

## IMAG(IN)ING THE GLOBAL CITY. POSTNATIONAL FILMMAKING IN BRUSSELS AND AMSTERDAM

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**ABSTRACT:** Beyond predominant discourses on the integration of immigrants, this research aims to establish a view on how immigrant filmmakers in global cities erode the idea of national cinemas. Contrary to the demands of assimilation in the regular labor market, the commodification of cultural diversity has become an important segment of the creative economy in global cities (Scott 2000, Zukin 1995). In European film industries, for example, the demand for cultural diversity creates opportunities for immigrant filmmakers. Discourses on cultural diversity, however, lead to an a priori categorization of immigrant filmmakers as ethnic. Against the ethnicization of immigrant filmmakers, I start from the interactionist framework of immigrant entrepreneurship (Waldinger et al. 1990, Rath & Kloosterman 2000). I argue that the ‘ethnicity’ of filmmakers serves as a brand to market their films as authentic in the global cultural economy. In this paper, I compare immigrant filmmakers based in Brussels, the multilingual capital of Europe, and in Amsterdam, the cultural hotspot of the Netherlands in order to illustrate different developments of postnational filmmaking.

**KEYWORDS:** globalization, migration, cultural industries, film industry

### 1. GLOBAL CREATIVE CITIES

World cities have always been at the heart of cultural production and innovation (Hall 1998, Scott 2000). In the age of globalization, discourses on creative cities (Landry & Bianchini 1995) have put creative industries and talent migration on the agenda of urban policymakers. The idea is that cities should invest in cultural amenities and diversity in order to attract a highly skilled creative class stimulating urban economic growth (Florida 2002, Florida 2005). Inspired by these discourses, cities compete for a creative and cosmopolitan image in order to attract highly skilled workers. The discourses on the creative class, however, neglect social inequalities in metropolitan areas. With the decline of manufacturing industries in favor of a service-based economy, a social polarization emerged in global cities. Instead of contributing to the expansion of a middle class, the global economy leads to an unequal earnings distribution between a high-income stratum of top-level professionals and a growing underclass of unemployed or low-wage workers in casual jobs, made up largely of immigrants from low-income countries (Sassen 1991). When policymakers deal with these socioeconomic inequalities, they tend to formulate answers in terms of employment. This way, they overlook entrepreneurship as a way to make a living. The erosion of large-scale modes of production, the rise of informal economic activities and the diversification of taste-fragmented markets open up opportunities for entrepreneurial immigrants. Immigrant entrepreneurship has mainly been described in terms of low-skilled and labor-intensive businesses in easy accessible industries like personal services and retailing. The growth of the creative industries in metropolitan areas may offer new opportunities to creative immigrants.

While mass consumption by the middle class was savings-oriented, functional and suburban, the new high-income professionals display excess earnings, luxury consumption and cosmopolitan lifestyles. In everyday life, this creates a market for extra-ordinary products by which members of the new cosmopolitan elite can distinguish themselves (Bourdieu 1979). This demand for aestheticism fuels the growth of creative enterprises in metropolitan areas. Dependent on a high income elasticity and agglomeration benefits, the creative industries have become a main grow sector in metropolitan economies (Scott 2000). Based on individual skills, ideas and originality, creative enterprises do not require a high starting capital. This low barrier of entry leads to an oversupply of applicants of which only very few will be successful. Striving

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toward product differentiation and competing on quality and uniqueness instead of on price, the creative industries consist of many small enterprises (Caves 2000). Within the creative economy, the demand for authentic or exotic products generates opportunities for entrepreneurial immigrants (Zukin 1995). As can be noticed in the popularity of hip-hop, reggae and world music productions, popular culture seems to be more accessible for immigrants than high culture. Closely linked to national heritage and state funding, the high arts like classical music, opera and ballet have a higher barrier of entry. The film industry occupies a place in between high and popular culture, as film productions contain arthouse cinema as well as commercial blockbusters.

The film industry is an exemplary case of a global creative industry. From the first silent films in the 1920s, filmmakers have shown an ability to reach audiences beyond local and linguistically defined markets. Contemporary film industries cannot be seen separately from the global film system in which Hollywood occupies a central position. More than any other cultural industry, the global spread of Hollywood films has pushed debates on film production beyond the framework of national policies. In the next section, I will summarize the international debate on global trade liberalization and cultural diversity regarding film productions.

## 2. GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

In international debates on cultural industries, global trade liberalization, promoted by the United States, clashed with the protection of national markets by France and the European Union. This conflict between trade and culture developed mainly around the audiovisual industries<sup>1</sup>. While global trade liberalization aims to reduce artificial trade barriers among countries, national governments perceived the dominant export of audiovisual products from the US to the global market as a threat to their national film, television and radio industries. Against the American definition of cultural products as commodities not different from any other goods to be traded under international trade rules, European and other governments defended their national film, television and radio programs as expressions of their cultural identity, language and values. The US responded that 'cultural identity' could not be defined and only served as an excuse for continued protectionism of national markets (Footer & Graber 2000).

In order to defend their cultural sovereignty in the global arena, national governments agreed on the UNESCO *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, promoting the conservation of territorially and historically defined cultural differences.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the UNESCO broadened its scope of protection from material<sup>3</sup> to immaterial heritage<sup>4</sup> and finally to contemporary cultural production<sup>5</sup>. The two recent additions can be read as a response to the dominance of American products on the global cultural market. Using the paradigm of cultural hegemony, politicians, scholars and social movements have equated globalization with 'Americanization'. Because of the first-mover advantage of the United States on the global market, global flows from other parts of the world have been neglected in debates on cultural industries. Along with migration, however, the international discourses on cultural diversity penetrated national frameworks as well. Global flows of people, goods and services in metropolitan centers eroded the idea that culture is produced and consumed within national boundaries.

While the international debate on cultural diversity focused on cultural policies, in national debates the discourse on cultural diversity came to dominate social policies (Robins 2006). Cultural diversity became an alternative to national assimilation policies. Spurring the recognition of diverse ethnic minority identities within national states, the discourses on cultural diversity lead to heated discussions within national states. By invoking their cultural identity on the international stage, national states aimed to protect the cultural productions of homegrown artists as unique and distinct expressions of their national identity. At the same time, cultural productions of immigrants are considered as ethno-cultural expressions different from the official culture. This way, a distinction is created between 'culture' as a universal product of human creativity and 'cultures' as social expressions of ethnic identities (Kosnick 2004).

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<sup>1</sup> GATT Uruguay Round, 1986-1993

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2002

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 1972

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, 2005

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Against the idealist tradition of thinking about culture as an expression of ethno-national identities, a materialist perspective reveals that contemporary culture is increasingly produced under global capitalist conditions. Along with privatization, deregulation and digitization, the use of culture moved from the non-commercial elevation of national audiences to commercial production for global markets (Cunningham 2005). This does not imply that global capitalism leads to a homogenized culture. Against the idea that globalization is a homogenizing process imposed by one external power, I argue that global culture is produced from within multiple local centers and with the participation of national and supranational actors. While international debates have mainly focused on the hegemony of Hollywood, the rapidly growing film productions in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East have received little to no attention in debates on global film industries. In the next section, I sketch the development of Third World film production.

### 3. FROM ETHNOGRAPHIC TO POSTNATIONAL FILMMAKING

Because of the historical relationship of colonialism and imperialism, cultural studies have mainly focused on the question of representation of 'the Other' in European cultural products. Inspired by the work of Edward Said (1978), postcolonial authors have analyzed exoticism and misrepresentations in visual arts, literature and films. This approach has led to a one-sided view on non-western people as voiceless victims of powerful Euro-American cultural industries. Without ignoring the traps of stereotyping, I argue that this perspective neglects the agency of non-western people.

In the history of film, the interest in people from other parts of the world goes back to the first ethnographic films. While classic documentaries like Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) gave a romanticized image of 'the Other', the production of ethnographic films was seriously questioned in the 1960s by the French filmmaker Jean Rouch. Rouch (1974) stated that the filmmaker should not be observing his subject as if it were an insect. His *cinéma vérité* entailed acknowledgment of the filmmakers' presence and subject participation. Rouch emphasized the importance of the subject's feedback in order to achieve mutual understanding. Despite the aim to highlight the perspective of the Other, these attempts ignored the existence of indigenous Third World film industries. A significant turn in the history of Third World film production was the plea of the Argentine filmmakers Solanas & Getino (1976) against the dominance of commercial Hollywood productions (First Cinema) and European auteur films (Second Cinema). Rejecting both Hollywood's escapist film spectacles and the European cinema as a vehicle for artistic expression, Solanas & Getino called for a Third Cinema, a neorealist and political cinema advocating class struggle and even armed resistance. Although Third Cinema was mainly produced in the Third World, Gabriel (1982) stated that any cinema produced anywhere can be called Third Cinema, as long as it is oppositional and liberationist. With the recent popularity of film industries like Bollywood (India) and Nollywood (Nigeria) and the commercial success of foreign-language films in English-speaking markets (for example Hong Kong martial arts films), the plea for a political and oppositional cinema lost ground to a global capitalist mode of film production.

In addition, intense migration flows changed the demographics of American and European cities. In American and European film industries, filmmakers emerged from all over the world. The influential film scholar Hamid Naficy (2001) conceptualized the films of Third World filmmakers in the West as an 'Accented Cinema'. He argued that immigrant filmmakers translate their personal experiences of exile, diaspora and ethnicity via an 'accented' mode of production into an 'accented' film style. Naficy categorized filmmakers in terms of their orientation to either the homeland, the diasporic community or to the host country. This accented cinema would be an embedded criticism of the dominant 'non-accented' entertainment cinema. Like the Third Cinema, the Accented Cinema would be highly political and oppositional to mainstream cinema. Naficy's work is representative of a larger body of postcolonial literature. In line with the postcolonial emancipation of new nation-states against imperial powers, the work of Third World immigrants has been equated with expressions of oppressed identities. This focus on identity resembles contemporary discourses on cultural diversity, aimed to protect national cultures from global homogenization. Examples are descriptions of the diasporic or hybrid identities of Black British filmmakers (Cham & Watkins 1988, Martin 1995), of French *beur* filmmakers (Tarr 2005) and of Turkish-German filmmakers (Burns 2007, Mennel 2002). These film studies on immigrant filmmakers are predominantly

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based on literary *auteur theory*, taking film as an expression of the director's personal vision<sup>6</sup>. Methodologically, this approach leads to textual analyses of film narratives and styles. Based on this methodology, the above-mentioned film scholars uncritically take the hyphenated or diasporic identity of immigrants as a determining feature of their films. This theoretical move of designating immigrant populations as diasporic or ethnic groups, however, reifies identity and community as natural. In the age of globalization, this obscures contemporary practices of citizenship, which are multi-connected, multi-referential and postnational (Soysal Nuhoğlu 2000).

Starting from films as end products, textual analyses neglect the social, economic and political factors that shape both the qualitative and the quantitative output of immigrant filmmakers. Very little to no attention has been paid to the art worlds in which the films of immigrants are produced, distributed and labeled. Against the a priori categorization of immigrant filmmakers as ethnic or diasporic, I argue that the work of immigrant filmmakers needs to be understood in the context of the global film industry where national film productions are increasingly subjected to the rules of the capitalist world economy. Targeting global markets and universal values, film professionals engage in multinational co-productions in order to compete with Hollywood. The participation of immigrants in (trans)national film projects is part of this globalization of film production, leading toward a postnational cinema (Danan 1996, Bergfelder 2005). In the next section, I sketch the position of European film productions in the global film industry.

#### 4. EUROPEAN CINEMA

The dominant position of Hollywood on the global market has fueled discourses distinguishing film as entertainment and film as a work of art. These discourses oppose economic and the cultural aspects of filmmaking (Hofstede 2000). Commercial entertainment films, however, are not always without artistic value and arthouse films can be commercially successful. The legitimation of films as arthouse or as entertainment has practical consequences for the lines of production, distribution and reception. Hollywood films are generally considered as entertainment aimed to attract the largest audiences as possible. Marketing, the film star system and special effects are the means to achieve commercial success. The marketing of Hollywood films thrives more on actors than on directors and the films are not categorized in terms of nationality but in terms of genres. Hollywood films are not considered as a national American cinema anymore but as global mainstream, setting the standards for other films in the world.

Against the conventions of Hollywood films, the independent film legitimates its existence by highlighting artistic innovation as its aim, denying any commercial purposes. Independent or arthouse cinema thrives more on the profile of film directors, as stated in auteur theory. Because of its non-commercial aims, independent cinema relies more on state (Europe) or private (U.S.) funding. Success is not defined by economic profit but by awards on international film festivals and recognition by film critics. Based on the principles of high culture and funding, the nationality of films plays a more important role. While independent cinema is produced in a small-scale artisanal way, it is aimed at international distribution. Via the circuit of international film festivals, independent cinema is a global alternative to the commercial hegemony of Hollywood.

Due to the 'art cinema bias' of international film critics, European cinema has been equated with art house films in a conventional opposition to commercial Hollywood films (Vincendau 1998). There is, however, also another kind of cinema in Europe: the national cinemas. Despite the similarity with arthouse cinema in its small-scale production, national cinemas cover more diverse and commercial genres like melodramas, comedies, musicals and thrillers with their own local star system. These productions are mainly broadcasted on national television and barely reach audiences beyond the regional language area. Nevertheless, some film directors starting in national cinemas are able to break out of their national career and become internationally recognized as arthouse film directors. While Hollywood does not need independent film festivals to promote its films, the risk-management of Hollywood does pick up film directors that proved their talent in independent filmmaking. This way, the three different film worlds – Hollywood, independent cinema and national cinema – are more interconnected than oppositional discourses suggest. In Fig. 1 I give an overview of the global film industry. Against Hofstede's categorization of

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<sup>6</sup> Auteur theory or auteurism originated in the 1950s publications of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, and was closely related to the French Nouvelle Vague.

central and peripheral film productions, I choose to speak about large-scale and small-scale modes of production. This way, I can add non-western large-scale film production like Bollywood and Nollywood into the figure.

<b>Production</b>	Large-scale	Small-scale
<b>Distribution</b>		
National market	Bollywood, Nollywood	National cinemas Television films
Global market	Hollywood	Arthouse films Independent film

**Figure 1** The global film industry (adapted from Hofstede 2000)

European film industries have established long traditions of national and arthouse cinemas. While French, German and Italian cinemas have received a lot of attention in film studies, the film productions in smaller countries like Belgium and the Netherlands have remained understudied. Despite their geographical position in the heart of Europe, Belgian and Dutch film industries show similarities with Third World cinema. Their mode of production is artisanal and dependent on transnational co-productions. At the same time, countries like Belgium and the Netherlands occupy respectively the first and third place of most globalized countries (KOF Index 2009)<sup>7</sup>. Because of their small size, these countries are highly dependent on foreign resources. Therefore, it can be expected that the film industries in Brussels and Amsterdam are more globalized than in other countries. Since it is in metropolitan contexts that the global, the national and the local intersect, I will now turn to the cities where immigrants and others participate in creative industries and postnational film productions. I will compare immigrant filmmakers in two globalizing cities: Brussels, the multilingual capital of Europe, and Amsterdam, the creative hotspot of the Netherlands. I will demonstrate how different metropolitan contexts shape the trajectories of filmmakers, films and film festivals.

To investigate the trajectories of immigrants in the film industry, I borrow the concept of the opportunity structure from studies on immigrant entrepreneurship. The opportunity structure refers to the chances to make a living in the economics of a certain time and place. Waldinger et al. (1990) argued that opportunity structures (demand side) interact with group characteristics (supply side) to give rise to ethnic entrepreneurship. Rath & Kloosterman (2000) criticized this a priori categorization of immigrants as ethnic groups and the concomitant argument that immigrants differ from mainstream entrepreneurs because they are endowed with ethnic resources. Against the a priori categorization of filmmakers as ethnic, I start from the observation that immigrant filmmakers participate in urban film industries. I argue that their identity is used as a brand to market their films as authentic. In order to demonstrate the impact of urban institutions and markets on the work of immigrant filmmakers, I compare film productions of immigrants in two different cities: Brussels and Amsterdam.

## 5. TWO CITIES, THREE CINEMAS

Since the secession of Belgium from the Netherlands in 1830, the two capital cities of both states have developed in quite distinct ways. While both cities had a predominantly Dutch-speaking population in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Brussels became a bilingual city with a majority of French-speaking citizens in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Amsterdam, the dominant language has always remained Dutch. This difference in linguistic histories has an impact on the development of film industries and immigration in both cities. While Amsterdam is the main center for Dutch film production, Brussels hosts both a Flemish-language and a

<sup>7</sup> [http://globalization.kof.ethz.ch/static/pdf/rankings\\_2009.pdf](http://globalization.kof.ethz.ch/static/pdf/rankings_2009.pdf), retrieved on 31 August 2009

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French-language film industry. Therefore, the two cities in fact host three distinct cinemas (Dutch-, Flemish- and French-speaking). In this section, I will discuss the opportunity structures for immigrant filmmakers in each of these two cities and three cinemas.

### 5.1 Brussels

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). Officially a bilingual city with Flemish- and French-speaking institutions, Brussels also hosts a considerable amount of Eurocrats and non-European immigrants.

Regarding the integration of immigrants, the two Communities take different stances. In Brussels, the Flemish Community Commission (VGC) pursues an ethnic minorities policy. The French-speaking Community Commission (COCOF), on the contrary, does not even want to use the word 'ethnic minority' in official policies. The French-speaking Community adopts a 'republican' assimilationist stance towards integration. It only states that immigrants should know French. While the Flemish Community supports immigrant 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).

In this section, I will compare the role and place of immigrant filmmakers in Brussels and the impact of the Flemish and the French-speaking institutions and markets on their films and their careers.

### 5.2 Immigrant filmmakers in Brussels

The two language communities in Brussels host different institutions for film professionals. Higher education in the audiovisual arts can be followed in nine institutes in Belgium. On the French-speaking side, the most important higher education institutes for the audiovisual arts are the INSAS, La Cambre and the INRACI in Brussels and the IAD in nearby Louvain-la-Neuve. On the Flemish-speaking side, the higher education institutes for the audiovisual arts are the RITS, the Hogeschool Sint-Lukas and the NARAFI in Brussels, the KASK in Ghent and the Media and Design Academy in Genk. Because of the democratization of higher education in Belgium, all schools are state-supported and tuition fees are low compared to other countries. Despite the artistic admission tests in some schools and the requirement of knowing Dutch or French, the schools are relatively easily accessible. Regarding students with an immigrant background, differences can be noticed between the French-speaking and the Flemish-speaking schools. Because more immigrants are French-speaking than Flemish-speaking, more immigrants can be found in the French-language schools. In addition, the French-speaking community has since the 1960s invested in several community-based film production workshops (*ateliers de production*) that provide material support and information for non-professional filmmakers. Among them, the 'Centre de l'Audiovisuel à Bruxelles' and the 'Centre de Vidéo de Bruxelles' are known for supporting especially documentaries made by urban citizens, sometimes from disadvantaged neighborhoods.

As the Belgian cinematographic production is a small industry, the total number of people working in this sector is not very large<sup>8</sup>. Consequently, the number of immigrant filmmakers is very small. Most of them are active as documentary makers and video artists. Only few have achieved to make feature films. One of the first immigrant film directors graduated from the INSAS in Brussels to make feature films was the Tunis-born Mahmoud ben Mahmoud. His film 'Crossing Over' (1982) was one of the first feature films to deal with visa problems of immigrants. Another graduate from the INSAS, the Nazareth-born Palestinian Michel Khleifi gained international acclaim with his feature film 'Wedding in Galilee' (1987) and continued

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<sup>8</sup> The Belgian film industry employed only 1193 people in 1995, most of them in Brussels. (Source: [http://www.obs.coe.int/oea\\_publ/eurocine/1424.html](http://www.obs.coe.int/oea_publ/eurocine/1424.html), retrieved on 3 Sept 2009)

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to make films and documentaries awarded at various international film festivals. In the 1990s, the Congolese director Mweze Ngangura, graduated from the IAD in Brussels, made 'Pieces of Identity' (1998), a feature film on an African king looking for his daughter in Brussels. During the civil war in ex-Yugoslavia, Danis Tanović, fled Sarajevo and came to study at the INSAS in Brussels. With his feature film 'No man's land' (2001) about the civil war, he won the Golden Globe and the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. While the second-generation Maghrebi immigrants in Paris started with the 'banlieue films' already in 1980s, the first film about second-generation immigrants in Brussels appeared with 'Beyond Gibraltar' (2001), made by Taylan Barman and Mourad Boucif. Both directors never attended any film school. As autodidacts, they started their careers by gaining acclaim at local film competitions. Another autodidact who just completed his first feature film 'The Barons' (2009) is Nabil Ben Yadir. His film is a comedy about the life of second-generation Moroccans in Brussels. While all the above-mentioned film directors are French-speaking immigrants, the Flemish-speaking film industry has much less immigrant film directors. Graduated at NARAFI, Rwanda-born director Georges Kamanayo made documentaries about his roots in 'Kazungu le métis' (2000) and 'La fille du grand monsieur' (2005). He became president of the 'Ethno-cultural minorities council in Antwerp' and engaged in several 'intercultural projects' for the Flemish television industry. Another Flemish 'intercultural' filmmaker is Sadies Choua, daughter of a Flemish mother and a Moroccan father. Without any formal film school degree, she made her documentary 'My sister Zahra' (2006) about the confrontation between her lesbian sister and her Muslim father, she gained wide acclaim from Gay, Lesbian and Bisexuals Organizations in Flanders and the Netherlands. In Antwerp, the Turkish-Flemish autodidact R.Kan Albay is producing his own crime and horror films. Without any state support, he made several feature films like 'Toothpick' (2002), 'The Flemish Vampire' (2006), 'Gangsta's Hell' (2007) and 'Coma' (2008). Another Flemish-Turkish film director is Kadir Balci, a graduate from the KASK in Ghent. With support of the Flemish Audiovisual Funds (VAF), he is directing the film 'Turquaze', to be released in 2010.

In both the French- and the Flemish-speaking parts of Belgium, there is an increase of film directors with an immigrant background. The evolution started earlier within the French-speaking part of Brussels. Remarkably, several film directors in Brussels and Antwerp have completed feature films without any formal education. Autodidacts like Taylan Barman and Mourad Boucif even received funding without having formal educational degrees. During interviews, producers revealed that immigrant directors give films a certain 'authenticity' that can be used to attract immigrant audiences. By targeting immigrant communities as consumers, film producers claim to have discovered an underserved market. The directors themselves, however, do not like to be stereotyped as 'immigrant director'. During the interviews I conducted with the directors, they all stated that they do not want to make films only about immigrants. They want to be considered as regular film directors who can make films about more topics than just about migration. To put the Brussels context in a comparative perspective, I will now discuss immigrant filmmakers in Amsterdam.

### 5.3 Amsterdam

From the Golden Age onwards, Amsterdam has been a refuge for immigrants attracted by the city's freedom of religion and economic prosperity. After postcolonial and guest workers migrations in the 1960s and 1970s, the population of the city became increasingly 'ethnically diverse'. While the Netherlands traditionally claimed the reputation of a progressive and tolerant nation that hailed 'multiculturalism' as the political standard, the discourse on immigrants changed significantly after the murder on the Islam-critical filmmaker Theo Van Gogh (2004) and the murder on anti-migration politician Pim Fortuyn (2002). The murders raised heavy debates about immigrants and especially about Muslims. Hardline politicians like Geert Wilders and Rita Verdonk gained popularity with their nationalist discourses on Dutch identity and their stances against immigration. While discourses on 'multiculturalism' became heavily criticized in political debates, Dutch filmmakers discovered 'multiculturalism' as a popular topic in cinema. In 2004, the Dutch film 'Shouf Shouf Habibi!' about the life of second-generation Moroccans in Amsterdam-West was released and gained much popularity. Television-series followed and other 'multiculti comedies' like 'Het Schnitzelparadijs' (2005) and 'Een Beetje Verliefd' (2006) became commercially successful as well. Remarkably, these films about immigrants were all made by native Dutch directors and their topics predominantly focused on the comical experiences of second-generation Moroccans in the Netherlands. Multiculti comedies break with the tradition of the ever-dramatic depiction of immigrants as victims. According to Malik (1996), immigrant films move from a social-issue-based realist cinema of duty to an

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amusement-based cinema of pleasure. The popularity of the ‘multiculti comedies’ made by Dutch directors, however, raises the question whether there are no immigrant filmmakers in the Netherlands.

#### 5.4. Immigrant filmmakers in Amsterdam

In Amsterdam, the main higher education institute for professional audiovisual production is the Dutch Film and Television Academy (NFTA). The internationally renowned Rietveld Academy has also an audiovisual department focusing more on the artistic video production. Other higher education departments for audiovisual arts can be found at the Hogeschool voor de Kunsten in Utrecht and at the St. Joost Academy in Breda. Short-term trainings in audiovisual techniques are offered by the Media Academy in Hilversum and the Binger Filmlab in Amsterdam offers predominantly script development programs. Looking at the Dutch film industry, it becomes clear that the NFTA plays a central role in the education of Dutch film professionals. The NFTA is closely related to the world of professional television and film producers. In interviews with several directors, they stated that the networks they built up during their studies at the NFTA remained important for the rest of their career as a filmmaker. To be admitted to the NFTA, applicants have to know Dutch and to fulfill an artistic admission test. Despite the democratization of higher education in the Netherlands, the NFTA is very selective in admitting students to its fixed programs. While the NFTA receives around 500 applications each year, only 75 students are allowed to start the program. After the hype of ‘Shouf Shouf Habibi’ in 2004, the NFTA noticed that it lacked students with an immigrant background. A campaign was launched to promote the NFTA in high schools with lots of immigrant youngsters. In the applications for the next year, however, no effect of the campaign was found<sup>9</sup>.

Just like the Belgian film production, Dutch film production is a small industry. Not surprisingly, the number of immigrants working as film directors in the Netherlands is low. Nevertheless, some immigrant film directors in the Netherlands have gained worldwide fame. Documentary maker Heddy Honigmann, born in Lima, moved to Amsterdam in 1978. After graduating from the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, she established a long and prolific career as a documentary maker gaining international acclaim with documentaries like ‘O Amor Natural’ (1996) and national success with two fiction films based on Dutch books. In 1985, the 24-year-old Alejandro Agresti fled Buenos Aires after the military coup d’état and ended up at the Rotterdam Film Festival. He stayed in the Netherlands for 10 years and directed 7 feature films there before returning to Buenos Aires. A more conventional migration story is the one of Fatima Jebli Ouazzani. Born in Morocco, she moved at the age of 11 to the Netherlands with her parents. After graduating from the NFTA, she made the documentary ‘In my Father’s House’ (1997) about the status of a woman in an Islamic marriage. The documentary won the Dutch Golden Calf for best documentary in 1998. Another female documentary maker is Meral Uslu. Born in Turkey, she moved to Amsterdam where her father was working. After graduating from the NFTA, she made several documentaries and one television film ‘Roos & Rana’ (2001) about two girls going on a trip from Amsterdam to Istanbul. Another graduate from the NFTA was the Algerian-born Karim Traïdia who gained national and international success with his first Dutch feature film ‘The Polish Bride’ (1998), which was nominated for the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film that year. Launched by the same producers as Traïdia, the second-generation Dutch-Chinese filmmaker Fow Pyng Hu, who just graduated from the Rietveld Academy, directed ‘Jacky’ (2000) and ‘Paradise Girls’ (2004) and became the hope of Dutch arthouse cinema. A second-generation Dutch Moroccan director Jamel Aattache made the first Dutch Kung-fu film ‘Fighting Fish’ (2003). The most successful film director in Amsterdam, however, is Hany Abu-Assad. As a Palestinian born in Nazareth, he came to Amsterdam in 1980 working as an airplane engineer. After directing the Dutch feature film ‘The Fourteenth Chick’ (1998), he started directing Palestinian films like ‘Rana’s Wedding’ (2002) and ‘Paradise Now’ (2005). This last film won the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film and an Oscar-nomination in the same category. Although Abu-Assad was living in Amsterdam and holds the Dutch nationality, the film was submitted as the entry for Palestine at both the Oscars and the Golden Globe. After this success, Abu-Assad left Amsterdam for Hollywood where he was offered the opportunity to make a big-budget film. Remarkably, while Abu-Assad’s ‘Paradise Now’ is the story of two Palestinian men preparing for a suicide attack, in the same year in Amsterdam, Israel-born director Dana Nechushtan filmed the television film ‘Sacrifice’ (2005) with a similar story about a suicide attack but now located in Amsterdam. Her greatest success, however, became ‘Dunya & Desie in Morocco’ (2007), a feature film based on her

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<sup>9</sup> Interview Ernie Tee, teacher NFTA, 10/09/2009



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television series 'Dunya & Desie' about the friendship between a Dutch girl and a second-generation Moroccan girl in Amsterdam-North. More recently, new talents are gaining acclaim in the Netherlands. The Poland-born director Urszula Antoniak, graduated from both NFTA and the Polish film academy, won several prizes at the Locarno Film Festival with her English-language film 'Nothing Personal (2009), about a Dutch girl moving to Ireland. Another young talent is Danyael Sugawara. Born in Japan from a Polish mother and a Japanese father, his parents moved to Amsterdam where he grew up. Recently graduated from the NFTA, he directed his first feature Dutch-language film 'Alles stroomt' (2009) about a mother-son relationship.

The wide-ranging of subjects in the films of immigrant filmmakers does not lend itself to easy conclusions. It can be noted that formal film education like the NFTA is an important condition for film production and funding in Amsterdam. In addition, the Dutch Film Fund explicitly states that it gives priority to experienced filmmakers in allocation its budget<sup>10</sup>. Recent stimulation programs of the Dutch television have proven to be beneficial for young filmmakers. Remarkable for Amsterdam, however, is that immigrant film directors usually start with films targeting national Dutch audiences rather than immigrant audiences (e.g. 'The Polish Bride', 'The Fourteenth Chick'). In this sense, they are not different from other Dutch directors. According to European rules, however, the Dutch Film Fund has to support only feature films that have a 'Dutch identity'. This might explain why most immigrant filmmakers in Amsterdam make feature films that are very Dutch in location, language and characters. Because this rule does not apply to documentaries, immigrants have more chances to make documentaries that include other locations, languages and persons.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Aside from the institutional differences between Brussels and Amsterdam, both cities experience comparable evolutions in their film industries. Beyond postcolonial and guest worker migration stories, filmmakers from very different corners of the world have come to settle for short or long term in the cities. Despite their small number, immigrant filmmakers have entered the film industries in Brussels and Amsterdam. While Brussels has a wide range of Flemish- and French-speaking institutions for filmmakers, the film industry in Amsterdam is more centralized. By consequence, national institutions like the NFTA and the Dutch Film Fund exert more control on the trajectories of filmmakers in Amsterdam. Because of their division, Flemish- and French-speaking institutions in Brussels have less means and less control. This might explain why some immigrant filmmakers in Brussels start up their own film productions without any state support. Regarding the reception of the films, it can be noticed that from the immigrant filmmakers in both Brussels and Amsterdam, the ones who gained most international acclaim are both Palestinians. Michel Khleifi, awarded at Cannes in 1987, and, more recently, Hany Abu-Assad, Golden Globe-winner in 2006, both imagined on the screen the perspective of Palestinian people in the occupied territories. Other than films on hot international issues, the Belgian and Dutch films on second-generation immigrants have been mainly displayed in local cinemas. Films directed by immigrants are marketed as 'authentic'. Contrary to the national 'multiculti' comedies directed by native Dutch filmmakers, the films directed by immigrants have been classified as arthouse cinema. Imag(in)ing the diversity of the global city on the screens of (inter)national film festivals, national cinemas transform into postnational film industries, targeting global audiences and cosmopolitan aesthetics.

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<sup>10</sup> [www.filmfonds.nl](http://www.filmfonds.nl)

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