

IMMIGRATION AND CINEMA: Q-TEAM

Salma Siddique



Event poster for the student presentations © Salma Siddique

In the winter semester of 2018-2019, I designed and convened a Q-Team seminar focussing on film practice with regard to migration and deterritorialisation. Partly emerging from my research on the Indian partition and the creative energies of migrant film personnel navigating the colonial division, the theme was also shaped by our location in Berlin, which has seen a substantial growth of immigrants over the past five years.

Working with a group of twelve BA and MA students, a number that wondrously remained more or less consistent, the course began with introductions to the various research approaches that could be marshalled to study the cultural space of film and its production against the grain of migration. The three topics that the students began researching in groups were diverse in terms of their space and time of production, necessitating very different approaches.

The first group examined the centrality of risk in the film practice of recent émigrés from Syria. Could there be a better time or city to examine this phenomenon? Unlikely. Quick to recognize their advantageous location and connections, a team of five students set about interviewing and collaborating with two independent Syrian filmmakers who now live in Berlin. The second group, too, found the city central to their question, albeit of a different time. On a quest to find the Iranian émigré filmmaker Sohrab Sales in the institutional archives of Germany, the group discovered a selective memory ordering the memorialization of the 'Gastarbeiter' filmmaker of

West Germany during the 1970s and 80s. Finally, the third group plunged themselves deep into the 'skin of the film' (Marks 2000), closely analysing the space, objects and words in Ousmane Sembène's *Black Girl* (1966). Following different geographies and histories of migration, all three inquiries were united in their investigation of an 'exilic displacement, split subjectivity' (Naficy 2000) and the contingencies of production.

The research findings of this seminar were presented in a public event on January 30th where we were joined by the Syrian filmmaker Rafat Alzakout in conversation with the students. Coming together fortnightly, our group consisted of a fair mix of émigrés to Berlin and the urban rail that periodically rushed past our room window provided a befitting backdrop to the journeys that made this congregation.



Q-Team students at the Arsenal archives © Salma Siddique

About the Author:

Salma Siddique is a senior postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at LMU in Munich. She is currently writing the book *Evacuee Cinema: Travels of Film Cultures between Bombay and Lahore 1940-1960*, under contract with Cambridge University Press



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