

In Retrospect

Interview with Sandra Schäfer, Zara Zandieh and a fictive person named MAZY, who combines the opinions and remarks of different persons thematically involved in the SPLICE IN project.

conducted by Karin Rebbert on 01/21/09

*KARIN REBBERT: I would like to begin the interview with questions related to how the individual projects originated. What is the relationship between the film *Passing the Rainbow*, the overall project *SPLICE IN*, the *SPLICE IN* festival and its continuation *SECOND TAKE* in Kabul?*

SANDRA SCHÄFER: The film *Passing the Rainbow* was made prior to the festival and it was the reason why I came to Afghanistan in the first place. At the time, however, the film project still looked entirely different as far as its content was concerned. I travelled to Tehran in 2002, among other reasons, to look for the Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf. He was in Kabul at the time to assist Siddiq Barmak in shooting the film *Osama*. We, that is Sonia Shafi and I, then spontaneously decided to travel to Kabul, where we were subsequently invited to participate in the shooting of *Osama*. That was the starting point of the film *Passing the Rainbow*. On the first day of shooting, a demonstration of women against the Taleban regime, or rather, against women being banned from working, was re-enacted. 1,000 women came to the shooting, something which no-one on the set had expected. I documented the shooting, more in a sketchy way, and after returning to Berlin, Elfe Brandenburger and I edited the short film *The Making of a Demonstration* from that material. But for us, it remained rather incomplete. We asked ourselves how it had actually come about that so many women decided to take part in the shooting. We wanted to learn more about the work of actresses who now play in a large number of new productions. They partially or mostly work as lay actresses and strongly include their own experiences in the roles they play. We viewed many films that were produced at the time, in 2002/2003, and there were also the first female filmmakers in Afghanistan who started making in part journalistic films; but Roya Sadat, for example, was already working on her feature film *Se Noqta* (Three Dots). In 2003, within the frame of the Ersatzstadt/SubstituteCity project, I worked together with Jochen Becker and Madeleine Bernstorff on the film festival *Kabul/Teheran 1979ff: Filmlandschaften, Städte unter Stress und Migration* that took place at the Volksbühne in Berlin. Three years later, the book of the same name was published by the Berlin-based *b_books* publisher. In 2006 Elfe and I returned to Kabul and continued working on the film *Passing the Rainbow*. Within the frame of our research, we stood in close contact with activists, as well as with actresses and female directors. The funding of our film project, which we applied for at the German Federal Culture Foundation, actually led to conceiving the other projects. We were not allowed to submit only a film project; the requirement was to offer a kind of supporting program. And so we thought about taking up the issues raised in our film *Passing the Rainbow* and compiling a film and discussion program in Germany and Kabul that presents different local strategies and methods of dealing with gender, gender roles and role attributions, and relating them to the local debates in neighbouring countries and in Europe. We intended to create a shift in regard to the theme of women in Afghanistan, which is repeatedly instrumentalized by national and international players. So the actual starting point was the film *Passing the Rainbow*, but then *SPLICE IN* and *SECOND TAKE* were added as independent yet closely linked elements.

*REBBERT: Could you tell us something about the titles *SPLICE IN* and *SECOND TAKE*?*

SCHÄFER: *SPLICE IN* is a term from film editing and refers to a function of the editing program Avid, Elfe's and my favourite function. It allows you to insert something in an existing sequence without overwriting anything. This leads to a change in the dramaturgy.

For us, it was a very fundamental thought that in the films, which we then looked for together with Regine Dura and Zara Zandieh, the issue was to change the existing conditions, for example, on the level of gender and society. We were interested in the different forms of these interventions. The title SECOND TAKE came up when Zara and I sat together with Malek Shafi'i, Diana Saqeb and Ali Mohammad Karimi in Kabul and tried to translate the term SPLICE IN into Dari. It turned out that there was simply no equivalent. The discussion also revealed that, with the festival taking place in Kabul and through our cooperation, something new was emerging, and therefore the need for a new title. Even if we couldn't generate an entirely new program, due to reasons of financing and time, we did adjust and alter the selection of films for Kabul. And so we finally came up with the term SECOND TAKE, which also signifies repetition and changes through repetition. With it, we refer to a concept in cinematic language and indirectly to SPLICE IN as well. In Dari, it is called Bardosht-e dowom.

ZARA ZANDIEH: Ali was the one who finally came up with idea of SECOND TAKE. Literally translated, Bardosht-e dowom means *the second interpretation*. So it doesn't have the exact same meaning as *Second Take*. When we thought about what a good festival title could be, it became clear in the discussion that especially Ali and Malek wanted to establish a relation to women and the views of women. Diana, Sandra and I, on the other hand, had different reasons why we did not want a title implying that we are showing films by women and that their views are *women-specific*. We then agreed on BARDOSHT-E DOWOM / SECOND TAKE, because this title allows a more open interpretation: It can be understood discursively and is at the same time a cinematic term.

SCHÄFER: I remember that the term was interpreted by Malek and Ali in a very gender-binary (in the sense of: the other sex) way, by Diana less so, and by us not at all. At least I didn't, I can't remember: What is was like for you, Zara? At first I wasn't aware of this connotation at all, because I didn't conceive the term within the binary of male-female. But due to the linguistic difference and the social environment that is organised in a strictly gender-binary way, the interpretation of the title also underwent a shift.

REBBERT: Could you describe the focus of your work on the festival in more detail? What were your interests when compiling the program? According to which aspects did you put the program together, and what played a role in varying and slightly altering it in the Afghan part?

MAZY: The intention from the very start, both in the German and Afghan part, was to not only show films *from* Afghanistan but also to present views *of* Afghanistan, e.g., films by filmmakers in exile or from other countries. This is made clear by two films that were already part of the program in Kassel, Berlin and Hamburg, *Kabul Transit* by Maliha Zulfacar, David Edwards and Gregory Whitmore as well as *Postcards from Tora Bora* by Wazmah Osman and Kelly Dolak. The sociologist and current Afghan ambassador in Berlin, Maliha Zulfacar, lived in exile for a long period of time. In her film she examines the machinations of so-called aid organisations and war profiteers. She takes on a distanced and relentless position that doesn't shy away from exposing the ridiculousness and hypocrisy of military security missions and reconstruction efforts. The very personal film of Wazmah Osman argues and narrates in a totally different fashion. She had spent her childhood in Kabul and returned to Afghanistan for the first time after 20 years. Osman and her colleague originally wanted to make a film about the situation of the women living there. They chose the topic in response to the instrumentalization of Afghan women's issues by US foreign policies. Overwhelmed by her memories, Wazmah Osman and her colleague changed the subject of the film shortly after arriving in Kabul. The film now focuses on life in exile and the relationship between vague memories and the changed present. Osman and Dolak combine super 8 recordings of Osman's family from the 1960s and 70s with images of the present. The film is about the relationship between Osman and her father which is characterised by his absence, since he had decided to live in Afghanistan and fight in the resistance. As a rare guest, he occasionally visited his family in the United States. The filmmakers intervene in this history by filling the gaps between wish and reality with animations they created themselves. We

selected this film because the experience of exile strongly shapes current Afghan society. We liked the way in which the filmmakers intervene in this history in a playful manner and rewrite (his)stories by means of animations.

A further aspect of the film selection was to establish a connection back to Europe. We did not only want to problematize the situation in Afghanistan, but also the way in which migrants and refugees are treated in Germany, for example. The film *Ungeduldig* deals with a group of young people from Afghanistan, India, Iran and Sierra Leone, who have to live in Hamburg with an insecure residence permit status.

SCHÄFER: The festivals in Germany also differed in regard to their dramaturgy. The range and sequence of films was different in Berlin compared to Kassel. In Berlin we screened Zara's film "*Such a strange time it is, my dear...*", for example, about female Iranians living in exile. They fled to West Berlin after the revolution due to the brutal purges. The interviewees speak about their relation to political work, the revolution, sexuality, and flight. We concluded the program in Berlin with a discussion on film production in Afghanistan, while the festival in Kassel ended with the film *Ungeduldig* by Hamburg youths on the exceptional leave to remain, which Mazy just mentioned. It was also important for us to bring different genres together. We showed documentaries and feature films, shorts and also historical feature films from the archive of Afghan Films. With these historical feature films, we wanted to refer to the brief history of Afghan cinema, but also show that there had been a modernity in Afghanistan, at least in the cities, where gender relations were negotiated in a different manner.

REBBERT: You strongly deal with questions of representation. You actually described it already, but perhaps you could make it more pointed: How do you describe your access to national representation?

SCHÄFER: We were absolutely not interested in national representation. We were instead interested in individual strategies that are anchored in a very specific and local way. For example, when we showed the film *Nari Adalat* (Women's Courts) by Deepa Dhanraj from India, we did not primarily intend to draw a comparison to the situation in Afghanistan, but to present this informal practice of women in the province of Gujarat and put it up for debate. The way they intervene in the hierarchical and male-dominated legal system cannot be directly applied to the situation in Afghanistan, where the political and social preconditions are entirely different.

In the supporting program in Kassel, there was a discussion between the jurist Kabeh Rastin-Tehrani, who is working on a research project dedicated to family law for the Hamburg Max-Planck Institute, and Deepa Dhanraj, who deals with informal practices in her activist and feminist work. Rastin-Tehrani worked on a textbook on family law in Afghanistan dealing with the interpretation and teaching of written family law. Her book was financed by the German Foreign Ministry that provided a financial package for supporting projects that further so-called reconstruction in Afghanistan. A highly controversial and interesting discussion commenced between them. Among other things, Deepa Dhanraj formulated fundamental criticism regarding the question of why the examples in Rastin-Tehrani textbook only refer to countries with Islamic jurisdiction. Based on her own activist experience, she also critically noted that hoping for change via official legislation is too tedious and ultimately ineffective. It was our intention to enable such encounters and confront positions based on very different political self-understandings and in part question each other. In this respect, our approach was actually a fragmented way of working. It was not at all our intention to invoke something like a national identity and the authentic view from the inside that is associated with it, to then claim: Here we now have the authentic Afghan filmmakers who can finally show us what it's like in Afghanistan. These kinds of approaches, which are reminiscent of the colonial methods of exhibiting at world fairs, are ultimately racist.

REBBERT: With which local groups did you cooperate, how did these cooperations originate, and what did your collaboration look like?

SCHÄFER: In Germany we first cooperated with the Kassel Documentary Film and Video Festival and the Kulturzentrum Schlachthof. We then thought it would make sense, since the films and guests were already in Germany, to have the festival also take place in Berlin, where we live. Milena Gregor from the Freunde der deutschen Kinemathek offered us great support. It was planned from the very beginning to show a selection of the festival at the Kino Metropolis in Hamburg, for that is where the largest Afghan exile community lives. During the shooting of *Passing the Rainbow* in Kabul, we mainly spoke with Engineer Latif Ahmadi, the head of the state-run institution Afghan Films, about the festival, as well as with other cultural producers. Latif Ahmadi responded very euphorically to the idea, which we were very happy about. The decision to cooperate with Afghan Films was already made at that point. During the further course of the project, we realised that Afghan Films is quite a huge enterprise and that it could be helpful to involve a partner that is organised in a way similar to our group, mazefilm. That's why we then approached Malek Shafi'i of the artists' group CACA Kabul. He had already gained experience organising a festival through his collaboration in the Kabul Documentary Film Festival. He was very eager to participate, and because we by all means wanted to work together with women, he then suggested his colleague Diana Saqeb and also Mohammad Ali Karimi. That's how our cooperation with Malek, Diana and Ali came about. At the time, they were still called CACA Kabul. They were a small initiative of filmmakers that edited Mohammad Ali Karimi's film magazine *Honarmand*. They continue to produce and edit films themselves and also organise film screenings – so they are actually structured in a similar way we were at the time. Malek, Diana and Ali, in addition to Engineer Latif Ahmadi, then became invaluable counterparts for us and contributed important elements to the film program of *SECOND TAKE* in Kabul. For example, they suggested inviting the filmmaker Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, who lives in Tehran, and screening one of her films. They had already made preparations for that and even acquired money.

ZANDIEH: Another important moment in our cooperation with Malek, Diana and Ali was that we jointly discussed and then altered Sandra's and my initial considerations on the dramaturgy of the festival program. For example, Malek and Diana thought that *25 Darsad*, which deals with the political work and the private lives of six female members of parliament, would be a good opening film in Kabul. For the film possesses a certain relevance to the present situation in Afghanistan, which other films of the program do not have in such a direct way; they thought it would directly address the audience. And that turned out to work very well.

REBBERT: What function did the educational films from Afghanistan that you screened have?

SCHÄFER: That was a bit tricky, because these films weren't received well in Kabul. Our group in Berlin (Elfe Brandenburger, Regine Dura, Sandra Schäfer, and Zara Zandieh) had decided that it is important to show these films. For since 2001, this has evolved to become a genre of its own that is closely tied to the funding of Western aid organisations. The financial backers often make requirements regarding what is to be cinematically implemented in which way. Many filmmakers produce these films to make money or to be able to shoot films in the first place. Because we did not only want to show high-art films, we decided to include educational feature films in the program.

MAZY: In this way, questions could be raised as to which values are transported by them. Are there only educational feature films about mines that pose a threat to children and others, or do the interventions on the side of these Western institutions go significantly further? For example in the areas of family planning, trust in the pharmaceutical industry etc. We also viewed the educational feature films under this aspect.

SCHÄFER: In Kassel and Berlin, it was important for us to show that these educational feature films exist and to address the influence of international funders and their claim to implementing democracy. For Kabul, we jointly decided to screen only one educational feature film, which was immediately and fiercely criticised by the audience afterwards. The

debate in Kabul is certainly different than in Germany. In Kabul, everyone is dealing with how to produce, how to circumvent the requirements etc. Diana also got into great difficulties with her film *25 Darsad*. Despite the official acceptance by the protagonists and the financial backers, she was only supposed to show her film abroad. But she had produced it above all for Afghanistan. After tedious negotiations with the financial backers and talks with the protagonists, she had to re-edit the film before it could be shown at the SECOND TAKE Festival in Kabul, where it triggered a very interesting debate on what filmmakers show and what they omit.

REBBERT: How did the seminar in Kabul originate?

SCHÄFER: We already had the idea of a supporting program in Germany and the idea to conceive something equivalent in Kabul. Since we had already begun with the debate on the theme of family law in Afghanistan at the festivals in Germany and wanted to examine it in more depth, we tried to find partners in Kabul who have been working on these themes over a longer period of time. This is something we wanted to take up, and as early as February, before travelling to Kabul, we formulated a number of questions in Germany and sent them to various women in Kabul to hear what they had to say. We wanted to find out what they thought about it or whether the debate was currently a totally different one in Kabul.

REBBERT: They were activists and filmmakers?

SCHÄFER: They were mainly activists and jurists, because the seminar was to predominantly address activists or women working in politics. During the course of our work, it again went more strongly in that direction. There was a group of women who were interested, and the Afghan Women's Network said they could also imagine playing a role. That's an NGO with its headquarters in Kabul which functions like a network including around 70 NGOs and 3,000 women dealing with women's and gender issues in their work. When we were in Kabul, it became clear that the Afghan Women's Network, as an organisation, might be too large for what we wanted. Malek and Diana then suggested cooperating with the organisation Armanshahr. Armanshahr/OpenAsia was co-founded in 1996 by the Iranian Guissou Jahangiri and first had its headquarters in Tajikistan. Since 2001, there have been concrete projects headed by Guissou in Kabul. Armanshahr explicitly understands itself not as an NGO, and its work aims at democracy and peace-building, as well as contributing to maintaining human rights. They accompany reading groups, deal with gender topics, publish books, and regularly organise the seminar Goftegu, to which they invite politicians, theorists, activists, poets and so forth to publicly debate certain issues. After our first meeting, we could very well imagine cooperating with them.

REBBERT: Could you describe what the intention of the seminar was, and who was involved in it?

ZANDIEH: There were many reasons why Sandra and I did not want to organise the seminar on our own. On the one hand, our timeframe was very tight. What was more important, though, was that we didn't know enough about the discussions and debates of politically active women in Kabul and Afghanistan. As Sandra already mentioned, we got to know Azra Jafari and Guissou Jahangiri through Malek; both were strongly involved in Armanshahr at the time. During our first meeting, we all thought about what themes could be important for the invited participants and drew up a thematic framework. According to the two, it was above all important to advance the networking between the already existing women's organisations.

REBBERT: Could you name the main thematic focuses of the seminar?

SCHÄFER: The title of the seminar was Strengthening Women's Movements – National and Transnational Experiences. It was about focusing not only on Afghanistan, but inviting activists from other countries as well. Marzieh Mortazi Langroudi from Mothers for Peace

was invited from Iran and Sharifa Khanam from STEPS from India. And Muborak Sharipova from Tajikistan was also to come, but in the end she could not participate.

In terms of content, the main theme was NGOism and questions related to the influence of all the international aid money, which strongly finances the local NGOs. Several NGOs have already been working for decades, others have sprung up like mushrooms since 2001. What does this precisely mean for local political work? Is it foremost jobs that are created through this, or is it also about content-related politicization? Or does it even prevent politicization? What content-related requirements are linked to the financial support? Are the various activities connected with each other, and what effect can they have? So it was very important for us that not only activists were invited to the seminar, but also members of parliament and jurists, women from different sectors of society. We wanted to take up the already existing debates of the past years and to reflect together on what functions and what does not.

A further thematic focus was on concrete informal practices. The activist work of Sharifa Khanam in India played an important role here. She founded STEPS in 1987, because she was dissatisfied with the male-dominated Muslim councils of elders (jamaats) in the province of Tamil Nadu. STEPS campaigns for women's rights: freedom of violence, work with women, the right to health and public security. Via a women's jamaat that it founded, STEPS attempts to intervene in the decision-making processes of the male-dominated jamaats. They are also in the process of building a mosque for women.

ZANDIEH: It was very important that Sharifa Khanam managed to come and present the work she does in South India. I think that the work of STEPS was exciting for many seminar participants, because the debates and solutions as well as the resulting scopes for action offered numerous possible points of departure.

SCHÄFER: The contribution of Marzieh Mortazi Langroudi from Iran also played an important role in this context. Like Sharifa Khanam, she defines herself as a Muslim and in the Islamic Republic of Iran campaigns for women's rights in the initiative Mothers for Peace. In her political work, she deliberately distinguishes herself from the Western concept of feminism and grasps herself as part of a postcolonial movement seeking specific local strategies. At the beginning of her political work, the thoughts of Ali Shariati played a pivotal role, who in 1959 during a study visit in Paris collaborated with the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) and who contributed to spreading the thoughts of Frantz Fanon among Iranian resistance groups in exile as well as in Iran. Among others, he translated an anthology of Frantz Fanon into Farsi. A part of the work of Marzieh Mortazi Langroudi consists in standing up for female inmates in Tehran's prisons.

In Iran there is this strange anachronism: After the revolution, the liberties of women from the secular middle and upper class were restricted significantly more than those of women from a religious background – above all the lower middle class and underclass. The latter participated far less in public life beforehand. Since public places such as universities now comply with the moral Muslim expectations, male family members are more willing to let women participate, and Muslim women are fighting for their rights. I had the impression that solidarity set in among the women during the seminar.

REBBERT: Was it a closed workshop? I know, you avoid the word...

SCHÄFER: Yes, there was a long debate surrounding the word workshop, which nobody wants to hear anymore in Afghanistan. For in the first years after 2001, one workshop after the next was organised. So we opted for the word seminar. Many people also associate the word workshop with the idea that foreigners are again coming to teach them how things should function.

ZANDIEH: Another point of criticism was that it is not possible to work on a theme in the long term during a one-day event, that not much could be developed and that it was more about coming together in regard to certain points.

REBBERT: The workshops are financed by foreign money?

SCHÄFER: Yes, and participation is usually honoured by daily allowances. Many people just come to pocket their daily allowances. In regard to content, many of these workshops gained no traction.

REBBERT: Was the seminar a public one or was it a meeting for invited experts?

SCHÄFER: It was not a public seminar but a meeting for invited persons. We discussed who to invite, and the number was to be limited in order to enable a discussion. The event took place in a schoolroom in the French secondary school Esteqlal. As opposed to a lecture situation in a large hall where people are scattered, the room was manageable and enabled debate. That was important for everyone.

REBBERT: These are very different formats: the seminar bringing invited guests together and allowing them to discuss, the film talks or the public panels. There was to be one panel on Afghan television production. Maybe you could give more details on that, so it becomes clear when and where it took place.

SCHÄFER: It was supposed to take place in Kassel and not Kabul, but it had to be cancelled due to visa problems. One of the panel participants who had a visa to enter Germany was prevented in Dubai from travelling on via Vienna because of a lacking Schengen visa. This caused the arrival of our Afghan guests to be delayed for several days, and so the panel could not take place. The idea of the panel was that we wanted to address not just television, but the relation of television and film production. We wanted to discuss with players from Afghanistan how they actually produce their films, who finances them and where they are shown. There are about eleven cinemas in Afghanistan. What is distribution like after the film is completed? What role does the international reception in the form of festival screenings and sales to television broadcasters play?

REBBERT: What is it like in the different markets?

SCHÄFER: What we wanted to know was: How does the market respond to the films and what effects does that have on one's own production? Where would directors like to have their films shown? For whom do they produce? And how does the production situation differ for men and women? Are there differences or not? Our idea for Kabul was to include the questions of the panel in the film talks and not to organise a separate panel. That had to do with our tight timeframe. The festival program took place each day from 2 to 6 p.m. to allow women, but also youths, to take part in the film events at the Lycée Esteqlal. Prolonging the program would always have meant excluding these groups.

REBBERT: Perhaps you can describe who made up the various audiences – both at the festival parts in Germany and in Kabul. You already started mentioning how it was in Kabul...

SCHÄFER: I had the impression that the festival in Kabul was a much bigger social event. We had a large number of visitors each day, on average 500, something we had not expected, because there was the attack against the president, Hamid Karzai, a day before the festival began. The political situation in the city was quite tense. One city district was entirely sealed off, because the attempt was made to capture the suspected terrorists there. I think that's the reason why less internationals came...

ZANDIEH: Yes, several internationals whom we had invited did not come.

SCHÄFER: Yes, because there are then always these security classifications. "White City", for instance, means that the internationals should not leave their homes. And that's something you also noticed in the streets, there were hardly any of these large jeeps they usually drive underway. Compared with Germany, there was a much broader range of

spectators that came to the festival in Kabul, pupils, men, women working in the field of film and television, activists, members of parliament etc.

ZANDIEH: It depended a lot on the daily program. For example, on the first day when we screened *25 Darsad*, the film about six female members of Afghanistan's parliament, three of them came on stage afterwards to talk with the audience. And because it was the first and most ceremonial day, many officials came.

The majority of the festival guests were men and young film students. On the last two days, Thursday and Friday – which is the weekend in Afghanistan – many families, women with their female friends and sisters, and many girls from a school, which our team had visited beforehand with two of our festival guests, attended.

MAZY: The fundamental difference to Germany was also that it was an independent festival in Kabul. The first part in Kassel was a festival within a festival, which is simply a special situation, meaning that there was a large program surrounding it anyway. The opening event in Kassel with the ambassador Maliha Zulfacar was almost completely sold-out, and it was an important event for the Afghan community in Kassel, because they could present themselves in a different way. The number of viewers varied strongly on the following days, mainly people from the Afghan community and those who were interested in specific films of the festival. In Berlin and Hamburg, *SPLICE IN* was integrated in the normal, ongoing cinema program – as a festival program, but not clearly separated in terms of content.

SCHÄFER: The festival in Berlin was actually well-attended, including the opening day in the large auditorium. By Berlin's standards, the audience was very mixed, there were many people from the Afghan exile community, but also many regular Arsenal visitors. And then there were huge differences between the individual screenings. The cinema was packed when we showed Zara's film on Iranians in exile in Berlin, for instance. Of course, many persons with an Iranian background came, for both the film team and the protagonists live in Berlin.

In Hamburg there were incredibly few spectators. That was really surprising, something I had not expected at all. For the largest Afghan exile community in Germany lives in Hamburg. I still wonder until today, how to address them best. I think we have to practice (laughs), build up communication. But I must also say that we heavily relied on the venue there, Kino Metropolis, and its public relations work. I think they were overtaxed, because it was a very specific program requiring a much stronger local link. That is something we underestimated, or rather something we couldn't do at the time, because we were already so busy with the festivals in Kassel and Berlin. What is more, Hamburg was planned as a sequel to the festival program without guests.

MAZY: What can also be said about Kassel, is that Elfe, Regine and Sandra worked together with Ayşe Güleç from the Schlachthof. The legal discussion took place at the Schlachthof, which is an extremely important intercultural venue and a place of migrant culture. Ayşe also moderated the final film of the festival, *Ungeduldig* from 2007. After the screening, she led the panel discussion together with those involved in the film and a housing group of underage youths who fled to Germany alone and now live in Kassel. That was a very good decision she made.

SCHÄFER: Exactly. I think there are many parallels between what Ayşe is working on and the issues of the film program. It was also very important that she was able to establish contact to certain groups in Kassel, something we couldn't do from Berlin.

REBBERT: How about the response of the audience at the different festival parts or to individual films? Do you want to or can you say something about that?

SCHÄFER: After the screening of excerpts of our film *Passing the Rainbow* in Berlin, I had the impression that the audience had the strong wish to find out whether the situation in Afghanistan really is the way we showed it in the film. Afghanistan is indeed perceived as a

very remote country that first needs to be elucidated. Our film refuses precisely this kind of access, since the staging and not the authentic character of presenting something is at the fore.

MAZY: Whereby one of your protagonists, Aiqela Rezaie, suddenly took on a surprising position during the public film talk in Berlin. There was a kind of reversal; she undermined all the expectations that it is very difficult for a woman or an actress in Afghanistan. She did not confirm these expectations, but instead reversed them.

SCHÄFER: Yes, she said that it's no problem at all; if you want to work as an actress in Afghanistan, you can. I thought, now she's undermining essential points of our film. I was a bit irritated and needed a while to understand why she reacted like this in the discussion situation.

MAZY: Then there was suddenly a discussion in the audience in Dari that couldn't really be translated simultaneously anymore, it developed its own dynamic.

SCHÄFER: Aiqela's statement was met with great opposition by other guests from Afghanistan, who partially live in the country and partially abroad. They criticised her and said that the situation is completely different; even if Aiqela's family is open-minded, it doesn't mean that other families are the same. I meanwhile think that there's another conflict behind this. It is about the way you face the Western horror scenarios of Afghanistan when visiting the West, without assuming the role of a victim. I would say that by saying what she did, Aiqela refused to take on this role of a victim. Regarding the way she manages her everyday life, the usual Western reflex of compassion is uncalled-for. Aiqela is the director of a girls' school, the main actress in an Afghan television series, a production assistant at the private TV broadcaster TOLO-TV and mother of three children. In comparison, the situation of Shakiba Adil and of Roya Sadat is different. They therefore pursue very different strategies. In Berlin, they couldn't or didn't want to comprehend Aiqela's line of argument.

REBBERT: And regarding the problematic of the social acceptance of specific life plans, like choosing the profession of an actress, you also made experiences when working on Passing the Rainbow, right? I remember that you had to make one figure anonymous. Could you briefly describe that?

SCHÄFER: While we were editing our film in Berlin, one of the protagonists was married into a very conservative family. We only learned about this after returning to Kabul with the rough cut, which we showed to all protagonists and discussed with them. The mother told us, it was out of the question that her daughter be seen in the film. She is now living under very difficult conditions in the new family, and they know nothing about their daughter-in-law having played in this film prior to the marriage. We didn't really know what to do, since we found her scenes to be very important within the overall dramaturgy. We then decided to create a kind of mask for her figure that would make her face anonymous without reducing her agility. We didn't want to cover her eyes with a black bar, which would have erased her person completely. We then shot an additional scene addressing this problematic.

REBBERT: There seems to have been an occurrence in Kabul similar to the Berlin conflict having to do with the situation of women in the field of film. Could you describe it?

SCHÄFER: There was a separate event at the university, a conversation between Rakhshan Bani-Etemad and film students, during which she claimed not being able to remember how hard it was for her at the beginning – especially as a female filmmaker – to produce her films. She argued as if there were no difference at all between men and women, because “we are all human beings”, or something along those lines. I somehow didn't believe her. In the discussion with the film students, this did not produce a conflict, interestingly enough. However, there was only one woman in the audience, because there are hardly any female film students at the university.

REBBERT: Could this have to do with the fact that one speaks differently in public?

ZANDIEH: That's what I also just thought... It could have to do with her speaking mainly in front of young males, and whatever her attitude may be, she wanted to transport something very specific at that moment. I can imagine that, in this context, she didn't want to represent female filmmakers as "weaker" or as "victims" of the social relations.

REBBERT: Of course, she also formulated a utopia or a goal that can be related to the working conditions and to what is visible; she negated gender inequality.

SCHÄFER: And she made herself less vulnerable by doing so. I found the atmosphere during the discussion a bit tense. Beforehand, the seminar leader had made an announcement, reminding the students to keep a polite tone in the presence of this significant guest. For the discussions were in part quite rough. When reading the film talk with Diana Saqeb again, I remember her saying at one point that there is either extreme admiration on the side of the audience or crushing criticism, but nothing in between. As an icon of Iranian cinema, Rakhshan Bani-Etemad was greatly admired by the students, so the fear of the seminar leader was unfounded. But from the fact that he pointed it out in the first place, one can come to the conclusion that he had his reasons. And during the film talks at the festival, we did experience how severely persons on the podium were criticised or called into question by the audience.

ZANDIEH: I found the atmosphere during the discussions with the audience to be one in which the films were taken apart or even torn apart. Most contributions were comments by film students of Kabul University, who compared the make of the films and the directors' decisions with European and Iranian cinema, which they adopted as their yardstick and beyond which they couldn't or didn't want to look. The subsequent film talks were therefore often like a kind of film seminar in which stylistic decisions and technical aspects of the films were addressed, but the contents of the films were almost never discussed – not to speak of asking the filmmakers open and interesting questions.

SCHÄFER: Certain technical standards were strongly presupposed. For example, *Passing the Rainbow* was criticised, because during interview situations there are not supposed to be any ambient noises. But if you sit in a flat in Kabul next to a busy street, it simply is extremely loud, and that is something we also wanted to convey so that the viewers can get an idea of this city. Based on this criticism, you noticed what is currently being taught, and that's why these people now talk the way they do.

ZANDIEH: I found it a pity that hardly any other voices except those applying scholarly, very Eurocentric standards were heard. Postcolonial approaches, for instance, were not discussed at all. In addition, always the same persons talked, and the moderation of the audience discussions had a hard time breaking open established patterns of speech. But that was basically no different than it is here and was therefore not Kabul-specific.

SCHÄFER: Yes, it turns out that always the same persons speak. Occasionally we used the strategy that the moderator specifically requested men and women to take turns speaking. After that, many more women and even female pupils got a word in, but that was something that had to be demanded time and again.

ZANDIEH: What also comes to my mind in regard to the film program: I had the feeling that, at the beginning, at least Malek and Diana weren't all too happy that we already had a fixed program, which left them with little freedom of action.

REBBERT: You mean they would have liked to compile the program completely anew together with you?

SCHÄFER: That would have been better. It would have been more fun. That's what I also meant at the beginning: It's such a shame that it was impossible to meet beforehand, before the program was conceived in Germany for Kassel and Berlin.

REBBERT: We've now spoken quite a bit about the reception, but I would like to ask one more question: What is your assessment of the coverage in the media? Let's maybe start with Kabul.

SCHÄFER: The media – television, radio and the press – took the festival as an occasion to interview various persons, not only from our team, but also very many actresses and directors. From our team, mainly Diana, but also Malek were interviewed. There was a decision in advance that Zara and I did not want to appear in public.

REBBERT: I find it important to first say that there was big interest in the festival, and that the media took it as an occasion to interview actors, actresses, directors etc., and by doing so certainly reiterated the event character. It's certainly not the case that such festivals currently take place each month in Kabul.

ZANDIEH: Yes, here in Berlin, many festivals take place and it's therefore hard to stand out as an event. In Kabul there is *one* regular festival, the international documentary film festival. When a cultural program is organised in Kabul, it clearly attracts a different kind of attention than in Berlin.

SCHÄFER: I have the feeling that the festival played a very important social role in Kabul, because there are not many opportunities to meet in public. Otherwise there's only the job or the university where people meet outside the family. And suddenly there's a place where one can watch films together and discuss with each other. I think that's a huge difference to the situation here. That was also a decisive criterion for Malek, but also for the program coordinator of the Goethe Institute, Ibrahim Hotak, when we asked both for advice on whether the festival could take place in public or not. Beforehand, we were very unsure, for security reasons. At the time, Ibrahim Hotak said that we shouldn't withhold the films from the audience, and that it has a right to view them. One should not give up now, for in the present situation the issue is to maintain this civil space. And Malek stressed that the people, even if they don't come, should see on television that such an event is taking place. Of course, we also asked for the opinion of many other local and international players. Before we travelled to Kabul, most of them said: Oh God, how can you organise a festival in Kabul, and then on gender, of all topics, impossible! The representatives of the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation were pretty appalled. But Malek not at all – when he was here in Berlin during that same time he dryly commented on our nervousness: Yes, it is dramatic in Afghanistan, but it's no problem to organise a festival, come to Kabul. And Engineer Latif also encouraged us to do so. After arriving in Kabul, we also asked the security official of the German Embassy for advice, and he had no major concerns.

ZANDIEH: We were also smiled at a bit by Malek, Ibrahim Hotak or Latif Ahmadi. It was made clear to us that we are indeed influenced by a certain representation of Afghanistan in the media and are too far away to realistically assess the situation and everyday life there. We were made insecure in advance by German news coverage and the warnings of the Foreign Office.

SCHÄFER: However, we did ask persons on location. I think it again makes a difference whether you are an international or not. After the attack on the Serena Hotel in Kabul in January, there was initially a certain paranoia in the international community, because it was a different sort of attack, for the first time directed against civil internationals in this form.

ZANDIEH: And because the Lycée Esteqlal, our festival venue, is located right next to it.

SCHÄFER: I think that Malek and Diana have a different experience in handling civil wars. They grew up with them, even if they've lived in Iran for many years. That's a huge difference between them and us.

REBBERT: If I understand correctly, there were also very illustrative, unexpected and touching moments during the course of the festivals in Afghanistan and Germany, for example, the encounters surrounding the film Saya.

EVERYONE: That was beautiful!

SCHÄFER: That was really totally beautiful. The director of *Saya* (Shadows), Nacir Alqas, meanwhile lives in Kassel. He only has a really poor VHS copy of the film, which hadn't been shown in a very long time. It was very interesting to talk with him about the film in Kassel. On account of this conversation we already knew what the shooting must have been like, how Nacir Alqas worked together with this small boy, who had no experience whatsoever. I think Omar was three at the time and acted incredibly well in the film, but following various tricks and ruses. The big surprise came in Kabul, when we received a call from Omar, who is now an adult living in Peshawar/Pakistan. He told us he would come to the festival with his mother. We were totally enthusiastic, but could unfortunately not pay any travel expenses, because we had a tight budget as it was, and, apart from the content-related preparations, our partners in Kabul had to constantly apply for money. This entire system of potential sponsors and aid organisations is extremely geared to competition, often characterised by enviousness, and anyone receiving money in this system is again faced with another dimension. Anyway, Omar actually came. He was there on all the festival days and also brought his relatives from Kabul. And he saw the film for the first time – consciously – for there was no copy in Peshawar. So he saw himself for the first time on the screen.

ZANDIEH: When Omar Shersad and Yasemin Yarmal then came onto the stage after the film, the audience was visibly touched. What I can remember about the discussion with the audience is that someone asked Omar if he could still remember the shooting and, if so, what he could remember. He said that if he didn't want to play in a scene he was told: If you play that now, you'll get a banana afterwards.

REBBERT: Maybe we can briefly address the issue of who talks in public in which way and who doesn't. I understood that some actors or activists that interested you operate illegally. Maybe you want to say something about the relation of legality vs. illegality or underground vs. public?

SCHÄFER: At the festival it was, of course, the case that those persons who participated and spoke there decided to speak in public. But there are naturally groups appearing in our films that take on a political stance that does not allow them to work in public. They therefore work underground. Because they advocate the separation of state and religion and it would simply be too dangerous for them to appear in public.

Then there are women in our films who have decided to remain anonymous, for the reason that their husbands or brothers exert pressure on them. Or because they are afraid of public reactions and are uncertain about how the political situation will develop. Others such as Aiqela have no problem whatsoever to speak in public. The way in which individuals handle the issue of speaking in public varies greatly.

ZANDIEH: When we spoke with several women at Armanshahr about the group RAWA, appearing in your film, it became clear that the group is very controversial. Critics describe their structures as sectarian or cadre-oriented. Despite this, RAWA is usually well-received in the West. I am familiar with this from Iranian contexts in Germany, in which the Mujahedeen, for example, are well-received by leftist groups and the Green Party, people collect signatures and donations for them, but they are highly controversial within the Iranian community.

SCHÄFER: In regard to our mediation work, we must self-critically mention that in Kabul we decided to publish our brochure for SECOND TAKE in Dari and English. Reasons being that we were extremely late with the production of the brochure, and then the translation work was very time-consuming. It was also difficult to bring together Latin and Arabic letters. We had long discussions on whether it is correct to publish the brochure only in Dari and English. For economic and time reasons we finally decided to do so, and not least because 98-99% of the people in Kabul understand Dari. And we also said that we won't include another language such as German in addition to English, even though we have German sponsors. Our decision triggered harsh criticism, especially among the Pashtuns. The conflict between the official languages Dari and Pashtu is still heated. A number of Pashtuns then actually didn't come to the festival. I now think it certainly would have been better if we had managed to translate the brochure into Pashtu. And the next time, the time schedule and the budget should take into account that three languages are needed. It can't be in the interest of such a festival to make one group feel excluded.

REBBERT: Finally, I would like to know what impact it has on the current production and distribution of films in Afghanistan that many of those involved have other day jobs? What is your opinion?

MAZY: The director Saba Sahar works as a policewomen, the job with which she actually earns a living. She also produces films in which she plays the leading role. The work with the police is not well-paid, but it has a certain social status and is in line with Sahar's moral ambition to establish a civil society. Aiqela Rezaie, apart from her work as the director of a girls' school, has been playing the leading part in the Afghan television series *Razhaie en Khaneh* (The Secrets of the House) for a year. This has made her a well-known actress throughout Afghanistan. She also works in the production department of the private TV broadcaster TOLO-TV. In regard to having different day jobs, the situation, in principle, is not much different than for many film workers here. Only the fewest can make a living doing films, they try to get by doing one job after the next or acquiring one funding and then the next.

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