

# Double Vision

## IN OUR PARADISE

There are two running motifs throughout *In Our Paradise*, Claudia Marschal's trenchantly intimate documentary about two battle-worn sisters striving to make better lives for their children away from home. One is a series of shots of the Earth from outer space – a vast and foreign-looking orb kissed by the sun. The other is a series of black backgrounds, holding white, short, lyrical phrases. "It's a Bosnian Roman prayer, and it's used to shelter the film's protagonists," explains Marschal.

Following the parallel lives of sisters Mehdina and Indira – who spend the film in France and Bosnia-Herzegovina respectively – the film documents despair and isolation through a kind, responsible and empathic lens. "I met Mehdina in 2003. She had just moved with her husband to an abandoned synagogue in a rural village in eastern France, which is where my grandmother used to live," Marschal recalls. Enticed by the prospect of anything exciting happening in her grandmother's insular town, the filmmaker's curiosity led her to document Mehdina for the next decade, though the work – taking its world premiere at Sheffield Doc/Fest this summer – wouldn't come into fruition until later.

"It wasn't until we went to Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2013 that I met her sister Indira and that I found the story I really wanted to tell," she says. "The work is about these two sisters, because their stories are so interlinked. I had the desire to investigate what exile means within a family, because whether you're in

France or Bosnia, the weight of prejudice is heavy and limiting."

*In Our Paradise* finds its lighter moments when tailing Mehdina's children, who turn the stark walls of their temporary homes into worlds that no one else can see. Capturing subjects with short temperaments does not make for an easy shoot, but Marschal perfected a rhythm that allowed her to slip unnoticed into their imaginations. "The great thing about kids is that when you turn on the camera, they're going to be performing for you for 20 minutes, and then after that they get bored and forget about it," she says.

The lasting impact of the interviews on the children is anything but transient – especially with Mehdina's eldest daughter. The filming proves to be a positive influence: "She now has a small camera, and she wants to make a film."

Whilst the future of representing displacement on screen appears to be in promising hands, Marschal is here, today, hoping to tell the stories of those seeking a better future for themselves and their families. "I think that we should question the prejudices that we all inherit," says Marschal. "I hope that the digressions in this work can remind people about how small human beings are as inhabitants of the universe." Indeed, upon watching, the film is filled with cinematic magic – instilling a sense of hope as well as the importance to share and understand each other within such times of mass migration, population growth, expansion and unsteady politics.

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Words  
Beth Webb

Claudia Marschal will be attending Q&A sessions for *In Our Paradise*, 7 & 9 June.

Sheffield Doc/Fest, 6-11 June  
[www.sheffdocfest.com](http://www.sheffdocfest.com)

