

From the Source: *Cinemas of the South*

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One of the films that I saw this June at *Cines del sur* film festival in Granada, Spain (<http://www.cinesdelsur.com/>), was the recently re-released Turkish classic *Dry Summer* (*Susuz yaz*, 1964), now restored by Martin Scorsese's World Cinema Foundation. It tells the story of two brothers who own land in the upper part of the village's fields. The configuration is such that the source of water that irrigates the fields of all other villagers lies on their land. So one of the brothers builds a dam and starts watering his own land as a priority, releasing only the left over water to his fellow-villagers. The dramatic events in the film evolve around a set up where this scheming individual plots to control the release of a vital supply and exploit what he possesses.

The Platform (a.k.a. Working Group Southern Film Festivals) is an organisation of film festivals that are dedicated to promoting and disseminating the cinematographies of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. Current members include festivals that are either based in the South or are based in the West but charged with showcasing the cinemas of the 'global South' related to Africa (Zanzibar International Film Festival, FESPACO of Burkina Faso, the African Film Festival of Tarifa, the Carthage Film Festival, the Cairo International Film Festival), Asia and the Middle East (Pusan International Film Festival, Osian's Cinefan of New Delhi, the Kerala International Film Festival, the Al Jazeera International Documentary Festival), and Latin America (Guadalajara International Film Festival, the International Latin American Film Festival of Huelva).

Their declared goals include preserving and promoting diversity while simultaneously respecting one's differences and seeking cultural enrichment. They all subscribe to the idea of promoting the South as 'a concept of life and culture which, even with its enormous diversity, is identifiable by its difficult social, political and economic conditions'. In this context, film is seen as a tool that can contribute to social, political and economic improvement. The two pillars of the document seem to be the declared commitment to 'quality of the filmmakers' and to the 'relevance of the values' which the festivals engage in promoting. It is all for the sake of ensuring that also in the future, the cinemas of the South will 'continue surprising us with its vigour and creativity' as they have done until now as well.

While at Granada, those fifteen or so guests associated with the 'Platform' sat in planning meeting for several hours every day; it was the fifth planning session that they had organised to coordinate their programming, publication, and promotion activities. Their previous meeting had taken place just a few months earlier, in Qatar, hosted by the Al Jazeera IDFF. Topics on the agenda pertained to promoting and disseminating the platform's collaborative efforts through the Internet; improving the circulation of films; and the creation of common contents for a specific section dedicated to cinema from the global South, which each festival can choose to programme either in full or in part. In line with the current trend where festivals are spearheading an integration of production, distribution and exhibition functions, Platform members also look into matters of distributing the festival films across the countries of the south, in order to ascertain just how the festivals belonging to the association can best help filmmakers and producers.

Planned collaborations between the film festivals within the Platform include establishing links and maintaining relationships with each other, hopefully leading to a variety of exchanges and initiatives such as programmes or showcases that will be extended

to like-minded festivals. While the original statement of 2005 talks of encouraging the incorporation of new members, the position in 2010 is that for the time being the membership of the platform has reached a good saturation point and the organisation does not need to grow further. At least not for the time being, while it takes time to consolidate and find its identity.

Cines del sur itself has been in existence for a fairly short time, since 2007; its declared goal is to showcase films from Asia, Africa and Latin America. The driving force behind this seem to be the director of festival, José Sánchez Montes, a documentarian who has made several music documentaries. He is assisted by a young German woman, Nina Friese, who came to Granada a few years ago as an Erasmus exchange student, liked the climate and the people so much, that she stayed, and now has a small production company that she runs out of Spain. Nina, in turn, is assisted by a young Flemish man, Bram Hermans, who is eagerly involved with festival planning. He recently received his Masters degree from Leuven University in Belgium, for a dissertation dedicated on the topic of Film Festivals. The mastermind behind this consolidation of ‘the global South,’ however, seems to be Madrid-based academic Alberto Elena, a high profile cinephile who is better-known in France and Spain and only gradually establishing his reputation in the English-speaking world.

The programme of the festival is perfect for a cinéophile like me: not only have I not seen most films on the programme, the important thing is that these are such films that I really would like to see. There is a god mixture of recent and older titles all from across the glbal periphery: a programme of Philipino classics through to some classical films from Egypt (the Mummy) or . I chose to see Merzak Alouache’s *XXX*, a saga on youngmigrant lives lost while crossing the Mediterranean, yet another moving chronicle in the oeuvre of

this little distributed beur directors.¹ The films are all programmed by a group of academics who have clustered around Alberto Elena, no wonder these are close to my taste as they all reflect the Cinema at the Periphery which I am committed to studying and promoting.² Free copies of the Spanish edition of *Cahiers du cinema* lie around for a pick up; the issue contains material that is tied up with the festival. Following the trend of Locarno where key screenings take place at the central square in open air, Granada's screenings take place in several similar impromptu locations: next to the Cathedral, as well as in the courtyard of the marvellous Corral del Carbón, a 17 century monastery which now hosts the offices of the festival and in the courtyard of which chairs are lined up for the screenings that take place at night (during the day the place is a stop on the city guides' tourist itinerary).

Reception, seminar

Of course, the festiva's backdrop of the Arab Khalifate is an important asset, and it is not by chance that the festival has been set up as part of the programmes of the Foundation, *El legado andalusí*, a semi-private project of an energetic heritage entrepreneur who has managed to bring together the local authorities, the University, and other bodies in order to pull off a range of activities that have resurrected the cultural life in the area. In the heart of Spain's southern province of Andalucia, the city is home to the magnificent complex of palaces known as Alhambra (the territory of the complex hosts another dance and theatre festival). Attending a reception at the Arab Institute, another great Oriental style building built during Franco's time, we overlooked the fabulous hill with the palaces, and had the chance to walk in the garden amidst orange trees. The food, the tapas, the wine, the company – it was all magnificent. It is perhaps not by accident that one of the young Spanish women

¹ I still think of his *Tamanrasset*, which I saw late one night on television in Paris as a great film; unfortunately, it is not available even on DVD.

² See Iordanova, Dina, David Martin-Jones and Belén Vidal (eds.), *Cinema at the Periphery*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010.

attending the event had come with the idea that in order to study of film festivals properly, one should start with studying the festival party: It is a key component of a successful festival architecture.

Parting with the *Cines del sur* festival, I am left with two recommendations I would like to make to the organisers two suggestions to follow up models developed at other festivals. I have in mind two of these at the moment. First, there is the wonderful *Cinema ritrovato* in Bologna (Italy; <http://www.cinetecadibologna.it/cinemaritrovato2009/ev/intro>), yet another project run largely by academic cinéphiles, which attracts a specialised and dedicated audience year after year. The Bologna event's model could be used for developing a programme of seminars and for building up an influential international board. Quite different, in that it is run by a group of amazing erudite amateurs out of a working class sardine can factory town in Brittany, is the wonderful film festival in Douarnenez (France; <http://www.festival-douarnenez.com/>), which has showcased cinema related to the world's ethnic minorities for over thirty years now. In addition, they ought to work toward developing a loyal cinéophile audience, one that could perhaps be recruited from amidst immigrants or younger radicals, one that would keep returning to the event year after year returns and would keep the festival alive with their dedication to the cause of the 'global South', like the audiences of the thirty-odd festival dedicated to the minority cinemas in Douarnenez (France) keeps it alive.