

Passing the Rainbow

Sandra Schäfer

Circulation 1

The following sequence of video stills and images are from the film project *Passing the Rainbow*. The shooting of the film took place 2004 and 2006 in Kabul. The point of departure for the work on the film was the making of another film: the first Afghan feature film since the Taliban took over in 1996, *Osama* by Siddiq Barmak. *Osama* was made in Kabul, after the end of the Taleban regime in November 2002. I joined the shooting of *Osama* and was particularly interested in documenting Barmak's filmic reconstruction of an historic demonstration of women against the Taliban regime.

Circulation 2

In 2004 I travelled to Kabul together with Elfe Brandenburger. We were curious to find out which women – so shortly after the collapse of the Taliban regime – dared to participate as extras in such a demonstration, even though masked by the burka. In spite of it being a staging for a film, the mere occurrence of the staging was obviously highly symbolically charged. Barmak had planned to work with 200 women as extras for the scene, but 1000 travelled to participate – many more than expected. We were interested in asking what these women's motives for participating were; and what effects acting in the re-staging had on them.? Which forms of resistance existed for women who were against the Taliban regime; and what strategies are still used by them in their current daily life? These questions became the linking threads running through our own film project, *Passing the Rainbow*.

In our film, we did not distinguish between fictional and documentary scenes. Rather we are interested in different performative strategies applied in daily life, for political work as well as for acting, and the seamless cross-overs and interactions between these. Also, we were interested in the reasons and intentions behind the protagonists becoming involved in our project. Methodically, we decided to fictionalize some scenes – and others not. Through the fictionalization, we wanted to underline that the film and the issues at stake were not about individual fates, but rather about social conflicts. We had many conversations with some of the women in question. But we couldn't just put these directly in the film. To show the conversations with the real people in public would have led to big difficulties for those involved. It was important for us that, from the very beginning, to be able to screen the film in Afghanistan – as well as in the so-called 'West'. To produce a film for one political context only, would not have been possible anyway, as pirate copies and mobile phone recordings get distributed beyond every political border. This dilemma was exactly at the core of our project.

In 2006, we went back to Kabul with our rough cut, in order to discuss it with those involved. After the feedback, some scenes were altered or even totally edited out. For example, the actress Breshna Bahar asked us to take out a scene in which she dances. Another protagonist who had meanwhile become married into a very conservative family, was not allowed to act or to be seen in films anymore at all. As the scenes we shot with her were important, we did not want to cut them out entirely. Instead, we developed a blur-effect that abstracts facial features without obliterating them. This is how she appears in the movie now – as a figure, but not

immediately recognizable. Moreover, there were further protagonists in the film who did not want to be recognized for different reasons: an activist of the clandestine organisation Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA); women who were forbidden to act in films by their husbands, brothers or sons; and a girl who lives as a boy for to make a living for her family.

Circulation 3

The 'crossing of the rainbow' refers to an Afghan myth, which says that girls or boys can change their sex when crossing the rainbow. This story is told by tells the grandmother to her granddaughter in the film *Osama*, before she cuts off her granddaughter's hair. In our film *Passing the Rainbow* we refer with the title to this myth; and a pupil tells the myth when she speaks about the film *Osama*. Furthermore, *Passing the Rainbow* aimed to cross and challenge in different ways gender binarity, as well as other kinds of normative processes.

Circulation 4

We refer in our film to the ways other filmmakers tackle the representation of gender in their films. Besides *Osama*, we also joined the making of the commissioned educational film *Little Carpet Makers* by Razi Mohebi – which was about the topic birth control. Furthermore, we included clips from the historic epic *Rabia-e Balkhi* (*Rabia from Balkh*, 1974) by Daoud Farani, Mohammad Nazir, Toryalay Shafaq and Khaleq A'lil. Rabia-e Balkhi is about the first poetess who spoke Farsi – she lived in the 10th century in the Balkh province. She fell in love with a serf called Bakhtash and believed that love could transcend class differences. Rabia was subsequently murdered by her brother out of lust for power and envy. In Afghanistan, she represents one of the most famous female icons of resistance. Her poems are part of the collective memory and many girls' schools are named after her. Moreover, we included clips from the action film *Qanun* (*The Law*, 2004) by Saba Sahar. The film is about a policewoman who fights against corruption, sexual harassment and child kidnapping. Saba Sahar, who works as a policewoman in her real life, plays the role of the super heroine in this homemade action movie.

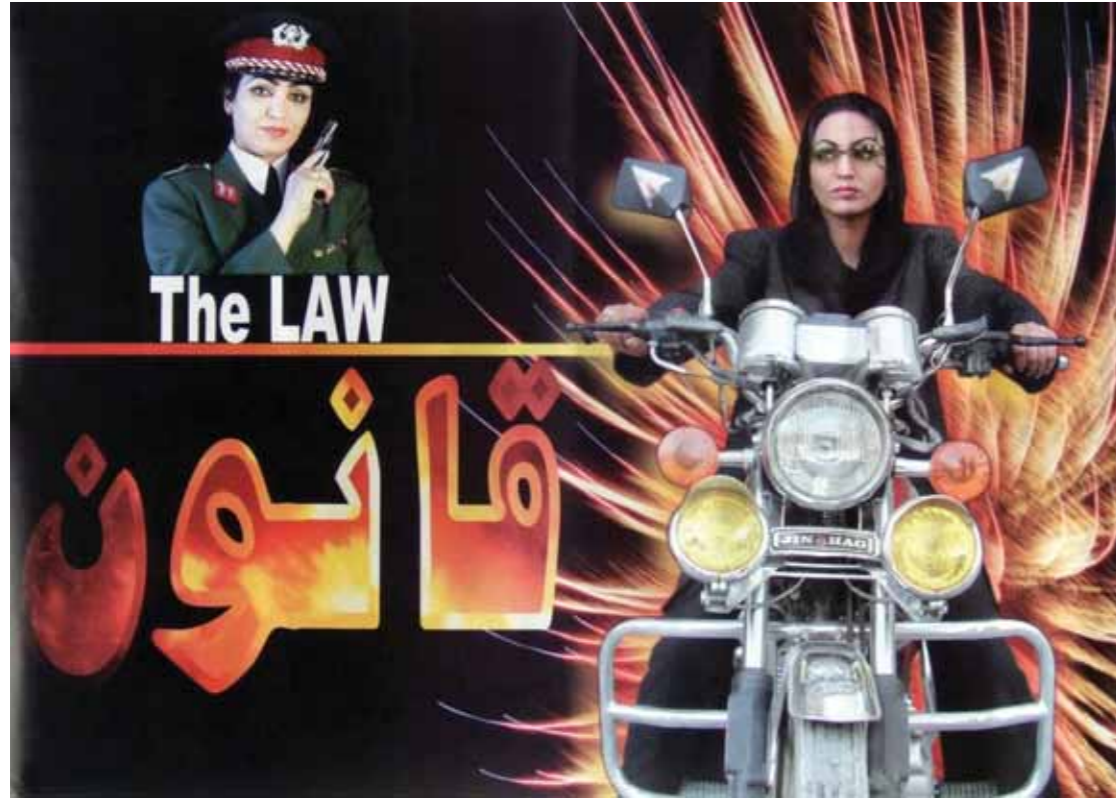
Circulation 5

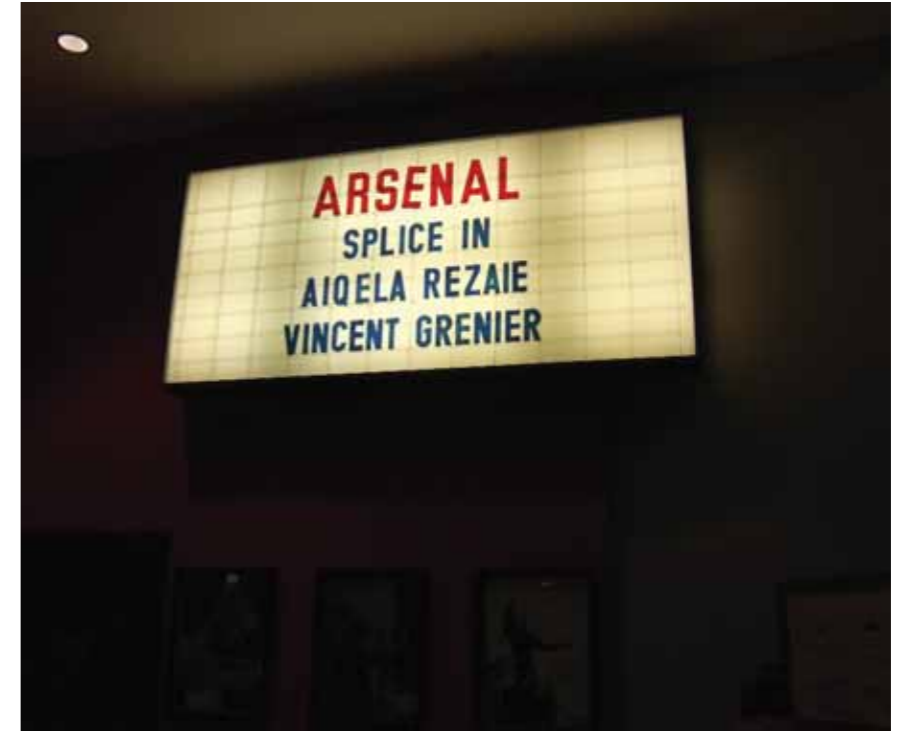
The film was shown for the first time in Kabul in May 2008 in the context of the festival, 'SecondECOND TakeAKE Gender and Society in Cinema'. The festival was curated by Elfe Brandenburger and Ime in cooperation with the artist group CACA-Kabul and Zara Zandieh.

Our film provoked antagonism. Some found the film too 'polyphonic'. Others regarded this as its strength – specifically the way it 'crossed the rainbow' in dramaturgic terms.

The 2008 video installation *To act in history* reflects the creative process behind *Passing the Rainbow* as well as its reception in Kabul and Berlin, and it uses historical images to trace the representation of women in Afghanistan.

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Captions

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The director and actress Saba Sahar playing a police woman in her action film *Qanun* (The Law), which she made herself in 2004. She fights as a super heroine against corruption, children kidnapping and sexual abuse. Also, in her main job, she works as a police woman.

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We staged a scene, in which Aiqela Rezaie plays the role of a president who invites citizens to consultations in her helicopter. A couple asks for her advice, about how their daughter is treated by the family she has just been married into. This scene we shot 2006 in Kabul, after we found out that one of our protagonists was married into a very conservative family, who forbade her to act in films. We shot the scene with the president for to pick up on this topic and for to contextualize the blur effect that we put on her figure afterwards.

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1 Meeting with some of the actresses playing widows in the film *Osama*. Some women wear a chador in front of the camera. The chador becomes a media-strategic masking that allows speaking in public, allowing those speaking to remain anonymous.

2 When we came back with the rough cut in 2006, we found that a woman who took part in our film was married into a very conservative family and could no longer appear on the screen. Since we didn't want to take out the scenes in which she acted, we created a blur-effect that abstracts facial features without obliterating them. For the screening in Kabul in 2008, we intensified the effect through a negative mask.

3 Maleka, a girl who lives as a boy, insisted that we record only sound and no image. For the film we created an image-montage, which gives the spectator the impression that the conversation took place in a car looking out of the window. Parts of the montage show the meeting place for day labourers in Kabul where Maleka goes for to look for work.

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In 2007, our film *Passing the Rainbow* is shown in Berlin within the frame of the festival SplicePLICE InN. We organized the festival to focus on gender and local political and filmic practices in Afghanistan, its neighbouring countries, and Europe. The following extract is taken from the debate between an Afghan actress and an Afghan film director living in Finland after the screening of a work in progress version of *Passing the Rainbow* at the festival Splice In *SPLICE IN* in Berlin.

SHAKIBA ADIL:

"This question depends on the family. There are fanatic families that don't allow their daughters to decide on something independently. But there are also more tolerant families, like Aiqela's family, who that allows their daughter to work in film, television and theatre. It is not as if no progress has been made. We had twenty years of war in Afghanistan. Time is needed for people to return to normality."

AIOELA REZAIE:

"Unfortunately, there are wrong ideas worldwide about the conditions in Afghanistan. If a young woman really makes an effort to work in film, she can assert her interest and nobody can prevent her from doing so."

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In spring 2008, the SPLICE IN Festival is continued in Kabul, we call it SECOND TAKE. The following extract is taken from the debate after the screening of *Passing the Rainbow* at the festival SECOND TAKE.

SCHOOLGIRL:

"My name is Adela Adil, I am a schoolgirl at Marefat grammar school. The film is about the situation of women. I think that women have their own moral concepts. In one scene of this film, it was stated that women should take their rights with violence. In the past decades we have seen that violence cannot solve the problems. What does the term "violence" mean in the context of women's rights?"

SANDRA SCHÄFER:

"I think it was a statement from one of the participants, Saba Sahar, saying that rights must be taken by force. But that is not the intention of our film. We introduce many different strategies of women in our film. So I wouldn't say that the film's statement is that women should take their rights with violence, but that it is one statement among many."

ELFE BRANDENBURGER:

"Saba Sahar is not saying that rights should be claimed with military violence but more as it is seen in the following scene, where the man follows the woman and she must strike back to protect herself."

Passing the Rainbow is a film by Sandra Schäfer and Elfe Brandenburger
Images in this photospread: Sandra Schäfer, Zara Zandieh

Circulating Artworks

Neil Cummings

Markets

Markets are a brilliant bundle of technologies, assembled to circulate *things*. All kinds of *things*. The most visible form of market is the competitive market. A neo-classical economic model of a competitive market pictures rational individuals pursuing their own self-interest – without regard for others – as the motive force for markets. The laws of supply and demand at play amongst these rational individuals extrudes the values – often represented by a financial price – exchanged in any transaction. These fundamental elements; rational agents, supply and demand and price mechanisms function in all markets everywhere, like natural laws.

Except, of course, competitive markets don't actually work like this. Or at least, only in ideological models.

Principally this is because the neo-classical model is spectacularly under-socialised. Enabling values to be made, and made present, is part of the work that markets do. And every value expressed as a price is a nexus of myriad social processes. Markets are meshes of embedded desires, needs, rules, technologies, rituals and obligations, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the markets for the circulation of contemporary art.

Outside of public museums, and some secretive private collections, artworks circulate through competitive markets. But *how* does this circulation take place? What are these embedded desires, rules, behaviours and obligations? The bankruptcy of art history, the public failure of criticism and art theory, the lack of consensus over the relevance of art, has enabled the values of competitive markets to dominate our recent evaluations of contemporary art. And markets mark the things that circulate within them.¹

Primary Market

The circulation of contemporary artworks is structured by two competitive markets – and prices in one, are routinely half that of the other.² The primary market is convened by gallerists who organise and manage 'commercial' galleries. Whether as small, single-person enterprises or vast corporate machines, what gallerists share is the desire to work directly with artists, to promote their work through exhibitions, and to sell their artworks to potential collectors.

To become a gallerist is easy; the start-up costs are extremely small – some enthusiasm, contacts, a small exhibition and office space, and an advertising budget. There are no formal qualifications necessary; no indemnity required, no trade association to join, and no regulatory bodies. The primary market is virtually without a 'formal' professional structure. It's also easy to attract a group of artists keen to exhibit, and typically a gallery will 'represent' between 10 and 25 of them. To be 'represented', usually means that an artist will be offered a solo exhibition annually or bi-annually and their artworks will be included in appropriate gallery group