

Images of diversity: migrant filmmaking in diverse Brussels

Arne Saeys – Kadir Has Üniversitesi

Summary

Hamid Naficy (2001) argues that Third World filmmakers in the West translate their personal experiences of exile, diaspora and ethnicity via an 'accented' mode of production into an 'accented' film style. Against Naficy's a priori categorization of migrant filmmakers as 'exilic', 'diasporic' or 'ethnic', I propose an interactionist approach of 'accented filmmaking' inspired by the framework of migrant entrepreneurship (Rath & Kloosterman 2000). I investigate how migrants use their social, human and cultural capital to pursue a career in the cultural economy of world cities.

In this paper, I take a case-study of migrant filmmakers in Brussels as an example. Brussels not only hosts many migrants but is also composed of two indigenous communities pursuing different cultural policies. The differences between Flemish multicultural and French republican policies make it possible to compare different opportunity structures for migrant film productions. Migrant filmmakers in Brussels are in the unique position that they live in one city but are subjected to different cultural policies depending on the language community to which they want to belong.

An accented cinema

In *An Accented Cinema*, a landmark work in film studies, Hamid Naficy (2001) argues that Third World and other displaced filmmakers living in the West translate their personal experiences of exile, diaspora and ethnicity via an 'accented mode of production' into an 'accented style'

of film aesthetics. Contrary to the poststructuralist statement that 'the author is dead'¹, Naficy wants "to put the locatedness and the historicity of the authors back into authorship" (p. 34). His main argument is that "deterritorialized peoples and their films share certain features" (p. 3). Naficy defines the locatedness and historicity of these filmmakers in terms of their orientation to either the homeland, the ethnic community or to the host country. He puts accented filmmakers into three categories: "[E]xilic cinema is dominated by its focus on there and then in the homeland, diasporic cinema by its vertical relationship to the homeland and by its lateral relationship to the diaspora communities and experiences, and postcolonial ethnic and identity cinema by the exigencies of life here and now in the country in which the filmmakers reside" (p. 15).

In a second move, Naficy adopts an old-school stylistic approach to construct a general taxonomy of features defining the 'accented cinema'. As features of an accented cinema, he mentions: interstitial and collective modes of production, epistolary narratives and chronotopes of utopian homelands, border crossings and claustrophobic life in exile. In addition, Naficy describes the accented cinema as an embedded criticism of the 'non-accented' dominant cinema, whose films are "realistic and intended for entertainment only, and thus free from overt ideology or accent" (p. 23). This way, 'accented films' are supposed to be highly political and critical of, not to say oppositional to, the classic Hollywood style and the national cinema style of any particular country.

¹ Roland Barthes (1977) argues that the author of a text should not be seen as an empirical person but merely as a fictive figure within the text, privileging a spectatorial reading over that of authoring.

In his theorization, Naficy reduces the enormous diversity of filmmakers and their stories to a simple "liminal subjectivity and interstitial location in society and the film industry" (p. 10). I argue that the categorization of accented filmmakers in terms of 'in-betweenness' follows from Naficy's uncritical use of old concepts like exile, diaspora and ethnic identity. In the following section, I will present several critiques on these concepts.

Exilic, diasporic and ethnic filmmaking?

The key concepts in *An Accented Cinema* (exile, diaspora and ethnic identity) are representative of a common way of thinking in postcolonial theories and identity politics (Bhabha 1994; Hall 1994; Rushdi 1992; Said 2001). Therefore, the critique that I will direct at Naficy's work is also a critique on a wider body of literature on postcolonial theories and identity politics.

Naficy (1993, 2001) uses the concepts of exile, diaspora and ethnic identity each in quite an uncritical way. Exile, defined as internal or external banishment, has been extensively commented upon by literary critics (Rushdie 1992; Kaplan 1996; Israel 2000; Said 2001; Ouditt 2002; Allatson & McCormack 2008). Modernist art and literature described exile, as both fact and trope, in terms of isolation, solitude and alienation of the individual from an original community: the artist in exile is never 'at home'. This distancing has been aestheticized as a necessary precondition to produce 'high' art. Edward Said (2001: 181) famously noted: "[E]xile carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality." Without dismissing personal testimonies like that of Edward Said, Kaplan (1996) observed that

"the formation of modernist exile seems to have best served those who would voluntarily experience estrangement and separation in order to produce the experimental cultures of modernism" (p. 28). By contrasting the mystifying metaphor of exile with ordinary travel, Kaplan argues that the notion of exile, as opposed to ordinary travel or tourism, helps to maintain the division between 'high' and 'low' culture, that is, between art and commerce. Indeed, in line with Kaplan's observations, one can see that Naficy's (2001) selection of films emphasizes more experimental styles and techniques (e.g. Trinh T. Minh-ha, Mona Hatoum, etc.). Besides Atom Egoyan, Naficy does not mention many displaced filmmakers working in more popular genres, like for example Ang Lee, John Woo, Josef Fares, Fatih Akin and Ferzan Özpetek. It is clear that more popular filmmakers fit less with the romanticized image of the solipsistic artist in exile creating 'high' art. Exile is mainly used to describe writers of literature. A complex process like film production, even if experimental or low-budget, requires the input of many diversely skilled people (Caves 2000). The idea of the individual filmmaker in exile is contradicted even by Naficy's own observations of the filmmaker's participation in multiple institutions, transnational co-productions and the use of multisource funding.

Another critique on exile comes from anthropology. Categorizing people as exiles or as refugees is based on certain assumptions about the 'national order of things' (Malkki 1995). "[B]elonging (identity, community) and not belonging (uprooting, exile) to a place are spiritualized in a broad sense of the word. And this spiritualization can lead to dehistoricization and depoliticization. The idealization or romanticization of exile and diaspora can be just as problematic for anthropology (and literary

studies) as is the idealization of homeland and rooted communities in works of refugee studies. Both forms of idealization take for granted certain categorical forms of thought, and both forms set up [...] a 'conventional opposition of origin and exile' [...]." (Malkki 1995: 515). Exile and diaspora discourses are closely linked to the nation-state model, assuming a natural bond between culture, identity and territory. Naficy argues for example: "Like the exiles, people in diaspora have an identity in their homeland before their departure, and their diasporic identity is constructed in resonance with this prior identity"(Naficy 2001: 14).

Nowadays, the concept of exile seems to have lost ground to diaspora discourses. The use of diaspora, however, shares the shortcomings of exile to designate migrants. As Soysal Nuhoğlu (2000) notes: "Diaspora is the extension of the place left behind, the 'home'. Thus, the presumed rootlessness of immigrant populations in the here and now of the diaspora, and their perpetual longing for then and there. This theoretical move, that is, designating immigrant populations as diasporas, ignores the historical contingency of the nation-state, identity and community, and reifies them as natural" (p. 3). Referring to post-war Europe, Soysal Nuhoğlu argues that diaspora as an analytical tool is "obscuring the new topography and practices of citizenship, which are multi-connected, multi-referential and postnational" (p. 13). Indeed, increasing instances of dual citizenship, European Union membership, the deployment of universalistic discourses of personhood (human rights) and global cultural flows have changed the conditions in which migrant filmmakers work. While the term *diasporic* filmmakers highlights only the relation with an ethnically defined community and homeland, it neglects

other potential spaces of movements and activities that are created by globalization.

Needless to say, the same critiques apply to postcolonial ethnic and identity filmmaking of which second-generation migrants are the enigmatic examples. While Naficy (2001) and others (Burns 2007) direct the attention to the (ethnic) 'politics of the hyphen' as a sign of hybridized identities, the urban context and the global cultural flows in which migrant youths realize their cultural projects (Soysal 1999) are neglected. It is striking that Naficy (2001) only dedicates five pages to the Banlieue Cinema in world city Paris, the most popular form of 'accented filmmaking' in Europe.

In the end, I see a total contradiction between Naficy's original argument of 'putting locatedness and historicity back into authorship' and his generalizing taxonomy placing 'accented cinema' in a liminal nowhere, not belonging to the cinema of the host country nor to the cinema of the home country, nor to the international cinema. Only in the close-ups of filmmakers that he provides throughout the book, Naficy pays attention to the spatial and historical particularity of the filmmakers. His stylistic approach, however, erases every locatedness and historicity of the filmmakers as soon as they are labeled as 'accented filmmakers'. As a film scholar, Naficy (2001) takes it as his final aim to *classify* films: "Like all approaches to cinema, the accented style attempts to reduce and to channel the free play of meanings. [...] The style designation allows us to reclassify films or to classify certain hitherto unclassifiable films" (p. 38).

Naficy constructs the category of an 'accented cinema' by putting the filmmakers in a liminal nowhere, not part of the host country cinema nor part of the home

country cinema, nor part of the international cinema. The filmmakers are conceptualized as forever 'homeless', outside national and international film categories. This way, Naficy creates for himself a gap in the already existing film classifications, taking this as an argument to fill the gap with a brand new classification which he dubs an 'Accented Cinema'. I take the example of Michel Khleifi. His films are discussed in works on Belgian cinema (Thomas 1995; Everaerts 2000; Mosley 2001), in works on Palestinian cinema (Dabashi 2006; Gertz & Khleifi 2008), as well as in works on World Cinema (Chaudhuri 2005). Thanks to Naficy (2001), Khleifi's films appear now as well under the heading of 'Accented Cinema'. I argue that creating a new film category, simply because the filmmakers have moved, offers little added value to already existing classifications. Moreover, I believe that labeling filmmakers as 'accented' reinforces the 'Othering' of migrant filmmakers by national and international film industries. In fact, the 'Accented Cinema' puts the filmmakers just into a new discursive ghetto. The 'Accented Cinema' is constructed as a stylistic category based on a generalized past of the filmmakers, modeled as a rupture from their natural territory of the nation-state. This way, the 'accented style' not only fails to account for the personal and professional evolution of the filmmakers over time but also obscures the contributions by migrant filmmakers to stylistic and other innovations in contemporary film industries.

If we take the spatial and historical position of the filmmakers seriously, the conceptual analysis should highlight the contemporary changes in global mobilities and the rise of the commercial creative industries. Moreover, if the locatedness and the historicity of the filmmakers really matters, the analysis should not look

for similar biographies of displacement but for the differences in the creative milieus where the displaced filmmakers live and produce their films at a given time. To illuminate these differences, we need to compare the cultural economies in which the filmmakers try to make their living and the effects of this context on their style.

To conclude, I do not want to dismiss the empirical richness of Naficy's work. His world-spanning overview of displaced filmmakers, with detailed close-ups, is major work of reference for the study of migrant filmmaking. Because the Accented Cinema is a new category gaining wide acclaim in film studies, I deem it necessary to critique the basic tenets of this framework defined by exile, diaspora and identity politics. I believe that the aim of studying migrant filmmakers should focus on understanding the contemporary position of filmmakers in a globalizing world and a commercializing film industry. For this reason, I want to place my own research in the framework of discourses on global creative industries and cultural diversity as these are becoming increasingly relevant in debates on migration and film production.

Between globalization and cultural diversity

Supranational institutions like the UNESCO, the WTO/GATT, and the European Union play an increasingly important role in regulating the global and local film industries. These institutions, however, often serve different interests. Basically, while the WTO/GATT pursues global trade liberalization, the UNESCO and the European Union rather seek to protect cultural diversity. This conflict of interests was most clear in the 'New World Information and Communication Order' debate in the late 1970s. The UNESCO fought against the unbalanced flow of mass

media from the English-speaking world to other countries, arguing for democratization of communication and strengthening of national media to avoid their dependence on external sources. The US heavily opposed the UNESCO (and even withdraw from it for some years) because it saw the 'New World Information and Communication Order' simply as barriers to the free trade of American media corporations.

In the early days, the film industry delivered popular culture to a national population. In the heydays of cultural industries policy around the 1980s and 1990s, the domain of culture expanded, trending towards social policies with an emphasis on culture for community development ends. In times of globalization, however, nation-state specific cultural policies are no longer predominant. Cultural industry policies have been the victim of their own success, since their agenda has been taken over by other, more powerful industry, economic development and innovation departments (Cunningham 2005). 'Creative industries' are a rather recent category in academic, policy and industry discourses. It can claim to capture significant 'new economy' enterprise dynamics that such terms as 'the arts,' 'media' and 'cultural industries' do not (Cunningham 2002). National film industries, among other industries, moved along a continuum from the culturally specific non-commercial to the globalized and commercial, where *generically creative*, rather than culturally specific, content drives advances. Recently, supranational organizations picked this up. In the Creative Economy Report of the UN (2008), cultural diversity became linked with economic growth, thereby following major academic trends like the 'culturalization of the economy' or the 'economization of the cultural', depending on the perspective (...).

The production and consumption of unique symbolic experiences, and hence, cultural diversity, is increasingly valued in the growth of the global creative economy (UN 2008). Taking into account these global evolutions, I want to direct my attention again toward migrant filmmakers. By crossing boundaries, migrants are expected to produce new ways of thinking, seeing, imagining and creating. Bloomfield & Bianchini (2004), for example, designate migrants as 'intercultural innovators'. I argue that the cultural economy with its demand for unique if not exotic images creates opportunities for migrant filmmakers. Using the theoretical framework of migrant entrepreneurship (Rath & Kloosterman 2000), I will investigate how migrant filmmakers use their social, human and cultural capital to pursue a career in particular film industries.

Migrant filmmakers as entrepreneurs

In studies on migrant entrepreneurs, the opportunity structure is a central concept. The opportunity structure refers to the chances to make a living in the economics of a certain time and place (Waldinger et al. 1990). The two main ways to acquire a position in a local economy consist of becoming an employee of an organization on the one hand, or becoming a self-employed entrepreneur on the other hand.

Waldinger et al. (1990) argued that opportunity structures (demand side) interact with group characteristics (supply side) to give rise to ethnic entrepreneurship. On the supply side, various kinds of capital (financial, human, social, cultural) can be situated (Bourdieu 1986). Cultural capital can refer to hard-to-copy expertise based on first-hand knowledge from the country of origin. Human capital can refer to the

level of education. The OECD (2006) showed that nowadays migrants have attained a higher level of education than some decades ago. This enables them theoretically to enter more segments of the labor market. Unlike the first migrants who were predominantly seen as guest workers in low-level industry jobs, the second generation can be found in various branches of the labor market (Rusinovic, 2006).

On the demand side, opportunity structures in many global cities changed with the decline of manufacturing industries and the growth of the service economy (Sassen 2001). Large-scale modes of production eroded by the saturation of industrial markets and the diversification of taste fragmented markets. Consequently, the demand tilted more toward small firms and, hence, toward the self-employed. Besides high unemployment rates, many migrants started their own businesses. By becoming self-employed entrepreneurs, they created their own jobs. A negative explanation for the rise in migrant entrepreneurship is blocked-mobility: due to discrimination, migrants are not able to find a job that fits their skills, interests or ambitions, and therefore, they have to create their own jobs (Saxenian 1999).

Rath & Kloosterman (2000) criticize Waldinger's *a priori* categorization of migrants as ethnic groups and the concomitant argument that migrant entrepreneurs differ from mainstream business owners because they are endowed with ethnic resources. Abandoning Naficy's *a priori* categorization of migrant filmmakers as 'exilic', 'diasporic' or 'ethnic', I follow their stance.

In addition to Waldinger's interactionist theory, Kloosterman & Rath (2003) proposed the concept of *mixed embeddedness*. They kept the opportunity structure as a starting point but this time with more emphasis on national institutional frameworks. By focusing on an

Anglo-Saxon economic model, Waldinger et al. (1990) tended to neglect the importance of government regulation. Despite similar post-industrial changes, differences in governmental regulations lead toward different post-industrial employment strategies, and hence, toward different opportunity structures for entrepreneurs. Thus, in order to study migrant entrepreneurship in the film industry, cross-national differences in audiovisual policies have to be taken into account.

Finally, most mainstream work on migrant or ethnic entrepreneurship seems to be restricted to the macro- and meso-level, that is, to the underlying political-economic structures and network resources. Apitzsch (2003) pointed to the scarcity of a micro-oriented theoretical approach, while that what needs to be explained is 'the opening up of opportunities by the migrants themselves', an understudied aspect of migrant entrepreneurship.

The cultural economy of World Cities

Geographically, film and media industries tend to be centralized in or around large metropolitan areas (Scott 2000; Sassen 2001). Richard Florida (2005) observed that particular cities attract more creative workers than other cities. He found significant correlations between those cities that provide a more tolerant atmosphere toward gays, ethnic minorities and bohemians, and the amount of creative class workers that lived and moved there. In order to attract workers from the creative class, Florida proposed that a city should be characterized by what he calls the three T's: talent, tolerance and technology. Although Florida's theory can be criticized for drawing a causal relation between the presence of diversity and economic growth, many cities

implemented his ideas in their policies to promote themselves as tolerant places open to ethnic and cultural diversity to attract migrants in order to encourage economic prosperity. While considering ethnic diversity as an important pull-factor, Florida, however, did not study the careers of migrants themselves in the rise of the creative industries.

For this reason, I investigate the case of migrant filmmakers. I take Brussels as a case-study. Despite its image as the rather grey administrative capital of Europe, Brussels has an extraordinarily diverse population. Officially a bilingual city with Flemish- and French-speaking institutions, Brussels also hosts a considerable amount of Eurocrats, European and non-European immigrants. Brussels has talent, technology and tolerance, so it could be called a 'creative city'. Brussels is also a divided city, composed of two indigenous communities pursuing different cultural policies. The differences between Flemish multicultural and French republican policies make it possible to compare different opportunity structures for migrant film productions. Migrant filmmakers in Belgium are in the unique position to choose between different cultural policies and different transnational collaborations for their film projects.

Brussels: a multi-leveled World City

Brussels Capital-Region is one region alongside the Flemish Region and the Walloon Region in federated Belgium. Brussels Capital-Region has its own government and parliament but it does not have its own cultural ministry. Both the Flemish Community and the French-speaking Community have their Ministries of Culture whose competencies include respectively the Flemish-speaking

institutions (in Brussels and Flanders) and the French-speaking institutions (in Brussels and Wallonia).

Regarding the integration of immigrants, the two Communities take very different stance. In Brussels, the Flemish Community Commission (VGC) shifted its focus to an ethnic-cultural minorities policy. The French-speaking Community Commission (COCOF), on the contrary, does never use the word 'ethnic minority'. The French-speaking Community adopts a 'republican' stance towards integration. It only states that immigrants should know French. While the Flemish Community supports migrant self-organizations and even subsidizes education in their own language and culture, the French-speaking Community refuses to support any project based on ethnic identity.

This difference in policies has an historical explanation. Brussels was originally a Flemish-speaking city that gradually became a predominantly French-speaking capital where the Flemish became a minority. State reforms ultimately granted the Flemish minority in the capital equal political power as the French-speaking majority. As a consequence of this position, the Flemish Community emphasizes strongly the 'multicultural' character of Brussels, in order to limit the dominance of the French-speaking majority (Rea 2005).

Favell and Martiniello (2008) argue that the multi-leveled, non-hierarchical governance of a postnational city like Brussels is creating new opportunities for entrepreneurial marginal groups. While they refer to the political field, I believe this also counts for cultural entrepreneurs in the creative industries. In the following, I will compare the role and place of migrant filmmakers in Brussels and the impact of the Flemish- and the French speaking communities on their themes, their style and, finally, their career.

Diversity of policies, diversity of films?

Do the different cultural politics of the Flemish and the French-speaking communities have an influence on the kind of films migrant filmmakers produce and their reception? In order to illuminate this question, I will discuss the work of filmmakers Mourad Boucif and Taylan Barman, two French-speaking *bruxellois* of respectively Moroccan-Algerian and Turkish origin. I compare their trajectory with Sadies Choua, a Flemish-speaking filmmaker of Moroccan origin, also living in Brussels. Their trajectories illuminate the differences between the Flemish and the French Communities' cultural politics and their impact on the careers of the filmmakers and the themes of their films.

a) Two friends from the ghetto

Mourad Boucif and Taylan Barman are two friends who grew up in Molenbeek, a district of Brussels that is known for its dense migrant population and often depicted as a dangerous ghetto. Although his parents are Moroccans, Mourad Boucif was born in Algeria in 1967. His family moved to France when he was 10 months old. Five years later, his parents moved to Brussels. Mourad grew up in Brussels and became a social worker in Molenbeek. Since 1993, he worked for several local and international humanitarian associations in Brussels. He developed an interest in filmmaking, together with his childhood friend, Taylan Barman. Taylan was born in Istanbul in 1968. His parents moved to Brussels when he was only a few months old. He grew up in the same district as Mourad Boucif. After high school, he was subsequently a truck driver, a seller and a logo cutter. As an autodidact, he learned to work with a camera in his spare time.

In 1995, the youth center in the Maritime Quarter of Brussels organized a film contest for amateur filmmakers. Taylan and Mourad participated with their first short-film called *L'amour du désespoir* (The Love of Despair), and did well in the competition. Two years later, in 1997, the two friends made another film called *Kamel*. With this film, they moved out of the socio-cultural circle as it was picked up by the French-speaking Belgian television (RTBF and Arte) and broadcasted on television. *Kamel* also won a prize by the author rights association SACD (Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques). In 1999, Mourad Boucif made another film, *Aller simple vers l'hiver*, about a migrant girl whose father is arrested because of he is illegal in Belgium. The breakthrough for Barman and Boucif came in 2001, when they released their first professional feature film to be screened in the Belgian film theaters. The film, *Au-delà de Gibraltar* (Beyond Gibraltar) tells a love story between a second-generation Moroccan in Brussels and a Belgian girl. The film was selected for several film festivals in Belgium and abroad and received good comments in the press. The soundtrack of the film by Abdelli, an Algerian singer based in Brussels, was also commercially released. After the success of their film, the two friends Mourad and Taylan followed each their own path.

Mourad Boucif started with a political project called *Collectif pour la Mémoire et la Dignité* (Collective for History and Dignity), defending the rights of soldiers that were recruited by colonial France to fight the Germans in the Second World War. In 2006, Boucif made a documentary with testimonies of old Maghrebian soldiers who helped to free France from Nazi-Germany. The documentary, called *La Couleur du Sacrifice* (The Color of the Sacrifice) was distributed among socio-

cultural associations and television. In 2008, he started recording a fiction film about the same topic. In France, however, Rachid Bouchareb already made the film 'Les Indigènes' (Indigenous) about these Maghrebian soldiers. Boucif stated that he wants to make a different film because he does not agree with Bouchareb's vision that the Maghrebian soldiers fought out of patriotism for France. Boucif's main aim is to bring to attention the bad treatment of the Maghrebian soldiers by France during and after the Second World War.

While Boucif became increasingly political in his filmmaking, his friend Taylan Barman developed in another direction. In 2008, Barman released his fiction film *9mm*. It is a psychological drama, starting with a mysterious gunshot in a family. The protagonist of the film is a French teenager who has problems with his mother, a police officer, and his unemployed father. The scenario was written by Kenan Görgün, a young Belgian-Turkish writer who published already some books in France. The film was displayed in several theatres in Brussels. The crew also made an effort to distribute the film in Paris. The film, however, did not become a big success yet. Interestingly, Barman recruited a famous Flemish actor for his film, not just for his fame but also to get subsidies from the Flemish Audiovisual Fund to complement his subsidies from the French-speaking Community and France.

b) A female Flemish-Moroccan filmmaker

In the Flemish community of Belgium, there are notably less migrant film makers. In part, this has to do with the fact that the French-speaking cinema in Belgium gets its piece (and subsidies) from the large Paris film industry. On the Flemish side, most migrant filmmaking is

limited to documentary production. One documentary maker that established herself is Sadies Choua, the daughter of a Moroccan father and a Belgian mother. She was born in Bree, a small town in the Flemish province of Limburg. She moved to Brussels for her studies in sociology. After her studies, she stayed in Brussels and started making documentaries.

In 2006, she made her first and immediately successful documentary *My sister Zahra, or how I wanted to change my father in 52 minutes* (Mijn zus Zahra, Of hoe ik mijn vader wilde veranderen in 52 minuten). This documentary shows an intimate portrait of the filmmaker's own sister who reveals that she is lesbian to her conservative Moroccan father. The documentary was subsidized by the Women's Council (Vrouwenraad) and the Holebi Federation (Gay, Lesbian and Bisexuals Organization). The documentary won several prizes in Flanders and the Netherlands (mainly from gay and lesbian associations). Sadies Choua (and occasionally her sister) presented this documentary on many occasions, held many lectures and participated in many debates on homosexuality, Islam and multiculturalism.

Sadies Choua received new subsidies to make other documentaries for the Flemish-speaking Women's Council. In 2007, she made a documentary (De Strijdlustige Weduwen) about the widows of Italian guest workers that died in the 1956 Marcinelle mining accident. In 2008, Sadies Choua made another documentary about women, called 'Zina and Mina Tales', about single women of migrant origin in a multicultural society, again subsidized by the Women's Council.

Conclusion

One could easily say that autobiographical elements are very noticeable in the films or documentaries made by migrant authors. However, it is clear that there are no themes of imagined homelands. Of course, they are not exilic or diasporic but second-generation migrants who grew up in Belgium. There is, however, a difference in the extent to which they use their ethnicity. Here the cultural policies and the opportunity structures come into play. The French-speaking migrant filmmakers have the advantage of the affiliation with the subsidization programs and potential markets of not only Belgium but also France. On the other hand, the 'republican' stance towards ethnicity does not support films based on ethnic identities. For this reason, Barman & Boucif avoid their films to be labeled as ethnic. Both react in a different way, however. In his latest film, Barman takes the road of a psychological drama, while Boucif goes on to make more political films. Both filmmakers define themselves as Belgians. This is not the case with Sadies Choua. Although she is only of mixed origin (and in biological sense 'less Moroccan' than Boucif), she emphasizes her 'Moroccanness', both in her documentaries as in her lectures. She really plays on the multicultural policies and identity politics Flanders and the Netherlands. The support she receives from the Women's Council is one part of these identity politics, the attention she gets in debates on multiculturalism is another part of it.

I argue that the French republican stance pushes the filmmakers to make films about topics that go beyond their own identity, while the Flemish multicultural policies on the other hand just support the filmmaker to deal with issues that are closely related to the personal (ethnic and sexual) identity. Sadies Choua, although of mixed origin, is much more depicted as 'Moroccan'. In the interviews that I conducted with the filmmakers, I heard

that identity politics seem to limit the artistic expression of the filmmakers. As Sadies Choua explained: "I don't want to make only films about lesbians and migrants. I don't want to be *the* voice of migrants and lesbians but people place me in that box. I keep doing this for the Women's Council, but I would like to do other things as well." Mourad Boucif and Taylan Barman, on the other hand, emphasized that they are "just Belgian filmmakers that made a film about migrants but now it's time to do other things." Boucif & Barman seem to get more easily subsidies to make mainstream French-language films than to make political statement with ethnic specifications. Mourad Boucif admitted that his choice to make a political documentary about Maghrebian soldiers is giving him the label of "a migrant filmmaker". In the French-speaking policies, this can hinder the subsidization of his film projects. Therefore, he prefers to be recognized as a filmmaker dealing with universal themes, rather than as a migrant filmmaker dealing with Maghrebian issues. In the end, I argue that the diversity of films and documentaries in Brussels seems to reflect the diversity of cultural policies and opportunity structures, rather than a mere expression of the filmmakers' personal experiences of migration.

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