Future Imperfect:

Some Onward Perspectives on Migrant and Diasporic Film Practice

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Film criticism generally bases itself on the finished film as *fait accompli*, as if the film, once made, were self-evidently a necessary and indispensable part of the cinema landscape. But this is not the experience of the filmmaker, whose creative arc will be strewn with rejected scripts, false starts, failed finance and aborted shoots. This may apply doubly to the migrant or diasporic filmmaker facing additional challenges of access or entitlement. The most passionate personal statement may be the hardest to finance and the best but thorniest screenplay may never be shot.

Film is expensive to make and hard to sell, thus no one has an inalienable right to make a film, a privilege that is usually won through indomitable determination, immense vanity and tireless networking, not to mention solid financial backing. Film is a luxury item of complex and collaborative genesis, in which the authorial principle is constantly relativised by the difficulties of raising a budget, accommodating commissioning editors, finding a distributor and reaching an audience, to say nothing of securing appropriate locations and coping with the weather. Despite our desire to rationalise the result, we must acknowledge that filmmaking proceeds along a variant of the chaos principle, is thus approximate in its realisation and almost by definition cannot quite convey the absolute meaning of its *auteur*. Film is a permanent process of accommodation between intention and possibility, a process that mirrors in some

respect the vicissitudes of migration, making film the natural vehicle for the recounting of thwarted journeys and incompleted rites of passage.

While the industrial context in its basic components might seem the same for migrant and diasporic filmmakers as for any others – script, crew, budget, edit, distribution etc. –, these common denominators disguise a multitude of subtle inflections, hidden obstacles and unconscious resistances, which together with varying national support mechanisms form the actual experience of such filmmakers across Europe. Ultimately it transpires that some versions of reality are acceptable and command finance. Others are not acceptable and do not get made. The stories abound, the talent is emerging fast; the output thus far, however, disguises immense strains that ought to be confronted.

Diasporas on our Doorstep – The Festival Circuit

Firstly we should not confuse an interest in films made outside Europe and the USA (generally 'World Cinema') with a commitment to foster migrant and diasporic film within Europe. At a national or a European level, the multicultural current of interest (such as it is) tends to run to the *outside* of the European Union. The excellent film festivals of Amiens, Fribourg and Tarifa, to mention only a few, specialise in non-Western film, and most festivals now feature a World Cinema section. Commendable initiatives such as the World Cinema Fund (Berlin) or Open Doors (Locarno) invite filmmakers from around the world to visit Europe in search of audiences and finance; the Hubert Bals Fund (Rotterdam) directly funds non-Western film with development grants. Cinéfondation (France) and the Binger Filmlab (Holland) offer residences to international filmmakers. However, it is hard not to discern a certain 'exoticism' in these globalising trends, which privilege the showcasing of product from distant parts

of the world over the creative enfranchisement of the rapidly maturing diasporic collectivities now deeply embedded in Europe, let alone that of the first generation migrant whether voluntary or exiled.

Through ambitious cultural programmes such as Euromed, the European Union exports large sums of development finance into its neighbouring regions, while largely overlooking the fact that Europe carries an important diasporic component of these regions and a vital talent base concealed *inside* its borders. ‘We like your rather strange and exciting films,’ the audience seems to be saying, ‘but please don’t think of coming to make them *here*.’ No comparable advantages or incentives are offered to any of Europe’s existing diasporic minorities, who thereby suffer from a double exclusion. Their concerns are viewed as neither fully foreign nor fully European and in cultural terms risk being marginalised.

Whether or not this is an unconscious or deliberate control mechanism, an attempt to deport, as it were, a cultural ‘problem’, I believe, as a European filmmaker, that this pattern should be challenged. Europe has been a continent of migration since earliest times and multiple failures of adaptation have accounted for much historical turbulence, failures we should avoid repeating. Migration will continue, and cinema as the *locus classicus* of intercultural dialogue has its part to play in disentangling the new realities it occasions.

Whether through the unavoidable ‘disturbance and pain’ (Iordanova, p. XX) of migration, the trauma of dispossession and homelessness, the challenges of arrival, rejection or assimilation, migrants can deliver powerful and challenging films in a stultified market struggling to find good stories in our safe, complacent societies. Creative artists of ‘double culture’ (Seeßlen in Berghahn/Sternberg, p. XX) not only bear witness to a complex past, they point the way to a more invigorating future.

Babylon – A Place of Welcome or Exile?

It was this intuition and the realisation that, despite lavish EU funding for audiovisual training initiatives through the MEDIA Programme, no European project existed where this hypothesis could be tested, that led to the founding in early 2006 of *Babylon*, a cultural forum and film development programme in which diasporic and migrant filmmakers from Europe's varied minorities can meet, compare notes and share their creative aims.

The experience of reaching the mythical Babylon of fabulous wealth and unremitting exile, a metropolis of competing languages, interests and traditions, is repeated across Europe in different forms and between different cultures. The specificity depends largely on colonial, economic and political histories, yet each European nation tends to treat its minorities proprietorially as 'our own', depriving them firstly of access to Europe and secondly of the chance to speak to each other, and it was this isolation that *Babylon* was intended to overcome. The 'national paradigm' described by Dina Iordanova (p. XX) as being no longer adequate needs challenging both in academic discourse and in professional practice. For instance, there is an ingrained assumption within filmmakers of the UK's African Caribbean and Asian communities, that 'Europe isn't meant for us', an assumption reinforced by self-exclusion, self-doubt, misinformation and mistrust, directly attributable to an unfinished colonial legacy that can only be challenged and dispelled through the dismantling of European borders not just for the privileged traveller but for all sections of society. *Babylon* is needed not just because the national paradigm increasingly delivers coarse cliché and sterile repetition, but because an intercultural model is Europe's only hope of challenging the hegemony of Hollywood

‘universalism’. Migration creates tales of the human condition capable of transcending language and acculturation and of speaking to a large audience. The dual sense of belonging speaks to us all, however monocultural we may be, if only as a paradigm of self-searching and self-doubt. The migrant carries a permanent *alter ego* and is the postmodern hero of our inner displacements and dislocations. His or her pilgrimage is the physical projection of an elusive quest for the self that we all share.

Though the emergence of such filmmakers as Fatih Akin in Germany, Rachid Bouchareb in France and Gurinder Chadha in the UK may herald the arrival of diasporic concerns in the mainstream, and though ‘postcolonial dynamism’ (Iordanova, p. XX) is certainly palpable in the European film scene, the ‘coming into representation’ (Hall in Berghahn/Sternberg, p. XX) of entire communities cannot yet be taken for granted. Individual success does not imply equality of access to the means of self-expression, nor does it guarantee that other voices and alternative diasporic interpretations will get a hearing (cf. also Malik, pp. XX-XX). It was the unheard voices we were searching for, and we found them.

Babylon’s pilot year 2006/7 brought together successful and aspiring filmmakers from the UK (Asian and African Caribbean), France (Maghrebi and Chinese), Germany (Turkish) and Switzerland (Macedonian) in two multilingual workshops in Rotterdam and Cannes dedicated to script development, network building, co-production and film finance. Our second year has added the Netherlands (Surinamese, Iranian, Chinese), Austria (Turkish Kurdish) and Italy (US-Brazilian). Funded by film and cultural authorities as diverse as the CNC *(Centre National de la Cinématographie)*, Goethe-Institut, British Council and Vienna Film Fund *(Filmfonds Wien), Babylon* is establishing itself in the European audiovisual sector as a serious network of like-minded film practitioners. We have been moved by the solidarity

shown, the commonality of experiences narrated and the generosity of creative support exchanged, all of which (with the help of interpretation) transcended linguistic and national frontiers that proved ephemeral compared to the deeper existential bonds between 'hyphenated nationals' (Elsaesser in Berghahn/Sternberg, p. XX) discovered less in the nationality than in the hyphenation, thus creating a sphere that Paul Gilroy evocatively characterises as 'multicultural conviviality'.

Migration is in every sense a shared experience. It decimates communities left behind, for example the southern Adriatic as shown in Eno Milkani's heart-wrenching *Edeni i braktisur/Abandoned Eden* (Albania 2004), and has compounded and complicated communities of reception across Western Europe. Of such a complex encounter anyone concerned should have the right to speak; one exclusion cannot be remedied by another. In the mid-1980s I was fortunate enough to write and direct the BBC five-part serial *Shalom Salaam* (UK 1988), which was based on two successive waves of migration into the UK, one Jewish, one Muslim, represented by two families sharing one city, Leicester. I belong to neither community, though I have always had personal links with both. I believe I was entitled to write this story, and the 'dominant perspective' (disclosing my subject position) was rendered by a mono-cultural adolescent envious of the complex identities of her peers. The piece was reasonably well received, especially in Continental Europe, and may have encouraged the liberation of new talents from within diasporic communities. This was exactly as it should be, though one should note the dangers of 'authenticism' that this advance brought with it. There was, and in many quarters still is, a perception that 'Asian filmmakers', for example, were only there to write about 'Asian subjects' and thereby deliver us 'authentic new voices'. Apart from the question of control – who is entitled to define authenticity? – this runs the risk of pigeonholing talent and reinforcing

sectarian divides. A generalised Asian writer might not wish to write about an equally generalised Asian subject, or if so, perhaps not within the social realist aesthetic complete with its prescribed stereotypes, preferring, say, Gothic horror instead. Conversely, since no British writer (as far as I am aware) belongs to both Jewish and Muslim communities simultaneously, *Shalom Salaam* should not have been made, since no one was entitled to tell it. The only response to this *reductio ad absurdum* is this: anyone should have the right to speak of anything, and they should be judged by the honesty, passion and insight with which they speak and the skill with which they touch their audience.

Thus *Babylon* is open to all producer, writer or director applicants of any origin who have a working base in Europe. We stipulate an initial track record of at least one short film and a previous full-length script, since *Babylon* is not designed or funded to be a start-up programme or a substitute film school. We encourage culturally mixed teams but also those with very specific community links. Husband/wife teams or civil partnerships are valued, since independent filmmakers increasingly work in a cottage industry enabled only by domestic sacrifice; one major European language (French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, English) is required, as our interpretation facilities cannot cope with more.

Nevertheless, despite an open call for offers, the submissions from every end of Europe speak of a passion for one subject, and that is the personal experience of migration in some shape or form, be it departure and arrival, exile and asylum, welcome or alienation, assimilation or emancipation. This does not imply that autobiography in itself makes good film; 'based on a true story' excuses nothing where fiction is concerned. It does mean, however, that in practice it is those with

first-hand experience who come up with the best stories most likely to grip an audience.

This pragmatic consideration is complemented in our selection by an alertness to prior disadvantages in cases where the filmmaker's subject matter, personal background or professional milieu may not have facilitated the access or attention he or she deserves. One aim of *Babylon* is to challenge existing perceptions that have hardened into prejudice and to stimulate an industrial environment in which audiences can be attracted by more diverse films. As Thomas Elsaesser notes, the cinema of double occupancy is thriving, but one might add that the hotel has many rooms still available.[1]

Of course there is no reason why the migrant or diasporic filmmaker should have an easier time than anyone else, and individuals should not be labelled as some priestly caste defined by election either through suffering or through the 'self-confident mobility' that Deniz Göktürk has identified (p. XX). 'Migrant envy', as I would describe it, is a recurring phenomenon with unfortunate antecedents and should not be needlessly provoked. The seemingly effortless management of cosmopolitan 'multiple codes' (Göktürk, p. XX) can prove inaccessible and potentially threatening to the monoglot, monocultural mind, and despite our belief that *Babylon* is needed, there are dangers that the well-meaning 'diversity industry', represented by political *fiat* at the heart of industrial bodies such as the BBC or the UK Film Council, may create the false impression that 'diaspora chic' has it all its own way. A multicultural market is exceedingly hard to create, as we shall see, and too many easy breaks or helping hands can entrench public resistance rather than genuinely open minds. We have been accused of exercising positive discrimination on the one hand and ghettoising filmmakers by identifying them as 'migrant or diasporic' on the other,

sometimes both simultaneously. The free market should be adequate and appropriate for all, we are told in some quarters. 'Talent will out. You'll make it if you're good enough.' Old saws often heard from people who actually mean: 'You're not one of us, you'll do as you're told.' Migration is indeed framed, all to commonly, as a 'monolinear narrative' that leaves the migrant stranded within 'the parameters of the nation state' (Göktürk, p. XX), and prising that narrative free from national constrictions is not an easy task.

The state of the 'diversity debate' is in very different phases across Europe, and in launching *Babylon* across the continent, we soon realised that every potential interlocutor had a different conception of what might be meant by equal opportunities and how the eventual aim was best to be addressed. Nowhere is the European divide clearer than in national attitudes to minority entitlement, and one premise of *Babylon* was that only a Europe-wide exchange between minority cultures might bridge the gulf of incomprehension that still separates the national majorities of 'Old Europe'. 'Polycentrism' (Shohat/Stam in Berghahn/Sternberg, p. XX) is certainly our cause, but at no point have we felt that Eurocentrism was the obstacle – this was a world with no centre to locate. In cultural terms the continent is centrifugally inclined, and, for instance, the engagements with *la francophonie* by metropolitan France have little in common with the UK's view of the English-speaking world. The post-Habsburg/Ottoman and also post-communist reshaping of South-East Europe as well as the recent penetration of Balkan and Maghreb interests into Greece, Italy and Spain contribute further to an endlessly dynamic demography. Europe is a profoundly asymmetrical continent, already multicultural in its historical composition and anti-centrist in its instincts, as its rejection of a single Constitution demonstrates. Paradoxically this might offer greater hope for new, richer syntheses than exist in a

largely monolingual continent such as North America. One thing is certain: the entire subject is an ideological minefield, fraught with perils for both practitioners and academics, as the occasional discursive strain within this volume openly admits.

For all these reasons it is hard to assess the migrant and diasporic experience solely through the prism of films that have been made, because those films have not been the only representational versions of reality on offer. Indeed, they have already passed through an industrial process that may have powerfully compromised or relativised their author's original plans and intentions. Therefore, I shall briefly consider the prospect of projected films from France, Britain, Germany and the Balkans, each drawn from our *Babylon* initiative, films that quintessentially deserve but in practice will find it very hard to get made. Their fortunes might well define the future available to migrant and diasporic film.

The Balkans - From Trauma to Transnationalism

Mitko Panov, one of our first-generation *Babylonians*, left Macedonia aged nineteen to study directing in Poland. From there he went to film school in the USA to learn and subsequently teach Hollywood-Aristotelian dramaturgy; thence he migrated once more to Switzerland mainly for family reasons. His remarkable short film *Z podniesionymi rekami/With Raised Hands* (Poland 1986) won the Palme d'Or in Cannes with a cinematic reconstruction of the infamous photograph of the boy under German guns in the Warsaw ghetto, but despite this widely recognised début, Panov's subsequent career has been strewn with interruptions, due at least in part to his various migrations, a reminder that transnationalism can effect as many ruptures as sutures.

The short film *Livada* (Macedonia 1998) saw him back in Macedonia with an intercultural fable of friendship between a Muslim peasant and a Greek Orthodox

doctor. His major documentary *Comrades* (Macedonia 2002) took him through the Balkans, retracing the protagonists of another photograph, a carefree snapshot from 1981 of his former comrades of the Yugoslav 'Peace Army'. The film charts how the happy conscripts have since then been divided on opposite sides of a bloody civil war, new enemies defined by exclusion and tribal bonding and frontline victims of an inner exodus inflicted by the break-up of their once unitary if federal state, now fractured into its not-quite-constituent parts, a diaspora of the soul by which a country has taken leave of its inhabitants and left them stranded.

Panov's *Babylon* screenplay *The War Is Over* tells of the anguished exile to Switzerland of an Albanian Serb teacher during the Kosovo crisis, a man who withers once separated from his home. 'Diaspora is the biggest trauma of all,' Panov ruminates, with permissible hyperbole, a gentle, bearded introvert with a watery, distant gaze. 'Think of the early pioneers who simply got in a boat and sailed away, never to return. I can scarcely imagine their sacrifice, the inner turmoil, the pain of separation. The shock was so great it was still felt by the second and third generations, who grow up like resilient mutants, a shock that makes the USA what it is.'[2]

Emigration can prove a traumatic event for whatever reason it is undertaken. Walking away apparently unscathed from the psychic disaster of their own exodus, many migrant filmmakers create from a base of latent trauma that often goes unacknowledged. The success of their output will depend on the extent to which they can transmute the trauma of exile from a repetitive, sterile 'acting out' of ritualistic behaviour patterns into a dynamic, fertile 'working through' of buried grief into empowering consciousness. Tapping into the creative potential of recovered trauma can prove as important for the personal voice of the migrant as the subsequent *métissage* with a new culture.

Though clearly a vessel for his own experience, Panov's suffering teacher is based on a former Yugoslav soldier whom the author happened upon as a stateless person in Switzerland, an example of how an accomplished writer displaces autobiography the better to tell it. Though an exile, Panov himself has never been a refugee; he is neither Albanian nor Serb but a Macedonian Slav; he has never been caught up in a war zone nor suffered such extreme alienation as his subject. Yet, quintessentially, this is his story. 'What's the difference?' he asks with the ingrained self-effacement of the dramatist. 'All experience is common.' The asylum-seeking teacher stands not for his screenwriter-creator but for displaced humanity, though this prompts me to wonder whether the universal is achievable in film without a scrupulous adherence to the specific, and whether the culture-hopping of the transnational inevitably involves a dilution of narrative intensity.

'Without leaving home I could never talk like this,' Panov muses and turns to his Israeli producer Assaf Shapira: 'It's the Exodus that makes you who you are.' Though not Jewish himself, Panov speaks in a diasporic vocabulary laid down in the Pentateuch at the dawn of recorded migration and still alive in the emotionally loaded terms *aliya* and *yerida*, 'going-up' and 'coming-down': *aliya* the final ingathering of the exiles into the promised Eretz Israel enjoined upon the Jewish diaspora; *yerida* the abandonment of Eretz Israel involved in rejoining the diaspora. This binary perception of faithfulness and desertion is echoed in varied modulations throughout the diasporic experience, at its simplest and most poignant in the weekly cash transfers from migrant workers to their families 'back home', for both of whom 'onward mobility' may be a distant mirage and 'return' a dubious endpoint.

Having made *yerida* and left his war-torn country, Panov's teacher fears nothing more than the impending *aliya* imposed by the Swiss authorities who wish to

send him back. At peace or at war, his birthplace will not be the same, and more crucially nor will he. Despite his inability to engage either with Switzerland or its Balkan diasporic communities, he knows he has changed and cannot revert to what he was. Unconsciously he suffers from the guilt implicit in the very concept of *yerida*, a betrayal of the covenant with one's land, one's ancestors and one's god, quasi-religious perceptions that have survived the state-fostered atheism of the Tito years. He has been broken, become a non-person; and return will never piece him back together or restore his integrity. 'Every uprooting is fatal,' says Panov and his logic eloquently drifts:

> If you don't survive it…it's fatal. Everyone who leaves is in the category of 'survivor'. My career ended where it was supposed to start, as soon as I left school, my country disintegrating, one part of the world collapsed. You have no project, you have to start from scratch, you're less of a filmmaker than someone who's done nothing, never studied but carries a project for three years. Then there's the competition, these people don't respect the rules, I'm on the starting line and they're already a hundred meters ahead, you can never catch up. You have an emotional sense of injustice. But then… it's never going to be fair. Every place has its challenges, the ideal space doesn't exist.'

In his eyes I see the wandering focus of the nomad attempting to locate the source of his trauma, as he quietly concludes: 'Yes, I feel like a survivor.'[3]

Nowadays migration is a more complicated affair than a one-way ticket in steerage class. The filmmaker is likely to spend time at international markets and festivals in

search of co-producers from opposite ends of the earth. Far from reducing the trauma of emigration, onward mobility paradoxically may intensify it through a compulsive ‘acting out’ in a hapless systolic alternation of *aliya* and *yerida*: once gone, no return is ever complete or adequate, however often repeated. ‘People back home look at you with a fear of new competition, as if you’re going to expose their cosy little game, and they make life five times tougher for you. When I’m tempted to say, “Hey, these Swiss are giving you a hard time”, I remind myself: “Remember those Macedonians, they treat you *really* bad”.’ In his screenplay *The War is Over*, Panov amusingly parodies resentment against the returning *émigré* loaded with inappropriate gifts for all the family from whisky to lingerie, whose robust display of Albanian independence nearly sparks an outrage by the local Serb police, thus proving that the habits and strategies of ethnic conflict, far from dissipating, may fossilise into self-caricature in the diaspora.

It is said that language departs from itself more slowly in the colony than in the homeland, if only because the exile holds more tenaciously to his dying roots. Thus Panov: ‘You speak your own language more grammatically, you avoid using outdated colloquialisms because you don’t know the new ones, you end up asking “Why am I talking like a book?”’ There may be a danger that migrant filmmakers make just such films about their former home, because the trauma of migration has frozen in time their cultural references. As well as eloquent, accents can be stilted, forced or comical, and accented films need not always prove either original or daring. Like language, cultural observances tend to freeze at the moment of departure and are often reduced to extravagant displays of loyalty, such as folk dishes unknown to native cuisine and long abandoned or purely mythical renderings of ‘life at home’,

and many film proposals we receive at *Babylon* arrive with impeccable diasporic but implausible creative credentials.

Conversely, the robust self-criticism adopted by home communities reflected in films such as Fatmir Koçi's *Tirana viti zero/Tirana Year Zero* (Albania 2001) can provoke howls of outrage from the disappointed diaspora, one further example being the protests of Australian Slovenes at Jan Cvitkovič's *Odgrobadogroba/Grave-hopping* (Slovenia 2005). The film was described as an insult to national pride, 'degrading Slovenian image and Slovenian culture […] which is Central European, not Balkan',[4] sentiments not echoed in Ljubljana or elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia to which Slovenia till so recently belonged. This diasporic *fatwah* indicates how easily the term 'Balkan' can itself be balkanised as an unthinking pejorative and an implement of ethnic rejection, though its current usage in film circles of South East Europe (galvanised by the Sarajevo Film Festival in particular) points more to its joyous recuperation as an emblem of regional solidarity.

Panov's teacher has a doubly problematic trajectory in that Albanians of Serbia are already part of an inner diaspora, from which he departs into an international No Man's Land. Albanians are to be found in most nations of the Balkans, and particularly in Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro, besides obviously Albania itself, where a newspaper editor recently took exception to my reference to a 'regional diaspora' with the rejoinder that Albania is simply not large enough for its ethnic population and an extension of its borders was all that was needed to bring the diaspora home.

Britain – Authentic to Whom?

While Mitko Panov's trajectory is caught somewhere in the bind between involuntary migration and transnational career-building, his frustrations have something in common with that of his fellow *Babylonian* Faisal Qureshi, a British journalist, film editor and short filmmaker who clearly, emphatically even, belongs to one of the UK's embedded diasporic communities. Born in Britain of first-generation Pakistani parents, he has lived in these islands all his life, is not a great traveller outside work commissions and would probably not welcome the label 'migrant' whether of second generation or any other epithet. Qureshi joined *Babylon* with an ambitious and well-scripted story of special rendition *Battle without Banners*, told from the point of view of a bewildered innocent snatched from his family on false information and consigned to a nightmare world of secret detention camps where he is converted to the Islamic fundamentalism formerly alien to him, a resounding comment on the War on Terror's counter-productive outcomes.[5]

An active trade unionist, Qureshi is familiar with the hurdles faced by filmmakers from Muslim communities and sober about his prospects: a good twenty years after multiculturalism reached the UK, equality of self-expression is still a long way off and 'Special Rendition from a Muslim Perspective' raises eyebrows amongst the UK's top executives. For them, arranged marriages, honour killings and Bollywood fantasy are more acceptable diasporic narratives, an illustration of what Qureshi eloquently describes as 'genre intimidation'[6] – the stereotypical reinforcement of received ideas via apparently neutral commercial pressures.

In the culturally myopic UK entertainment industry, Muslim characters are regularly played by Hindu actors and Muslims generally feel uneasy in the drinking, socialising, promiscuous film world with its downward pressures on family life. While an Islamic language of film has emerged in, say, the cultures of the Maghreb,

the same cannot be said of the Muslim diasporas of Western Europe, and the reason must be found in part within the hedonist, materialistic assumptions of an industry that consciously Muslim filmmakers such as Qureshi find antithetical to their way of life and their authorial aspirations. Is it arguable that Muslim film cannot be produced by a postmodern, post-Christian industry, yet the locating and rooting of Muslim allegiance and belonging within Western film is surely a priority of huge concern.

This brings us to the central question: Whom is the migrant or diasporic filmmaker addressing? The diasporic community or majority audiences? Pleasing both may prove hard. The adaptation of Ayub Khan Din's stage play *East is East* (UK 1999, dir. Damien O'Donnell) did much to familiarise the UK's non-Asian public with the permanence of the Pakistani communities, and the general response could be paraphrased: 'Look, they can laugh at themselves, so they must be British' (see also Malik, pp. XX-XX). This assumption was not reciprocated in many sections of the Muslim community, where the film's undercurrent of satirical humour caused deep hurt, and, according to Qureshi, threw doubt on the value of attempted integration. 'You do your best, you try to fit in, and *this* gets thrown at you,' might be a rough rendering. 'Compromise doesn't work and was wrong in the first place. Better stick to your principles', says Qureshi. Thus the film might lend some comfort to the rejectionist stance of the younger generation, disillusioned by 'parental sell-out'.

Unhappy with their screen representations, Britain's minority communities have taken refuge in their own radio and television stations such as Star TV, DTV, Prime TV, Zee TV, the Islam Channel; eighty percent of the foreign films shown in the UK are from the Indian subcontinent. This deepening of a 'niche market' can only intensify the difficulties encountered in the mainstream crossover even by high-profile

British Asian screenwriters and directors such as Hanif Kureishi and Gurinder Chadha.

Meanwhile the focus is squarely on the upcoming generation, who paradoxically may find life harder than their immediate predecessors. Qureshi's trade union BECTU is leading the industry with the training initiative *Move on Up*, which is now being extended from film and television into the music world, but few training places convert into full-time jobs and unpaid secondments often bring no real work experience beyond menial tasks. Disillusioned career stagnation can be the outcome.

Qureshi's progression to feature films may prove a hard one, and local diasporic talent, by a bitter irony, is likely to find itself leap-frogged by transnationals from the glamorous film schools of Eastern Europe. Following the European *entrée* offered him by *Babylon*, Qureshi thinks the answer may be to make common cause with other European minorities and to hunt for production finance on the Continent, in other words, to complement his locally bound diasporic identity with a new transnationalism of his own.

France – A Filmmaker's Heaven?

While the British approach to cinema is clearly market-orientated, treating film as a commodity like any other, the French have a long-standing and honourable tradition of supporting film as an essential form of cultural self-expression on a par with theatre or the visual arts. Film is seen as clearly deserving of public funding (see Jäckel, pp. XX-XX), particularly where it involves the French language and the extended political-cultural ambit of *la francophonie*. By teaming up with co-producers from compatible countries in the Maghreb, the Mashrek, French-speaking Africa or even the Balkans, and with top-up funds from the Council of Europe's *Eurimages* (from

which the UK withdrew in late 1995), a French producer can hypothetically mount a production with no private investment of any kind. The results are rewarded with prizes at international film festivals and with sophisticated audiences in Paris and beyond, but again one should note that international co-production does not necessarily entail greater creative mobility of the director, let alone facilitate the self-expression of filmmakers already entrenched in certain diasporas, as we might illustrate through the experience of *Babylon*-participant Jilani Saadi.

Tunisian-born Saadi has lived in France for twenty-five years, but his award-winning films (including his *Ors el-dhib*/*La Tendresse du Loup/Tender is the Wolf,* (Tunisia 2006) were shot in Tunisia. With some support from *Babylon*, he is now raising finance for his latest project *L'Impossible Testament*, set mostly in Paris, which ought to qualify for French state support. But the film, and Saadi as a diasporic filmmaker, fall foul of a terrible double bind. As a French resident, he is making a French film. But as a filmmaker of Tunisian origin, he is filming mainly in the Arabic language. Under current regulations he is neither French nor foreign and qualifies for none of the existing schemes. In the absence of French support he believes it simpler (and cheaper) to shoot the entire film, including the Paris sequences, in Tunis. This bureaucratic loophole typifies the challenges faced by diasporic filmmakers in asserting their right to be heard. At the time of writing, Saadi has abandoned his French home of twenty-five years and has migrated (I refuse the word 'returned') to Tunisia.

Behind this problem lies the deeper one: films about 'Arabs' living in France don't sell. In the highly cinephile (and largely white) French public there is an aversion to seeing its own image relegated to supporting role or walk-on status in favour of minority protagonists. This is borne out by the funding difficulties

experienced by French resident Raja Amari, whose Tunis-based *Satin Rouge/Red Satin* (Tunisia 2002) should long ago have been followed by her latest project *Corps Etranger,* a Paris-based story of a young Maghrebi domestic carer recuperated by his *haute bourgeoise* host family. Despite international recognition, finance is slow to come in. Firstly the protagonist is non-French; secondly the French characters don't behave well. Paris won't like it. Difficult (particularly *subtly* difficult) truths are always more palatable when displaced to a safe distance from home, and 'Old Europe' can prove reluctant to look inwards through the eyes of the migrant in its midst. In a recent phone call to her producer, I learnt that *Corps Etranger* has been overtaken by another Raja Amari project that can be financed and shot entirely in Tunisia.

This *de facto* exclusion lies in stark contrast to the warm welcome France has traditionally offered political exiles who have fallen foul of authorities at home and who wish to pursue their cause from a safe distance. Our fellow *Babylonian,* Paris-based Show-Chun Lee started as a documentarist aged sixteen with a film on the Aborigine community of her native Taiwan. She came to France to study visual anthropology and continued her filmmaking with a dangerous and partly undercover report on *sans papiers* Chinese migrants in France, consigned to forced labour in the sweatshops of Paris. Her feature project *Shanghai-Belleville* draws on this previous work. 'Rich Chinese love to buy expensive French product,' she muses, 'but little do they know that leather handbag with the French label has been crafted by Chinese slave labour.'[7] Neither Taiwan nor China would have allowed her to make such a film; in China she would have ended up in prison. France has provided her with the freedom and the visual inspiration for her career; she is grateful and proud of her association with the French cinema, but also culturally attached to Taiwan:

> Of course I get homesick, I'll never forget what Taiwan taught me, but I say to myself 'homesickness is a state of being.' I'm always kind of nowhere, a bit peripheral, and that's why minority subjects interest me. *La nostalgie, c'est moi* – that's what drives me on. Every winter I cry, I want to go back to Taiwan, but I live here, my daughter was born here. I keep telling her I'll leave France when she's eighteen, but in the meantime my trauma, my homesickness give me the sensibility to enquire into the lives of others.

Searching for defining factors to distinguish the British and French positions, one realises that Jilani Saadi, Raja Amari or Show-Chun Lee will always be regarded as Tunisian or Taiwanese filmmakers domiciled in France. But Qureshi will always be thought of as British filmmakers of Asian or Pakistani origin. In this asymmetry of appartenence the different emphasis seems slight but is crucial. The sense of separation and belonging is different in the two countries, due in part to the geographical proximity of the former French colonies and the incomplete nature of French decolonisation, especially in the cultural domain. Different legal traditions of citizenship and residence play a part as well. Despite its generosity with political asylum for the stranger within its gates, France has yet to prove that French-born *beur* talent has it any easier than the UK's African Caribbean or Asian communities.

Germany – No Problem!

Meanwhile the German situation is different again, in part because its largest diasporic community, the Turkish, is not '(post)colonial' and its presence in Germany is based on different assumptions. While film officials in London and Paris are keen

to address diasporic issues such as access and inclusion, wide layers of myopia and denial still prevail in Berlin, where a top film executive in private conversation recently brushed aside the entire concept of *Babylon* with the magisterial 'Turkish filmmakers have no problems in Germany', a complacency punctured by recent press reports of significant emigration of well-educated Turkish Germans (Sontheimer 2008) that our *Babylonians* might yet emulate.

The strains and discrepancies in national policy can be detected in the different nomenclature assigned to the 'multicultural project'. In the last Chirac administration in France, the affable writer and filmmaker Azouz Begag oversaw the *Ministère de l'égalité des chances*, while in the chilly winds of a new dispensation his successor now runs the *Ministère de l'immigration, de l'intégration, de l'identité*. The 'integration word' rears its head in Berlin too, in the title of the *Beauftragte für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration.*

Fears of the integrationist agenda run deep: Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan on a visit to Germany in February 2008 described assimilation as 'a crime against humanity', an intervention that did little to sweeten intercultural relations. Admittedly there are pockets of concern within the German television sector, exemplified by ZDF's excellent *Das kleine Fernsehspiel* and the WDR's series of debut films *Avanti Debütanti* which have handed first opportunities to numerous filmmakers of Turkish and other diasporic origin. Downward pressure tends to set in higher on the career ladder, as illustrated by the experience of *Babylon*-participant Sülbiye Günar whose moving and much-awarded début film *Karamuk* (Germany 2002) tells the story of a German girl who is brought up by her single mother and discovers, almost by coincidence when she is seventeen, that her biological father is Turkish.[8] As is frequently the case in the entertainment sector, a first success leads to the wilderness,

and Günar's personal diasporic concerns are proving hard to pursue, as if the combined weight of the establishment were saying: 'That was your personal statement, now face up to the market place.' Though mainstream employment is not hard to find for someone of Günar's ability, her latest personal project in development with *Babylon* had been first 'ethnically cleansed' of its Turkish characters by the producers and then removed from her control entirely, before legal intervention restored it to her and with *Babylon's* encouragement she bought it back.

Europe-wide, the problem lies not so much in accepting diasporic filmmakers in themselves as in welcoming their concerns and stories. 'Tell it the way it is' is the editorial instruction, by which all too often is meant 'the way *we* see it and the way *we* can sell it', and frequently this amounts to direct censorship. Of course it is the exception to this rule that seizes our attention. But some eminent successes should not blind us to statistical realities. Not all is well in the garden of the European audiovisual industry. For every diasporic film made, hundreds have been refused, occulted or suppressed[9].

Migrant and Diasporic Film – Does it Exist?

Arguing from the negative: If no such thing exists, then this volume has thrown up an amazing number of coincidences, for it seems that right across Europe the fact and the subject of migration have moved to occupy a position of interest and concern within our audivisual cultures, a phenomenon we have witnessed at first hand through our *Babylon* initiative. The arrival of a cinema of migration is a phenomenon hard to define, born of the working-through of Europe's colonial past, its changing labour economies and the upheavals that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and driven by the movement of peoples, both of individuals and of collectivities. In

modern history only the cataclysmic wars of the 20th century have shifted such large numbers of people across the map of Europe. As Stephen Castles and other migration and diaspora scholars have noted, the speed of migration and the global dispersion of diasporic communities had never reached the dimensions we are experiencing today. The 'proliferation of transnational movements, flows, and connections of people into and across the European space' (Robins 2007: 152) has made 'migration […] one of the key forces of social transformation in the contemporary world' (Castles 2002: 1144), resulting in fundamental changes of the social and cultural composition of European societies. It is scarcely surprising that there are new stories to tell, stories of a weight and insistence to match the unending filmic output generated by the Second World War.

One might equally argue that migration has proved simply the catalyst for changes already stirring in Western societies, and that the migratory experience is in some sense a paradigm of self-discovery that provides the best optic on society as a whole. Although many diasporic trajectories (and the films that speak of them) take place on the periphery of our established societies, the latter are not unchanged by them, whatever resistances are thrown up along the way. It may well prove that migration has brought about a revolution in the way we see ourselves, and that film is one of the first, most sensitive indicators of this societal shift.

As an academic discipline, the study of migrant and diasporic film belongs in the vanguard of media studies, as the site where new sensibilities are emerging fastest and finding their most natural expression through film, in whatever format it may be delivered or watched. How should one describe this distinctly discernable trend? As yet it has no manifesto, so it is hard to call it a movement, though *Babylon* is attempting to provide some underlying support. It might be called a wave –

spontaneous, spreading, ungovernable – more properly so than the highly self-conscious and theorised *Nouvelle Vague*. It is definitely *not*, in my opinion, a 'genre', a term better used to denote *post facto* similarities in narrative construction and the stylistic handling of content.[10] The classification of films according to genres threatens to straight-jacket migrant and diasporic cinema, a phenomenon that is still emerging and has yet to assume its true dimensions. Conceiving of this relatively new type of European cinema, or even world cinema within Europe, as a single genre cannot account for the exuberant, simultaneous emergence of so many different voices working in completely different tones and timbres across most European cultures, voices that may choose, as time goes by, to explore their themes and concerns through the varied 'genres' (and their hybrids) discussed in academic discourse and successfully sold at the cinema door – from romantic comedy to horror (both of which have provided our *Babylonians* with useful points of reference). These voices should not be condescended to with closed-end definitions that seek to prescribe their concerns and circumscribe their output.

Whatever category is eventually chosen to describe migrant and diasporic film, it must respect the plurality of form, style and production implicitly advocated in the following statement by Reece Auguiste of the Black Audio Film Collective, aready quoted in the introduction:

> we [...] believe in giving privilege to historical and geographical contexts in the formation of our film sense. Independent film producers of the diaspora have a historical/cultural task which is to extend the boundaries of cinema as an apparatus capable of articulating our vision of the social world. Therefore, it is absolutely redundant to reproduce the filmic categories and organising

> principles of Third Cinema [or any other – GJ] theory in the metropolitan centres, for this amounts to an intellectual disservice to those who for many years mentally and physically laboured to make it a viable proposition within a particular geographical context. (Auguiste in Pines and Willemen 1991: 215)

Amongst many other potential wrong turns, it is vital to resist the equation: Films of migration and diaspora mean art house film. Migrant and diasporic concerns already command large budgets and reach diverse audiences. Are we to banish these films from the diasporic hearth on the grounds of their commercial success and crossover appeal? Of course, migrant filmmakers have as much right as anyone to make art films, and are possibly best placed to do so. Of course one must guard with the greatest vigilance against the dilution of intensity, the compromise of vision and the recuperation of message that the commercial machine threatens to impose. But the mindset that tells us 'small is authentic/big is bad' is a counsel of despair, leading only to empty cinemas and binned prints. The assumption that anything a minority filmmaker has to say can be of interest only to an educated minority leads only to a double ghetto.

Migrant and diasporic cinema can be regarded as distinct from all the related fields excavated in the editors' framework chapter at the beginning of this volume. It denotes firstly a thematic area of concern, secondly a source of biographical engagement, thirdly a growing social phenomenon and fourthly a wave of films that may indeed become a movement. Most importantly, migrant and diasporic cinema contains a fertile creative tension in the contrapuntal use of its complementary but by no means synonymous terms: 'migrant' connoting translocation and impermanence;

‘diasporic’ accommodation and engagement. In the dialogue between these two notions lies an entirely new discipline in film studies.

Filmography

Edeni i braktisur/Abandoned Eden (Albania 2004, dir. Eno Milkani)

Shalom Salaam (UK 1988, dir. Gareth Jones)

Z podniesionymi rekami/With Raised Hands (Poland 1986, dir. Mitko Panov)

Livada (Macedonia 1998, dir. Mitko Panov)

Comrades (Macedonia 2002, dir. Mitko Panov)

Tirana viti zero/Tirana Year Zero (Albania 2001, dir. Fatmir Koçi)

Odgrobadogroba/Gravehopping (Slovenia 2005, dir. Jan Cvitkovič)

East is East (UK 1999, dir. Damien O’Donnell)

Ors el-dhib/La Tendresse du Loup/Tender is the Wolf (Tunisia 2006, dir. Jilani Saadi)

Satin Rouge/Red Satin (Tunisia 2002, dir. Raja Amari)

Karamuk (Germany 2002, dir. Sülbiye Günar)

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[1] Elsaesser borrows the term ‘double occupancy’ from hotel brochures offering discounted room rates for two people sharing the same room and applies it to European cinema (2005: 129).

[2] All of Panov’s statements are taken from an interview with the author during Cinelink, Sarajevo, 7 May 2006.

[3] Cf. also Beumers on aspects of alienation and trauma for Russian *émigrés*, p. XX-XX.

[4] Protest to the Sydney Film Festival, Re: Offensive and inaccurate comments about Slovenia Saturday, June 10, 2006 Source: Jozko Rutar, Producer *Gravehopping*

[5] See Göktürk on ‘the rhetoric of ‘the clash of civilizations’ […], an infamous and detrimental formula, which has tended to breed the conflict that it predicts’, p. XX.

[6] All of Qureshi’s statements are taken from an interview with the author, 20 July 2007.

[7] Lee’s quotations are taken from an E-mail from the author, 20 August 2007.

[8] See Tarr on *Babylon* participants Sülbiye Günar, Seyhan Derin and Ayse Polat, pp. XX-XX. For a detailed discussion of *Karamuk*, see Berghahn (forthcoming).

[9] At the time of going to press, one *Babylon* film has been shot and is currently in post-production: *The War is Over* by Mitko Panov.

[10] For more on the question of genre see Berghahn/Sternberg, pp. XX-XX.