that there is less 'othering' occurring in the Dutch remake. From the first sequence of *Adios Amigos* on, it is obvious that the 'new' other is, on an abstract level, the 'caretaker', in all its figures and forms. For instance, in the beginning of the film, before the friends leave for the trip, there is a male caretaker (all dressed up in white) who mocks Philip, Lars, and Joost and treats them like children: 'Come on boys, let's have a drink at the aqua bar! Hey, maybe you will find some hot chicks there!' (laughs in a derogatory way). The same man also drives a white bus that is specifically designed to transport people with disabilities. Again, he speaks to his passengers in quite a patronizing way as if they are infantile human beings and annoys them by endlessly singing the same song, clearly causing irritation. Then, at the end of the film, the friends make a toast and univocally say, 'To Lars, and fuck all doctors!'—doctors are here seen as caretakers who are, in a sense, considered a necessary evil. It should, however, be noted that both the Flemish and Dutch version do share another (more universal) 'other', that is, the parents of both groups of three friends. This is a common element in disability road movies: parents (and sometimes staff from the clinic or asylum) taking up the role of the 'other' while, for instance, trying 'to bring the escaped characters back into the institution [...] reaffirming the medical model of disability that sees disabled characters as a problem to be fixed or contained' (Grebe, 2016: 181). In both films, it is only Jozef/Joost who is able to escape this 'total institution', as Lars dies and Philip joins his parents back home.

Less politics is more sex?

It is interesting to note that *Hasta La Vista* was overtly promoted as being non-political. During an interview for a French festival about cinema and disability, Enthoven claimed that his film embodies absolutely no political idea, ideal, or project (Vimeo, 2012). However, we argue that there is a political dimension involved, especially when compared with *Adios Amigos*. As the Dutch film critic Broeren (2016) asserted, in *Adios Amigos* the political subtexts of the 'original' story (by Philpot) disappeared more into the background, in exchange for 'extra (vulgar) humor and emotion' (p. 1). The political dimension that was inherently connected to the Flemish story is, as we argue, socio-culturally defined. While creating a socio-cultural verisimilitude or making this Dutch film remake 'about' a specific social reality, the political subtext was omitted and, one could claim, had to be excluded.

First of all, the aforementioned scene in the vineyard has been deleted in its entirety in *Adios Amigos*. Although the three Dutch friends travel through Belgium, there is no clear representation of Belgium or Flanders itself, nor is there a contrasting scene of identity building to be found. In addition, the fact that in the Dutch version the 'original' French-speaking supervisor is changed to a Croatian woman called Lub is significant. Moreover, it is important to note that, in comparison to the Flemish counterpart, she speaks both Dutch (with a slight accent) and Croatian, and that the three friends are mostly disappointed because of her gender and not her origin. Another important (but less obvious) element that makes the Dutch remake less political than both the original BBC documentary and the Flemish feature film has to do with the reason why the group of friends want to make a trip to Spain. In both the documentary and the Flemish feature film, they make the journey because they want to visit a brothel in Spain that is 'specialized' in offering sexual experiences for people with disabilities. In the case of the documentary, they are obliged to do so because owning or managing a brothel is illegal in the United Kingdom. In an interview, director Enthoven states that there is a different situation in Belgium, where prostitution is actually legal (Vimeo, 2012). This is true, but the act of prostitution is also legal in the United Kingdom, although it is an offense 'to cause or incite prostitution or control it for personal gain' (Casciani, 2008). The latter law is actually quite similar to the Belgian prostitution law: the act is legal, but exploiting the activity, managing, keeping, or renting a brothel (gross procuring) is illegal. In summary, prostitution itself is legal, but pimping is illegal, which may be the reason why these three friends are inclined to make a trip to Spain and visit a brothel there. However, the rules in Spain show a similar policy to those in Belgium and the United Kingdom; prostitution itself is considered legal, but some activities surrounding it, and mostly pimping, is *de jure* illegal.

Why then did Asta Philpot, and consequently the group of Flemish men with disabilities, travel abroad for sexual services? Most likely, this has to do with the taboo that still exists in both countries (United Kingdom and Belgium), but also with the fact that organizations that offer sexual services for people with disabilities are not officially recognized or licensed by the governments in Belgium and the United Kingdom. In the last few years, however, things are now changing. In Flanders, there is one organization, called *Aditi vzw*, that acts as a mediator between sex workers and people with disabilities

but is not yet licensed by the Flemish or Belgian government. As this phenomenon is not established, this is most probably the main reason as to why the Flemish friends in *Hasta La Vista* decided to travel abroad to find a brothel and lose their virginity.

When compared with *Adios Amigos*, there is another big difference, as the three friends want to go to Salou not to visit a brothel, but to find ‘real girls’ to have sex with. Again, by applying the concept of ‘banal aboutness’ and by looking at the Dutch regulatory and socio-cultural context, this change becomes natural: not only is prostitution legal there but also brothels are recognized and licensed by the Dutch government, which confirms the so-called Dutch tolerant attitude. Moreover, there are a myriad of different organizations⁸ that offer sexual services for people with disabilities, and these services are for the most part state-subsidized. The three friends of *Adios Amigos* thus do not have to cross national borders to be able to enjoy these services, which explain the change in narrative. This element, however, makes the Dutch version less political since there is hardly an underlying call for more openness toward these subjects. Even more, this indirectly contradicts the famous myth of Dutch tolerance: indeed, the fact that the three friends in *Adios Amigos* are obliged to leave their society because they are unable to find sexual contact with girls there does not really represent the ideal of a highly tolerant Dutch society.

As ‘narratives of disability – filmed or otherwise – rarely incorporate sexuality’ (Fraser, 2016: 6), combined with the fact that ‘disabled people are often constructed as asexual and unattractive objects, rather than subjects who have private desires and full sexual relationships’ (Vertoont, 2017: 5), both *Hasta La Vista* and *Adios Amigos* could be praised for their efforts. Nevertheless, the directors’ decision to not include explicit sex scenes was met with quite some criticism (GRIP vzw, 2012). Instead, the Flemish director of *Hasta La Vista* preferred to show the protagonists immediately after they had sex. Oddly enough, this is depicted in a very ableist manner: both Philip and Lars suddenly walk out of the brothel, while there are no wheelchairs to be spotted. This is all visually presented in a surreal, dream-like fashion, in slow-motion, and highly overexposed. By doing so, it is posited or assumed that people with disabilities, in this case, the protagonists, often dream of being, or even aim to be able-bodied, which fits in the dominant cultural ableism (Ellcessor and Kirkpatrick, 2017: 13).

In the ‘making-of’ of *Hasta La Vista*, the Flemish director argues that many people with a disability actually loved that particular scene. He adds that because of that scene, they feel that this film is really about them. He even claims that when people with disabilities dream about themselves, they always see themselves without their specific disability, for example, ‘when they dream, they never sit in their wheelchair’. According to him, this is why this scene is so recognizable for them. Such contradictions between the director’s discourse and the critical interpretations of academics can be linked to Darke’s (1999) findings that explain that specific representations of disability held by disabled people may be read in different ways by non-disabled people. Indeed, apparent positive ‘depictions may actually serve to “other” disabled people or may retail potentially harmful stereotypes’ (Waltz, 2016: 98). In this case, however, whether the Flemish director’s statements are correct, different readings or value judgments of such representations may also differ between different disabled people (which nuances Darke’s contention, making it less binary). This specific element is omitted in the Dutch version, which is why it

would seem that *Adios Amigos* is less ableist in these terms. Yet, a few scenes earlier, when the three Dutch friends go to a party in Croatia, before going to the brothel, Lars gets out of his wheelchair to dance with a girl. By doing so, he wants to hide the fact that he is actually disabled. What this scene communicates is that the only way to attract non-disabled women is to ‘become’ abled. The Flemish version did not include such a scene. On the contrary, even though he never really quits his wheelchair in *Hasta La Vista*, the Flemish Lars is able to date a non-disabled girl in the streets of Punta del Mar. In conclusion, it seems that the Dutch version tries to reverse the often ableist discourse of its source text, but while doing so, it sometimes achieves the opposite.

Although the Dutch film text itself is less politically inclined, the promotion of the film was accompanied by the launch of a campaign called *Seks voor Iedereen* (‘Sex for Everyone’), with the idea of removing the taboo resting on sex for people with disabilities (Spijkerman, 2016). The title of this campaign – pointing toward the notion that sexual desire is universal – is actually quite notable, as, in the context of both *Adios Amigos* and *Hasta La Vista*, the idea of breaking this taboo is deeply gendered. In both films, it is only men with disabilities who are seen as having sexual desires, obscuring that women with disabilities are also sexually desiring, agentive subjects. In a sense, by organizing this campaign, the distributor *Dutch FilmWorks*, working together with the foundation *Intermobiel*, added a less gendered (i.e. male-focused) political subtext *ex post* and extra-textually. The political message should, however, be caveated, as there were critical voices that questioned the campaign and doubted whether it was meant to help people with disabilities in finding sex or rather to promote the film *Adios Amigos* (Spijkerman, 2016), which, again, nuances the idea of ‘Dutch tolerance’. While the Dutch version was given an extra-textual political dimension, the Flemish filmmakers, as mentioned earlier, aimed to divest themselves from such political connotations. At the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018, however, Flemish newspapers reported that the Flemish liberal political party *Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats (Open VLD)*, the socialist public health service *Bond Moyson*, and eventually the Belgian Advisory Committee on Bioethics were putting high pressure on the government to alter the law and exclude sexual assistance from the domain of prostitution (De Standaard, 2017; Mayeur, 2017; Rdc, 2018). It is striking to see how these newspaper articles are directly linked to the film *Hasta La Vista* (both visually and content-wise), reaffirming the political potential of the film.

Conclusion

Our analysis confirms the notion that the remake process is imbued with complexity and hybridity, and that reworkings are not simply copies of texts in other contexts (see for example, Mazdon, 2000: 179). It was shown that, as a result of the re-contextualization processes, subtexts that were ‘originally’ intrinsically embedded in the source text are sometimes ignored or even consciously withheld in the newer version(s). While crossing borders and translating (con)texts, ‘original’ connotations often get appropriated or even divested and replaced by new significations intrinsically linked to the (perception of a) new context. Inquiry into these processes of (re)producing, appropriating, and localizing

texts discloses a lot about different cultures and how and why filmmakers perceive, (re) brand, or even (re)fetishize them.

Pinpointing such changes tells us a lot about the significations that are being ascribed to images and the cultures in which these meanings are embedded. Moreover, it unravels the construction of meaning itself: as these filmmakers build on particular stereotypical visions about specific cultures with the purpose of recreating a socio-cultural context (films 'about' a nation), they indirectly reaffirm, and in a way reconsolidate, such narrowed perceptions. Indeed, by representing the 'other,' one solidifies one's own (perception of) identity; by exoticizing other spaces, one re-fetishizes one's space; and by creating a socio-cultural verisimilitude, one sometimes divests a story of its former (and other) connotations. Moreover, our results show that disability and gender identities are at times cross-culturally shared, while in other instances these are defined by specific national or cultural contexts. While some patronizing and ableist representations of, respectively, gender and disability identities were subverted in the remake, others were kept or even reinforced. This points toward the existence of a partially universal and partially culturally specific disability and/or gender culture, which is, again, in consonance with the remake's hybrid status.

In conclusion, this article lends further weight to the notion that meaning always exists (or emerges) in relation to the other(s). Indeed, difference-in-sameness and sameness-in-difference are, by extension, the signifying element of film remakes in particular and cultural artifacts in general. This is precisely what makes the analysis of the remake as a prism so valuable: it enables us to locate the locality in the universal, and vice versa. By fusing different horizons of (textual and contextual) meaning, the film remake helps us to defamiliarize the banal, the unattainable, or the at first sight unnoted.

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Notes

1. Flanders is the northern Dutch-speaking part of Belgium.
2. The BBC documentary will, therefore, not be analyzed. This article mainly focuses on the Dutch-Flemish context and on the process of remaking fiction films.
3. The social model contradicts the medical or moral model of disability, which 'understands disability as an ontological "fact" in the world' (Ellcessor and Kirkpatrick, 2017: 5).
4. It should be noted, however, that in the context of the Flemish audiovisual media, the sudden and drastic decrease in watching Dutch television programs around the year of 1989 was heavily influenced by the coming of the first Flemish commercial broadcaster, VTM, which caused a greater diversity in television content. One could argue that this important event might have also impacted the broader dismemberment of a shared Dutch-Flemish mediascape.

5. Flemish is in fact not an official language but indicates the (entirety of) Flemish dialect(s).
6. It should, however, be noted that Claude is actually from Brussels (and not from Wallonia), which is, next to the capital of Belgium itself, the capital of the 'Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles' or the French Community, which is one of the constitutional linguistic communities of Belgium.
7. Dutch director Van Rees confirms this thesis in an interview in the Dutch journal *Leeuwarder Courant* (Van der Burg, 2016) by stating that they changed filming locations from Spain to Croatia because of pragmatic reasons (read: financial reasons).
8. Think of SAR (1982), *Flekszorg and De Ultieme Zorg*, *Stichting Handicap & Seksualiteit* (1997), sociaal erotische bemiddeling (*SEB*), intimiteit, seksualiteit, informatie en scholing in de zorg (*ISISZ*), and so on.

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