The year 1989 remains of definitive importance for the recent migratory and diasporic dynamics of Europe at large, and for European migrant and diasporic cinema in particular. Many of the developments that define today’s Europe were, directly or indirectly, triggered by the events of that year, including the German reunification, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the wars of Yugoslavia’s succession in the 1990s and the 2004 enlargement of the European Union, which saw the admission of a range of former communist countries.

After the end of the Cold War, global migration and diasporic cultural expression intensified, imposing a new understanding of transnational human interactions. Countries that had been traditional sources of emigration were turning into countries of immigration; worlds that had been unlikely to touch or collide now intersected and overlapped. The new movements consolidated the status of older European diasporas, of migrants who had arrived in the West at an earlier point: all of a sudden the Turks of Germany, the Algerians of France and the Jamaicans, Indians and Pakistanis of the United Kingdom came across as well-established mature settlers whose presence and creative voices were clearly an inherent part of the artistic and discursive fabric of the respective countries. This ‘maturity’ of diasporas took place against the background of new arrivals, mostly from the former Soviet bloc: migrants driven away by the wars in former Yugoslavia throughout the 1990s, Polish construction workers or other migrants from the Ukraine, Romania and Bosnia, whose influx posed new challenges to understanding and managing immigration. Eastern European countries, while being a source of significant outmigration, were simultaneously turning into immigrant-receiving countries. Sometimes in transit to the West and sometimes as permanent settlers, Chinese migrants opened takeaways, Vietnamese migrants ran cheap goods shops, and North African migrants engaged in complex transnational trade networks. There was yet another significant population shift, reflecting the multilayered nature of the former Eastern bloc, in which people from less prosperous former
communist countries flocked to more affluent ones. The migratory histories of Europe’s largest transnational minority, the Roma, were indicative of these economic hierarchies and inequalities.¹

This chapter investigates aspects of our understanding of Europe’s migrant and diasporic cinema that were defined by these population shifts and the specific migratory patterns triggered by the end of communism. First of all, I endeavour to show that the prevailing economic and political discourse of progressive transition from centrally controlled state socialism to free market capitalism as put forward in the social sciences, which builds on visions of straightforward and linear post-communist evolution, is not supported by the narratives that emerged in the context of European cinema of the period. Intentionally or otherwise, a range of cinematic texts reveal that the European status quo of the post-Cold War era is more appropriately addressed if one recognises that the state of affairs is distinguished by specifically post-colonial conditions. Films and other narrative arts tell the ‘real’ story of movements, inequalities, cultural hierarchies and exclusion in contemporary Europe, and disciplines like history, anthropology, cultural, literary and film studies have, to some extent, acknowledged that the post-colonial framework is particularly suitable to study these processes and texts in the post-communist context.

Secondly, I am concerned with some of the themes that characterise the representation of post-Cold War migrations in cinema. A wide range of films featuring new migrants interacting within multi-ethnic urban neighbourhoods have recently been made across various European countries; I believe these make up a critical body of works that enable us to discover and define a new, specifically European film genre, which I tentatively call ‘cinema of the metropolitan multicultural margin’.

Next, I argue for a transnational treatment, that is, for a methodology that transcends the discrete and ultimately limited national frameworks in favour of ‘watching across borders’ and that takes the cinematic discourse to a level that rises above the national. The diversity of migrant and diasporic cinema reveals an expanding universe of common multicultural conviviality; these films can no longer be studied as a mosaic of isolated cultural phenomena, idiosyncratic to specific national contexts. One increasingly recognises that the localities of migrant productions are spatially disjointed and that audiences too live in diasporic conditions scattered around the globe.

Finally, I look at some specific career pathways of transnational film professionals in the new Europe. The post-Cold War migrations of East Europeans differ substantially from earlier resettlements that took place in the aftermath of World War Two and into the early 1960s, which produced compact migrant communities and thriving milieus for what came to be known as European migrant cinema in countries such as Germany or France from the 1990s onwards. Nowadays film-makers operate more in a mode of