

REPRESENTATIONAL ISSUES AND PITFALS IN DOCUMENTARIES ABOUT
MIGRANTS

A Project presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree
Master of Arts

By
ALEKSANDAR PETRASKOVIC

Stacey Woelfel, Chair

Reuben Stern

Robert Greene

DECEMBER 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	4
Chapter 3: Professional Analysis.....	19
Appendix I: Interview transcripts.....	54
Appendix II: Weekly Field Notes.....	134
Appendix III: Self-Evaluation.....	140
Appendix VI: Research Proposal.....	144

Chapter One - Introduction

Introduction

Documentary films about migrations have been used not only to depict the sheer numbers of people seeking asylum or citizenship outside of their native countries, but also the causes of migrations, their patterns in different regions around the world and perils that come with relocations. In the opulent body of documentaries about migrations, there is a wide variety of migration tendencies presented—there seems to be a film about every major migration process that happened in the past 30 years.

It is apparent that stories of migrations have many more complexities than are presented in breaking news segments on TV stations. Much like every group has its dynamics, migrations should not be presented in media only from a collective perspective, but interwoven with stories of individuals and their journeys that lead them to become migrants. This became apparent to me when Europe declared its first migrant crisis in 2015 due to an increased number of asylum seekers who were escaping the war in Syria or poor living conditions in other Middle Eastern or African countries. Because I was working at a national TV station in Serbia at that time, I noticed the migrant crisis only became news when there were conflicts with the police on the Serbian-Hungarian border, and that migrants came into the spotlight primarily when there was a clash with the authorities that resulted in injuries, or even worse, with deaths.

Soon after these events in 2015 came the realization of just how hard or even impossible it is to represent migrant experiences in media by focusing solely on the common denominators they all share. Because some of my closest friends also became migrants but were privileged enough not to be included in mass migrations and have left

their native country on their own terms, there was a realization of just how unjust the treatment of migrants in mass media is, and this led to an eagerness to show migrations from a more personal perspective and to make a short documentary film about this subject.

The research about the representational issues in documentaries on migrations and migrant experiences was done in order to avoid some dilemmas in making a documentary film of my own and in order to avoid pitfalls observed in the way mass media reports on migration.

An additional aim of this research is to make a record of challenges encountered by filmmakers while making a film with migrant protagonists so that those challenges can be analyzed in order to see if they show similarities and patterns. Subsequently, this project will contribute to the body of research done on migrant documentaries by offering an “inside-out” approach. In short, this means that the research will look for insights from the filmmakers’ perspective and add a distinct view that is rarely seen in the growing body of academic work about migrant documentaries or reporting on migrations in general. These restrictions noticed in other research are primarily because most of them focused on the published or broadcasted work, and not on the process that happened during the creation of such work.

In doing this project, the questions that were posed to filmmakers were also trying to discover if reporting on migrations and migrant experiences is in any way distinct and does it add nuances to the ethical considerations documentary filmmakers are already facing when being granted the right and access to record and creatively portray other people’s lives and experiences. Therefore, the biggest motivation for this project came

from the lack of similar research and the objective reasoning that this research is worth doing not only to show of which future filmmakers should be cognizant when making a migrant documentary by offering advice from those who have worked in this industry for a long time, but also to inform the public of the expressive power—or the lack of thereof—in documentaries that try to present the complexities of migrant lives.

Chapter Two- Literature Review

Literature review

Despite the variety of issues that documentaries depict, the topic of migration probably bears most concern when it comes to the question of "How do we treat the people we film" (Nichols, 2017), and this question relates to much more than the sheer treatment of people during the filming process, since it speaks to all the pre- and post-production choices available to the filmmaker. The proceeding literature review will try to find an insight into all the representational pitfalls found when making a documentary film about migrants and their experiences, and also how a filmmaker's "way of seeing the world" (Nichols, 2017) can be made complementary to the way a migrant sees the world.

Presentation of migrants in documentary films

When presenting migrant topics in documentary films, authors have to be extremely diligent and pay attention to the vulnerability of subjects whose identities are not only being reexamined by themselves but often reshaped by others. Dutch researcher Jasper Vanhaelemeech in his work on tracing borderscapes- a term coined for the research done on documentaries about Central American migrations (Vanhaelemeech, 2018), analyzed the work of anthropologist Shahram Khosravi and philosopher Giorgio Agamben and stated that the act of relocation that characterizes the migrant experience, regardless of its motives, typically leads to a discarding of the nation's political and legal framework for the insecurity of the journey. Following this reasoning, undocumented migrants are then regarded as "unnatural" "pathological" and "criminal" in the logic of

the nation state as their performance expresses a desire to shake off the shackles of citizenship to return to naked, depoliticized life as *homini sacri* (Agamben, 1998).

The logical question coming from this rationale is whether documentaries in their quest for truthfulness are even able to grapple with the representation of stateless individuals. The counter argument to this would be that documentary films, even though not omnipotent, have much greater power in presenting the paradoxical nature of being a migrant in comparison to other visual forms of narration, mainly fiction films. This is affirmed by those who claim that attempts at presenting migrant stories in documentary form have seen a major change for the better since the early days of ethnographic research. Pantoja Prechard argues that ethnographic research only provided a false scientific rigor and that instead, films employing self-reflexivity have a much greater expressive power that can at least get somewhat close in rightfully presenting the position of migrants.

A self-reflexive documentary -- despite being determined by and imbued with the social, political and cultural conditions under which it is produced – has an open-ended form, a form that challenges its own closure and thus suggests other possible closures, inviting other possible meanings. And it is here where the value of self-reflexivity lies (Pantoja Peschard, 2014, p. 208).

Similar to Prechard, Vanhaelemeesch theorized that different stylistic approaches can contribute to the creation of a pedagogical function, informing viewers about the social reality behind migrations and at the same time offering a complex aesthetic cinematic experience (Vanhaelemeesch, 2018).

Just how creative a documentary filmmaker should be in order to make a film that will both inform and educate viewers without misrepresenting the life of its protagonists

or altering the reality of the issue at hand is another topic to be taken into consideration. Nichols has discussed films that set out to heighten our awareness of the problems of representing others, one such film has testimonies of Vietnamese migrants as a central theme; *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989) questions the authenticity and truthfulness of representation itself. Even though the film features testimonies by Vietnamese women who emigrated to the US, the audience realizes this only later in the film as they are first led to believe that the interviews are done with the women in Vietnam who describe the oppressive conditions they have faced since the end of the war. These accounts are actually true but transcribed and edited by Trinh Minh-ha and performed on stage by the women in San Jose, California. Despite the general impression that this type of involvement from the director decreases audience trust, knowing that the film is constructed this way in order to bring attention to larger issues makes for a valid argument that, sometimes, unorthodox structures have a greater power to perform this very pedagogical function discussed earlier.

The women in *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* are from Vietnam but now belong to an immigrant community that is itself part of a war-induced displacement, or diaspora: hybrid identities, provisional alliances, and a tension between past and present realities render most categories. (Nichols, 2010, p. 240).

The constant desire of filmmakers to be creative in telling someone else's stories can, at times, prove to be detrimental. That is why filmmakers and those who analyze their work keep ethical considerations in the center, and particularly scrutinize them in migrant films.

Ethical concerns in migrant documentaries

French philosopher Jacques Derrida posits “ethics is the domain of the unconditional concern with the responsibility towards the others who have endured the violence of politics” (Pantoja Peschard, 2014, p. 9). This statement seems to resonate the most with the ethical dilemmas in migrant documentaries. It is often politics that forces individuals or groups of people across the borders of their native countries, and how to convey this violence of politics on the screen while keeping in mind the concern and responsibility towards the subject is the topic of this chapter.

The authors who have theorized about documentary filmmaking such as Bill Nichols might have already solved the puzzle and offered the guideline for filmmakers that have ethical concerns and representational issues when portraying the life of their subjects, but even though the advice to "do nothing that would violate the humanity of your subject and nothing that would compromise the trust of your audience" (Nichols, 2016) could not be truer, the question is how do filmmakers accomplish this when their subjects are migrants, and it seems like Nichols purposefully left the space for ambiguity in this definition.

The research done by Strom and Alcock shows that a great ethical concern when it comes to the representation of migrants in mainstream media comes from lexical and grammatical choices. The critical discourse study they have done analyzing the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times daily newspapers between January 2014 and December 2014 showed that water-based lexicon, particularly words such as floods, waves, and surges of migrants, communicates an ideology that reinforces the opinion that migrants need to be removed instead of focusing on the fact that there was a humanitarian crisis in 2014 and that unaccompanied children crossing the US-Mexico border needed

aid (Strom & Alcock, 2017). No such feats were recognized in the documentary films analyzed in this research, primarily because the films had very little or no voiceover narration. However, Storm and Alcock did bring attention to the implementation of ideology through the usage of specific expressions and words.

Dehumanizing migrants can be an issue for documentary filmmakers—especially in films that are using voiceover narration—but even in observational films. According to Nichols, persuading viewers cannot be done with purely observational techniques, and the overt intervention of the filmmaker and obvious explanations are required for the documentary to convince or promote a view (2016). But Prechard and documentary theorist Michael Renov disagree. It emerges from Renov’s argumentation that there is no such thing as “pure” observation since all records—all images—are always mediated. Therefore, the visual record or document, even if attempting to “merely” observe, is inexorably promoting a view (Renov, 1993).

Perhaps the ethical concerns do not only come from filmmakers’ choices and decisions, as Foucault has seen that a person can perform in relation to procedures and actions proper to their time. Therefore, societal norms and power structures can influence one’s behavior, and this idea is taken further by Faubion who claims that “in ethics and in that reflexive exercise of power the human beings can, if always within limits, undertake to envision and to revise themselves.” (Cowie, 2011).

Foucault’s thoughts are shared by filmmaker Jonathan Oppenheim, who notes that everyone talking to the camera is both performing and expressing themselves in a deep way. In an interview with yet another filmmaker, Colin Nusbaum, Oppenheim said that he realized how interview is behavior rather than information when editing the

documentary *Paris is Burning*, adding, “In a documentary, pieces are collected, extremely partial fragments of reality. In fact, they’re very strange pieces because everyone in these fragments of reality is aware that they’re being filmed” (Kouadjo, 2015). This performative aspect of documentaries—even more performative in migrant documentaries since they often opt to portray portraits and close ups of different characters—is almost counterbalanced if not outweighed by the choices available in the editing room. Since Oppenheim is primarily an editor, he spoke about this, too.

What you see in a lot of non-fiction films are people who are not fully aware of what they’re showing you. You’re sort of there to catch it and work with it and reflect. You use it to shape your narrative, but you also want to be true to them. Intention comes in – your intention is to be true to your own vision of reality – but also, they’re at your mercy. (Kouadjo, 2015)

What seems most problematic in documentary films and their quest to ethically present issues they are trying to convey is that there are no codes of ethics as there are in journalism. In order to provide a public space for the discussion of documentary ethics, research done by Aufderheide et al. in 2009 is helpful. The authors investigated the ethical challenges specific to documentary filmmakers by interviewing 45 directors and producer-directors and, even though the general implication is that filmmakers approach ethical considerations case by case, there were still three common challenges they all shared: those relating to subjects, the audience, and the filmmakers’ own artist vision and production limitations (Aufderheide, Jaszi, & Chandra, 2009).

It is not a secret that production costs money and that filmmakers often come from the middle or upper echelons of society, and in some cases are able to help the

subjects they are filming, but this raises a series of other ethical questions. Aufderheide et al. talked about this with filmmakers, and this conversation proved once again that filmmakers assess the situation from case to case. One filmmaker whose subjects were financially strapped did not talk about money in initial conversations, but “a year later, when he was still filming, he offered his subjects a \$5,000 honorarium. He chose to do this because the subjects had asked for money, and he felt that by then his access was not predicated on the payment, and that this was an important gesture to make” (2009, p. 13). Another filmmaker found subjects who were immigrants asking to borrow money, but she refused to lend the money because she feared it would jeopardize her working relationship with them.

Yet another dilemma that the filmmakers working on a migrant documentary might find themselves in, is whether to report any illegal activities to the authorities. A filmmaker who made a documentary about a company that employed illegal immigrants simply left that fact out of the film and did not report it “We didn’t call the police—we felt like that would be a breach of trust.” (2009, p.9). All these personal dilemmas are interconnected with the perspective of the production and the way they envision the film and since a lot of times artists depend on the money coming from broadcast corporations their independence should be questioned. The next chapter speaks about the films that have been made from the position of power and how that changes the overall sentiment of a film.

Issues related to telling migrant stories

In their critical approach to the documentaries that were broadcast on BBC Two and Channel 4 in the United Kingdom, Vickers and Rutter implemented the Marxist

analysis of British capitalism, the capitalist crisis and the economic and political position of migrants. By analyzing the discourse of three separate TV documentary films, the authors were able to conclude that the representations of migrants can be grouped into three categories “disposable labour, passive victim, and active threat.” (Vickers & Rutter, 2018, p. 486). The authors argued that “these discursive roles reflect and reinforce capitalist exploitation, by constructing ‘migrants’ as a mutable ‘other’ to divide the working class” (Vickers & Rutter, 2018, p. 486).

This research is important for the project because it shows how a mix of text, sound and image can be used to change or reinforce viewers’ beliefs or attitudes. Authors have provided an analysis of “how discourses reflect and contribute to material exploitation” (Vickers & Rutter, 2018, p. 491). Furthermore, Vickers and Rutter were able to conclude that all three analyzed films, *The Truth about Immigration in the UK*, *The Hidden World of Britain’s Immigrants* and the Episode 2 of *Benefits Street* suggested that recent migration is unlike any previous ones, not only quantitatively but qualitatively, and authors found the reason to claim this because documentaries they analyzed suggested that a threat to society is present not only because of the number of migrants seeking asylum but due the way in which they organize and steal jobs from British- born citizens.

In *TIUK*, contemporary migration is described as ‘unprecedented’, and in *BS* as a ‘new wave from the East’. *HWBI* covers at length a robbery carried out by a recent migrant on a shop owned by an earlier migrant, and in interviews the presenter generalizes by suggesting such incidents may be a reason ‘some people’ want migrants to leave the country. In *TIUK*, a more general sense of economic threat is expressed, for example in this interview with an unnamed South Asian man against the backdrop of a cultural festival, emphasizing his minority status: The frustrating thing about it is our communities, our British-born, cannot get the job, and the

Eastern communities, the European communities, can get a job. (Vickers & Rutter, 2018, p. 496)

According to the findings from this research, the filmmakers framed their stories in order to show how new immigrants pose a threat to the old ones and their descendants, and authors deducted that the creators of these three documentaries unknowingly or not were strengthening the current power structure by omitting messages that reinforce the culture of fear.

We found migrants consistently portrayed as distinct and separate, reinforcing Moore and Forkert's argument that depictions of migrants disidentify them from the working class and thereby mask their exploitation and undermine the potential for classbased solidarity. (Vickers & Rutter, 2018, p. 498)

Misrepresentation of immigrants in TV documentaries is also a major part of the research done by Cheregi. This author goes into great depth when searching for recurring themes in British documentaries about Romanian immigrants. Cheregi recognizes the role of images in framing the stereotypes about Romanians and findings from this approach proved fruitful in pinpointing another pitfall of migrant presentation in documentaries; that being introducing private issues in public context and subsequently redefining the public sphere.

The British television mostly use economic (images of pauper Romanian villages), political (images of politicians discussing about the Romanian migrants), and national security (images of homeless Romanians rough sleeping) frames in the coverage of Romanian immigration. The media also infer the polarization between "Us" (the British citizens) and "Them" (the Romanian migrants). (Cheregi, 2015, p. 96)

Cheregi's article combines framing theory with dispositive analysis and it is yet another research approach that could be used in developing hypotheses about the representation of immigrants in documentary films. Justification for this mixed approach is to be found in the reasoning that images appear more closely linked to reality than

words, even if they are “human made artificial constructions” (Messaris & Abraham, 2001, p. 216). Cheregi claims that the relationship between words and their meaning is purely a matter of social convention, while the relationship between images and their meanings is based on similarity. Nonetheless, this analogy is heavily debated, mainly because there are discrepant views on the representational power of images, and their indexicality. Within the realm of film, indexicality can be thought of as an "image that bears a strict correspondence to what it refers to" (Nichols, 2010), or in the sense of the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce, a trace or imprint, a pointing finger with a material connection to the object it signifies (Doane, 2007). However, Cheregi justifies her views by drawing from Messaris' and Abraham's perspective and this allows her to conclude that images can constitute “effective tools for framing and articulating ideological messages” (Messaris & Abraham, 2001, p. 216).

Messaris and Abraham are not the only ones who realized the potential images and sounds have in dispersing ideological messages; Plantinga was of the opinion that film images alone may imply or suggest propositions, but cannot assert them with the directness of verbal language (Plantinga, 1997). This is especially important for migrant documentaries that do include voiceovers, interviews, other recorded speech or title cards, since linguistic accompaniment determines the meaning, and if images are backed by a voiceover commentary that is falsely making claims to truth, the film might be edited out of context in order to support someone's agenda.

Nichols is yet another author who mentioned the potency images have to move into action and appeal to the feelings of the audience with either artistic or artificial

proofs. Nichols devoted a whole chapter of his book *Introduction to Documentary* to deliberative films that tell us what to do.

This is the domain of encouraging or discouraging, exhorting or dissuading others on a course of public action. Political issues of social policy such as war, welfare, conservation, abortion, artificial reproduction, national identity, and international relations belong to this domain. Deliberations face toward the future and pose questions of what is to be done. (Nichols, 2017, p. 105)

Since national identity is firmly embedded in most of the documentary work on migrant experiences, once again, Nichols' thoughts on how the audience constructs categories and concepts can help filmmakers be aware of the identity politics that does not originate with documentary but in society at large. Importantly, "documentary filmmakers strive to find the means to represent these issues in ways that retain a sense of their magnitude in the lives of the people who confront them." (Nichols, 2017, p. 242)

Possible solutions to the representation of migrants in documentary films

While it is now obvious that most documentaries just depict plights of the migrant population and that only some of them help construct these social occurrences, how to inventively and respectfully portray these experiences and retain a sense of their magnitude is the next big dilemma. Work done by Juhasz & Lebow might help with that.

In their book *A companion to contemporary documentary film*, Juhasz and Lebow presented a series of essays in which documentary filmmakers explained what they thought to be the best approach in portraying migrant topics with the highest level of ethics and without misrepresenting the migrant experience. This approach is closest to the

methodology this research incorporated in the interviewing phase since the direct voices from documentary filmmakers were included and analyzed in a similar fashion.

The voice of Mieke Bal might prove very useful in shedding light on innovative ways of filming and editing migrant documentaries with high representational and ethical standards; this cultural theorist and visual artist calls her own ongoing self-reflective practice “autotheory” (Juhasz & Lebow, 2015, p. 90). Biemann’s “videogeography” *Sahara Chronicle* (2006–2009) documents how migration paths within Africa have changed due to occurrences on other continents, primarily in Europe after the 1990s and the implementation of the Schengen Agreement that eliminated borders within the EU. This led to European Union’s decision to shift the patrolling and surveillance to Sub-Saharan migration areas. “In effect, Biemann’s video research testifies, European mobility has increased at the expense of Sub-Saharan mobility” (Juhasz & Lebow, 2015, p. 90). . With an aim to create migratory aesthetics Bal is trying to have her documentaries admit to their own performativity.

They (the films) establish connections with people who are immersed in migratory culture but do not necessarily take critical distance from their own position in it. They are made in close collaboration with their ‘subjects’ and deploy aesthetic experimentation in order to get closer to a shared understanding. (Juhasz & Lebow, 2015, p. 134).

Bal sees artmaking as a form of thinking and reflects on film as a continuation of the making. Her process of filmmaking should allow for a better connection with people beyond the limits of traditional writing by implementing the idea that the entire public space in which we live is migratory, whether someone is a migrant oneself or not. Only

such a cultural translation can challenge inherently hierarchical linguistic, cultural, and political borders and foster a “move toward the other,” in Bal’s formulation, which is the main goal of contemporary documentary-making. Additionally, she wants to “break the loneliness of the migrant not so much to offer a condescending ‘voice’ but to build a ground of empathy based on a shared participation in migratory culture” (Juhasz & Lebow, 2015, p. 91). Interviews with filmmakers done for this research showed that shared participation in migratory culture did indeed inform directorial choices, and whether these choices can improve the representation of migrant experiences will be one of the main topics in the analysis.

Another documentary theorist, Ursula Biemann, has been uncovering and visualizing geopolitical lines of migration and mobility across the globe. She explains that she uses the video camera as a cognitive tool to write counter-geographies, which, rather than reinforcing regimes of border control, documents the way in which people subvert and transgress borders. She attempts this through video installations. One of them, entitled *Contained Mobility*, shows the absurdity of the regulations within the European Union by offering a two-channel synchronized video—one side of the split screen depicts sophisticated technologies that regulate the movement of goods and people by what seems like the radar imagery, and the other side shows Anatol, a migrant himself who was able to outwit the restrictions and achieve mobility and security.

Even though both Bal’s and Biemann’s films and video installations seem experimental and unlikely to reach a wider audience, what seems to be the most important take from this school of thought is the idea that documentary aesthetics should mostly focus on reproducing the experiences of migrants themselves. For Biemann,

borders that separate countries isolate the filmmaker from her subjects and her audiences and erect boundaries among genres, disciplines, and methods.

Unlike these filmmakers and documentary theorists who, rightfully so, center the stories of migration around the migrants themselves and their lived experiences, refusing to portray such transnational phenomena from a perspective of one country or one border, other work analyzed in the literature review showed that there are a lot of documentary films that do not have such an experimental approach.

Therefore, in conclusion, based on the discussions above, I propose two research questions that are of significance to the study of documentary filmmaking:

RQ1: What are the principal representational challenges of reporting about migrations and migrant experiences in documentaries?

RQ2: How might filmmakers address/overcome those challenges?

Methods

This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach that seeks to identify “the essence of human experience” (Creswell, 2014) and, in order to explore and scrutinize these experiences, in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews with filmmakers and professionals from the documentary field were used. According to Fontana and Frey, semi-structured interviews offer a chance for the interviewing process to be directed by the interviewer with questions that are already constructed but leave enough space for the interviewer to ask the follow-up questions (Fontana & Frey, 1994). This implies that the preconceived categories may limit the field of inquiry, and therefore, the researcher should ask follow-up questions in order to get a better

understanding of the pre-defined concepts and hypotheses, however, the respondents should remain the experts and direct the research. For this to happen, a certain level of previous study in the research topic area is required and that is why the general prompts for the interviewing phase were constructed by analyzing the literature review.

Furthermore, there is evidence that the quality of the interview guide fundamentally influences the results of the study (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016), and an important step in formulating a guide, other than informing the interview questions from the literature review, is to test the interview questions by looking for an assessment of these questions from the external specialists. I found my committee members helpful in this, as they not only helped in formulating relevant questions but also offered guidance about the wording and the arrangement of the questions. That is why a first draft of the interview questions was offered in the research proposal.

Chapter Three- Professional Analysis

Procedure

In order to understand filmmakers' experiences and search for nuances in their artistic approaches, the interviews asked two types of questions, the general, and the more specific ones. Often, one led to another, however, some of the more specific prompts were in direct relation to the films made by the interviewed filmmakers.

To clarify this, the specific questions that came from the more general ones occurred when interviewees reported that they found a way to avoid representational issues in their films by looking at the work done by other filmmakers, and a logical follow-up question to this was, whose work they are referencing.

I began each interview with an open-ended prompt such as "Can you describe what first attracted you to make a film about migrations/migrant experiences?" or "Does a documentary form have the power to present the complexities of migrations?" Each of these prompts allowed for follow-up inquiries about details heard in response. Leech suggests to include unstructured formal probes with each question, or the list of desired response details for each question (Leech, 2002). Thus, the two types of questioning, informal and formal, assisted this research and helped in making sure that responses were strictly regarding the research topic.

Since most of the time in-person interviews were not possible because the relevant filmmakers for this research lived on different continents, telephone interviews were conducted. Additionally, when choosing interviewees, there was a deliberate effort to find filmmakers who have done work on migrant experiences of the population from

southeast Europe, since the issues these filmmakers encountered could be complementary to issues found in making of a similar film for the capstone project.

Once finished with conducting the interviews and transcribing them, the responses were analyzed in the form of a written report. Since the initial inquiry on the academic work that analyzed migration documentaries did not return any results that included interviewing as a method, and since this was one of the first attempts to articulate the representational issues of migrant experiences by using this research method, coding the findings was done by using the grounded theory approach, “reserving the need for the researcher to conceive preliminary hypotheses, thus providing greater freedom to explore the research area and allow issues to emerge” (Jones, 2005, p. 144). This theory proposes three levels of coding the results; open coding is the stage in which the raw data is initially examined, followed by selective coding that allows the researcher to filter and code data which is determined to be more relevant to the emerging concepts, and lastly, theoretical coding occurs when the saturation point is reached in the first two stages (Jones, 2005).

Sampling

The main criteria for the selection of interview subjects was their previous work in documentary filmmaking. Primarily, the aim of this research was to only include those filmmakers with at least one short or feature documentary on migrations or migrant experiences. Additional filtering attempted to include interviews with filmmakers who have made films about migrants from the Balkan countries currently living abroad. This is due to the professional part of this research project that accounts for a film whose topic is the life of Serbian migrants in countries around the world and the wish for this film to

be informed by the interviews in this analysis. However, since it was not possible to achieve relevance and answer the research questions by focusing only on documentaries that have depicted the life of migrants from the Balkan countries, interviews with filmmakers from different European countries and the United States of America were conducted, and even with the filmmakers who have made documentaries on migrations and migrant experiences outside of their native countries.

The films made by the directors interviewed for this research were not divergent only in their length, but also in styles, genre (one of the films was a hybrid documentary), countries where filming happened, migrant nationalities and the migrant plights they presented. Because of these reasons, the initial idea to have all the interviews conducted in person had to be changed, and only an interview with Lynne Sachs happened in person, primarily because Sachs was the only filmmaker from the wish list based in the US at the time of this research. The remaining seven interviews were conducted over the phone, and two of them had to be done in Serbian and then translated into English.

The reason why such a wide net was cast when it came to different forms of documentaries used in this analysis was due to the first research question and the follow-up questions that came from it that are trying to investigate if one style of documentary filmmaking presents a better option for presenting the complexities of migrations. Therefore, this analysis, other than keeping migrant documentaries in the crux, also aimed to include interviews with filmmakers who have made migrant films from different perspectives; one example is the character-driven film *My Honeymoon* by Eileen Hofer from Switzerland, another is the observational documentary *Taste of Cement* by Ziad Kalthoum, a Syrian filmmaker based in Germany, and yet another can be the hybrid

documentary *Your Day is My Night* that saw its director Lynne Sachs mix both the elements of documentary and theater in her film. The list of dissimilar forms and styles does not end here and will be presented with the biographies of each interviewed filmmaker.

Another very important concern for this research was to find an adequate sample size. Boddy suggests "qualitative research often concerns developing a depth of understanding rather than a breadth" (2016), which I believe is true in the case of this study. In the research proposal, initial sample size included the list of five documentary filmmakers, however, this number proved to be insufficient and for this analysis, the number of interviews grew until there were clear signs of saturation, and that point became most apparent when the last two out of eight interviews were conducted. Even though the research proposal also stated that the project would try to include in-depth interviews with more than six filmmakers, an estimate from Boddy proved to be helpful in achieving the right sample size: One study based on theoretical sample-size found six in-depth interviews began to show signs of data saturation, and after twelve in-depth interviews became fully apparent (Boddy, 2016). Similarly, the first six interviews revealed certain patterns, but expanding the list to a total of eight interviews reaffirmed these patterns and made them more apparent. Additionally, from the list of five filmmakers provided in the research proposal, only two proved to be willing to participate in this research, and so, new names were added to the list, but this did not stop the research from going deep in order to find answers as to what the filmmakers find to be the principal representational challenges of reporting about migrations and migrant experiences.

The first director interviewed was Ratko Momcilovic, a filmmaker who directed three 45-minute documentaries for VICE Media about the life of Serbian immigrants in the United States of America entitled *Galeb u Americi (Seagull in America)*. The documentaries in the center of this research are the first two episodes of the *Galeb u Americi (Seagull in America)* series. The first one titled *Kimiondzije (Truck Drivers)* portrays the life of Serbian truck drivers from the Chicago area, whereas the second episode named *Green Karte (Green Cards)* shows the attempt of Serbian immigrants to obtain American green cards.

The second filmmaker I interviewed was Aleksandar Reljic, whose film *Zid (Wall)* captured early endeavors of Hungarian officials to build a wall on the border with Serbia in order to prevent mostly Syrian migrants from getting into the European Union. The film was made in August of 2015, so it also captured the experiences of first migrants from Syria and other Middle East countries before their resettlement to Europe was breaking news and before it was declared a humanitarian crisis.

I then interviewed Lynne Sachs, a filmmaker from Brooklyn who documented the experiences of Chinese immigrants to New York in her film *Your Day is My Night*. The documentation process for this film was rather unusual since Sachs first had a casting to find Chinese immigrants who had experiences with the shift bed houses- the apartment buildings in which one bed is rented to more than one person. She then recorded their testimonies, worked with a playwright to have a script for a theatrical play with the same “social” actors who shared their experiences, and after all this, the hybrid documentary was filmed in New York’s Chinatown using the dialogues from the play as a starting point, but also including other non-scripted elements. Another documentary film on

migrants made by Sachs is *The Washing Society*, a film that talked about the experiences of people who work at the New York City laundromats.

The next interviewee was Ziad Kalthoum, the director of the feature documentary *Taste of Cement*. This film goes on to show the working conditions of Syrian construction workers in Beirut, Lebanon. For his work in *Taste of Cement*, Kalthoum got a Muhr award at the Dubai International Film Festival for the best nonfiction feature film and was also nominated for the European Film Academy documentary award – Prix Arte.

I also interviewed Iva Radivojevic, a filmmaker currently based in Fairbanks, Alaska. Radivojevic emigrated with her parents in the 1990s from then Yugoslavia to Cyprus where she spent most of her adulthood. Spending most of her life as an immigrant, she was able to transfuse some of her own experiences in the documentary feature *Evaporating Borders*. In this film, Radivojevic offers a great deal of self-reflexivity and this comes not only from being a migrant herself but from realizing that borders are often a psychological construct more than they are a physical barrier.

The next interview was conducted with a Danish documentary filmmaker, Soren Klovborg. His film *Maid in Hell* about the life of mainly African maids in Middle East countries, was bought and broadcast by numerous national or public TV services, including BBC, CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation), as well as other, primarily Scandinavian TV networks. A short version of this film was also distributed by BBC Africa on Facebook, and it was shared more than 25,000 times in Africa only.

The second to last interviewed filmmaker was Eileen Hofer from Switzerland whose short documentary *My Honeymoon* was selected for a number of festivals both in

Europe and in the United States. This film was made in a migrant camp in Bulgaria where Syrian asylum seekers got their temporary shelter. The migrant whose story was the focus of this film is Berivan, an English teacher from Syria who got to spend her honeymoon in the migrant shelter after escaping the war in her home country. This is definitely the most character-driven film among the ones analyzed in this research, and as Cagle describes it, character-driven films use social actors that have a semiotic function and act as the conduit to larger issues (Cagle, 2012).

The last of the filmmakers interviewed was Nikola Ilic, a migrant himself, Ilic made a documentary film *Kanton Jugoslawien (Yugoslavia County)* about the life of Serbian immigrants in Switzerland. In this film he had several of his characters discuss the occurring themes, mainly regarding the migration experiences of those that fled Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, and how, if at all, they assimilated to the Swiss lifestyle. This film was broadcast by the Swiss national television SRF 1, and it also received a special mention award at the South East European Film Festival in Los Angeles as well as the Silver Remi Award at the World Fest in Houston.

Findings

The most common representational issues found during a series of in-depth interviews with documentary filmmakers can be divided into two categories. The first is more practical and it comes from the outside factors such as the lack of access to film's protagonists, money or production needs. The second is internal since it is imposed by filmmakers' own creative decisions, stylistic choices, transparency and self-reflexivity included in the film or the lack of it. Although these two categories of representational issues became apparent in the research analysis, they are not completely independent, and

at times they work together, therefore, stylistic choices, creative decisions and structural changes to the film are often made due to the limited access to immigrants and their experiences or the limited means of production.

Principal representational challenges in migrant films

Because the profiles of interviewed filmmakers were so different and their documentary work on migrations also quite dissimilar, there was a fear that the challenges they encountered were very distinct and that the patterns would not occur. This was not the case. There were many common themes that presented themselves in this analysis, as well as points at which filmmakers opinions conflicted. The most common representational challenge each filmmaker had to face was the decision on how to structure the film and implement a style that would truthfully tell a migrant story without causing harm. Because the films that were included in this research were so structurally different, it came as a surprise that the majority of interviewees thought that observational documentaries did the least harm to the representation of migrant experience, despite the claims from Renov that there is no such thing as “pure” observation, and that in an attempt to observe, filmmakers also have to promote a view (Renov, 1993).

For Ziad Kalthoum, observing through the camera lens was the best way to convey migrant experiences even though he was also aware that he was promoting his view, primarily because he believes that pairing the footage with all the distinct sounds from the construction site in his film *Taste of Cement* made for a veracious presentation of the repetitiveness to which the migrant construction workers were subjected every day.

Kalthoum said that in cinema, the filmmakers' job is to transfer a feeling and not dry information. Moreover, he thinks that for this particular topic, opting for interviews would have been a big mistake. Kalthoum said, "If you are only listening to one of the workers, you are only following their direction, but if you let the silence play its part, and if everything exists in front of you, you don't need any explanations, because it is apparent." This challenge to avoid representational pitfalls and to "invite the audience and show them what it's like to be one of the workers" was his primary goal, and the sound design was his biggest language in telling the story of 400 Syrian migrants being forced to work on a skyscraper in Beirut. Although in the *Taste of Cement* he decided purposely not to present dry facts to the audience by using title cards or infographics, Kalthoum, much like other interviewees, posited that the structure depends on the filmmaker and what story he or she is trying to tell. Nevertheless, Kalthoum said that it would have been easier "to put a Syrian worker in a very beautiful frame and let him speak for 10 hours, go to the editing room and reduce that to five minutes, provoke the emotion and let the audience cry". Instead, Kalthoum decided to include only a short narration at the very beginning of the film and an additional one towards the end, but this narration was juxtaposed with scenes of the construction site and the workers who function within this highly industrial and repetitive environment even though they are trapped inside it and left without a choice. In a sense, this gave the film more authenticity and humanized Syrian workers, not by using oral testimonies, but with the footage that observes both the individual and collective struggles and injustices of the Syrian war and its repercussions.

Others, like Soren Klovborg, said that making a character-driven film without a voiceover but with interviews and title cards was the best way to show the gravity of the migrant story he was trying to tell. Klovborg presented the complexities of showing what African and Asian women are going through through while working as maids in the Middle East, and also shed light on the potential reasons why 2.8 million of primarily African maids still work in Middle East despite the perils they are facing.

The participatory style used in *Maid in Hell* is visible when Klovborg asks questions to Maher, the agency owner who makes arrangements for African maids to work in Lebanon, or in other instances when he interviews maids who are located in the safe house, or even when he made his presence felt in an interview with Mazen Al-Hindawi, an agent of Mary Kibwana, the girl who died because of the burns she suffered while serving as a maid in the Middle East. The style of visual narration Klovborg opted for was also influenced by outside factors, primarily the impossible task of having the right access to private homes where maids were abused. Klovborg explained that if a woman is abused “there's no way in hell that you're going to get access and film”, and that this is why he used the video footage that the maids filmed themselves.

In a similar vein, Eileen Hofer thought that it was best for her to construct the story of Syrian immigrants in Bulgaria through the lens of just one person, making her film *My Honeymoon* character-driven.

To me, the big history is linked to the small history and the story of each individual. Each person, the anecdote of each citizen, that is more important to me. Therefore, I only wanted to have this woman (Berivan) on the camera and to follow only her and only show her perspective.

Much like other filmmakers, Hofer said a personal approach and narrating the story from one person's perspective has a much bigger impact and can have a much greater outreach, as she believes that when a viewer sees a refugee camp with 10,000 people, it is hard to feel empathy for such a large group of faceless individuals. She counters that if "you follow and keep track of one person from A to Z, you see all the drama of their lives, and that's when audience will start to feel empathy for this person." However, within this same rationale, she said documentaries should avoid constructing reality and that this is the way to have representational pitfalls of telling migrant stories reduced to a minimum. There are so many ways to enhance the story without being untruthful, and for her, the most important postulate is to shoot everything in-the-moment without staging or rehearsing. Hofer says that by filming Berivan in the moment and without having anything staged, both the audience and the character were done justice in showing the most veracious portrayal of reality, and that if she wasn't operating in this way, there would be a greater risk of the breach of trust and consequently the risk of dehumanizing her characters.

I am capturing the moment, I don't want to rehearse. I don't want to ask someone, except maybe a comedian, to repeat something and show the same emotion. I would never say to my protagonists; can you please cry again? No, they cried once, and it's up to you to get the impact of the moment and you must do it on the spot.

Yet another way through which Hofer tries to illuminate the problems of migrations is by finding characters who share commonalities with the audience, rather than catering to the stereotypical images of migrants often seen on TV. "(Berivan) went

to a University, so I knew that she was educated and also that she came from the city, and as a European citizen when you see this destruction in Syria on TV you don't compare yourself to people like her," said Hofer.

What was also intriguing is that Nikola Ilic, Aleksandar Reljic, Ratko Momcilovic, and Iva Radivojevic all agreed that they would rather present migrant experiences by not including any voiceovers or interviews, but they still did so in their films. For Reljic, it was because he had a tight deadline and only six days to shoot, and his film *Zid (Wall)* was made primarily for the TV audience and therefore journalistic standards required him to do interviews with both migrants and officials at the Serbian-Hungarian border. Ilic had an initial idea to make a film without any narration, but soon realized this would be impossible for the story he wanted to tell because it would not have portrayed the experiences of numerous individuals with nuance and in such a short format. Momcilovic was constrained by the VICE Media production that contracted him to make the *Galeb u Americi (Seagull in America)* documentary series.

Radivojevic felt that because she was talking about a very serious subject matter multiple perspectives were required, and in order to provide the audience with a historical context and information, she had to give in and include both interviews and a voiceover in her film. It seems that Radivojevic was innately aware of Pantoja Prechard's position on the value self-reflexivity can bring to documentaries and that this is why her voiceover in *Evaporating Borders* never explains the position of others, but only her own perspective and background. Following this reasoning, it does seem apparent that the style used in *Evaporating Borders* helps with the representation of migrant subjects by not taking away their voices and their ability to speak for themselves. Furthermore, the

narration used in this film is followed by the landscape of the island and other shots of daily life that is not embedded in the violence and the conflict of anti-migrant and pro-migrant demonstrations that were showed in this film in a separate chapter. This shows that a reality of migrant experience is not encompassed by the violence, but with similar daily struggles to those of other Cyprian inhabitants, and using these narration techniques helped Radivojevic avoid the pitfall of generalizing the migrant experience.

I had to make it nuanced and complicated and what I ended up having to do is use this style of clinical interviews which is not my favorite way of expression and not my first go-to way of explaining things, but I felt this self-imposed pressure to give the historical context or to give information, and if I had to do the same film today I am not sure I would impose this on myself.

Additionally, she talked about the very deliberate choice to let her voice be heard in order to expose herself, rather than to include the argumentative logic. “I speak Greek the same way that I speak English, which is with an accent, so it was a sort of unmasking, there is a purpose to it, and there is also a vulnerability through which you are exposing yourself”.

The challenge to present the migrant experience was also a big concern for Lynne Sachs as she considers her film *Your Day is My Night* to be a reality-based performance and thinks that by recording migrants’ experiences, having them crafted into a play and then a documentary, there is a deliberate effort to try to show a migrant story from inside out, unlike the way in which most documentaries today look from the outside in. To reinforce her argument, Sachs explained that she was aware of how to let the people in

front of the camera tell their own story, suggesting it be without too much pathos and without a tendency to make the audience cry. Essentially, Sachs said leaving enough space for the characters in the film and building trust with them over a longer period of time increases the chances for a more honest representation of the protagonists and their stories. This filmmaker claims that she has certain ideas but that mostly she is proven wrong, and that “unlike the narrative film where the space is very hermetic and the intention is to have control, the hybrid form implies that the environment is very porous.” This, in turn, means that the director should find not having complete control working to their benefit.

Another very important question about the representation of migrants is what their incentive might be to take part in the film. Sachs believes that paying her protagonists reduces the comfort zone difference, and that “it's more than just respect, it's also saying your time is valuable.” Others, like Momcilovic, have seen migrants eager to tell their stories without being incentivized. For this filmmaker, the therapeutic power of sharing one’s life experiences is valuable, especially “when you go through challenges in life and you overcome them.” He goes on to explain that “this notion is in all of us as humans” and what was also striking is that all the characters from the VICE series he produced “were super interested in telling their stories.” Momcilovic claimed he did comb through their testimonies ethically and explained what was his process in overcoming representational challenges in depicting migrant experiences. That will be addressed in the subsequent chapters, as well as solutions to some of the issues raised.

What seems to be causing the representational challenges?

The outside factors that could prevent a filmmaker from crafting a story that would portray some if not all the complexities of a certain migrant group are often a limitation that results in changing the visual narration and the structure of the documentary. First of all, the representational challenges discussed in this chapter are those regarding ethical dilemmas of showing the face of the subjects or blurring it, whether the portrayal of the subject's story is accurate and do the protagonists agree with it, and other more practical concerns that come from the lack of access or legal constraints. Nonetheless, limitations and challenges don't always have to be a bad thing, and especially in documentaries, filmmakers can use them to their advantage. The most common limitation for all the interviewees was the lack of access, either to a protagonist or a specific part of their life that relates the most to the migrant experience on which a filmmaker wants to shed light. In the case of Ratko Momcilovic, the pressure and the constraints were coming from the VICE production guidelines, which Momcilovic found absurd at times. For example, VICE Media was letting him use the footage of a series host driving a truck without a license, but would not allow almost any footage they shot on the US-Mexican border to be included in the film. At times, Momcilovic found a creative way around it. One of the characters in his film used to smuggle people across the Mexican border and shared a story of his sneaking in to the United States for the first time, but since no footage could be shot on the border and since there was no archival material that could present this event, Momcilovic went in another, more creative direction.

(An) especially interesting part was in the first story about Vlad, the guy in San Diego who crossed the border from Mexico. Since we didn't have

anything to cover or support his story, and luckily he was a good caricaturist, I asked him if he would draw some scenes from that episode of him crossing the border and it worked really well.

A commonly shared concern among the interviewees was the lack of access, and both Ziad Kalthoum and Eileen Hofer had to be creative in order to start filming stories of migrants. They both found a way around restrictions imposed by officials. Hofer didn't get a permit to get into a migrant camp in Bulgaria that was based in an abandoned school but used the money she raised in Switzerland to buy food and rent a truck that would get her in the school as a humanitarian. After she was certain that the military forces guarding the facility were not suspicious of her, she started filming. On the other hand, Kalthoum did get permission to enter the construction site where migrants were living and working, but that took him a year. However, getting the story he thought spoke the truth about the migrant experience required deception.

When the owner of the building asked me why we are here, I told him the film we are making is about how beautiful his building is, and I never told him it was about the Syrian workers. He gave me 10 days to enter the site and told me not to go underground to this black hole where people were sleeping and spending their time off work. I disobeyed and sneaked down with my team and we spent five nights until he found out about everything and kicked us out.

Having seen both Hofer's and Kalthoum's films make an impact on the public and being selected to numerous festivals, an additional analysis about the ethical concerns and the potential justification for using deception when filming is

necessary. The research done by Aufderheide et al. shows that other documentary filmmakers acknowledge that they occasionally would resort to bad faith and outright deception both “with subjects and with gatekeepers who kept them from subjects.” In both situations, they used deception to keep someone with the power to stop the project from doing so, and they regarded it as entirely ethical because of an ends-justifies-the-means argument. (Aufderheide, Jaszi, & Chandra, 2009). Kalthoum and Hofer were of a similar conviction and believed that if the only way to report on a migrant story required deception, it was worth pursuing, especially knowing that those who were setting the restrictions were working against the basic human rights and were preventing migrants from their right of free movement, such as the building owner in *Taste of Cement* curfewing all the workers after 7pm. However, in the case of deception used for making a documentary on migrant experiences there does not seem to be a special justification to break the law or the orders of superiors in comparison to any other documentary that uses deceit to be granted the access in order to give the voice to those who have been wronged or silenced.

Kalthoum was also the only filmmaker who felt the pressure from the outside to craft the migrant story according to someone else’s wishes. Despite that pressure, he managed to keep complete creative freedom. Kalthoum noticed that some of the producers and distributors that wanted to work with him were not genuine and that they focused on the war in his home country because it was a conduit for them to make a lot of money, and that is why they tried giving him advice on how to make the film. This filmmaker talked about his first arrival to Berlin, where he met with a lot of producers

and soon realized that he was an object for them. For Kalthoum, everyone wanted to work with him because the Syrian war was a hot topic, and what producers were suggesting was to develop a story with one main character, which he firmly refused.

I decided that I am not going to work with them and that I needed someone who believes in my project as an artist and as a human being. I think the biggest challenge for filmmakers both in fiction and documentary is to create something on their own, without anyone's interference, and I wanted to make something never seen before. Also, if I was weak and let my producers control the film, I would have been persuaded to have one main character and to include interviews.

Speaking their own language as filmmakers was of great importance to all the interviewees. For Kalthoum, he wanted to show the world his view and that the "revolution in Syria is not just about al-Assad regime." Kalthoum introduced a clear example of what a migrant story should look like and how their experiences should be presented to an audience, by using a trip across the ocean as an example.

If they (the migrants) are crossing the ocean to reach to the other side, you have to show the whole trip and the mainstream media just waits on the other side, they don't know how to transfer the story from the perspective of migrants, and they never show you the details of the trip, their lives, memories, and the full background.

It became apparent through the analysis of the interviewed subjects that Kalthoum's concerns are shared by other filmmakers and that all eight interviewees

believe that a documentary has a different task than TV reportage, which is to go beyond reporting and to dive into protagonists' feelings in order to enter the mind of the audience.

Being nuanced and finding one story that relates to a whole group was yet another challenge that caused the self-imposed pressure for Klovborg, Radivojevic, and Ilic. Klovborg's film *Maid in Hell* in particular was made by focusing on two main storylines, that of an agency owner Maher Doumit and of a Kenyan senator Emma Mbura. Klovborg spoke about an enormous amount of research and an enormous number of possible cases of maids being mistreated they could have included in the film. Klovborg was not able to present the story from the perspective of maids in Saudi Arabia where he believes the situation is at its worst, because filmmakers have no access there whatsoever. In the end, Lebanon and Jordan presented the best locations for the story told in *Maid in Hell* to unfold. An analogy presented by Klovborg when he compared migrant documentaries to those that depict climate change was particularly insightful and showed just how conscious he and other filmmakers have to be when making a migrant film.

People say they want to hear about it, but they really don't. I was struggling with the story and the structure of the film to make it as appealing as possible, and if the film just showed the story of one victim, I don't think it would have made any difference, this is very sad, but we wouldn't feel like watching it.

Consequently, Klovborg included the agent Maher Doumit in his film in order to show the audience what was happening behind closed doors, but also felt the self-imposed pressure from the lack of access to the survivor's stories. "The ideal way of

doing this would have been to follow one girl from her village in Africa and the Philippines, be with her for two years and follow her back home,” Klovborg said. The Danish director knew this was not possible very early on in the process and knew that the most important stories remain untold because if you “expose them, they (the migrants) will be in danger.”

One way of showing that the filmmaker is not an inexhaustible source of knowledge and that he or she cannot talk about all the migrant experiences as an insider was to be transparent. This concept was introduced by Radivojevic. The director of *Evaporating Borders* felt pressure to show what her perspective as a filmmaker was, and therefore she included some sequences in this film that were not closely linked to the migrations of Syrian people, but rather her own experiences. This became apparent when she used music to set the mood for certain observational scenes of the Island (Cyprus), knowing that this might look like it had nothing to do with the people who were portrayed in the film.

I did use the musical sequence when I was trying to be very transparent in the film and when I was talking about my own experience, for example, I would spend many evenings with different migrants and refugees and then I would go and hang out with my friends, and they have a very nice rooftop where they would sing; this experience is available to me, but it is not available to many of the people who I was with. It was a stark difference of reality, and I couldn't continue to film without talking about that.

Transparency informed this research about the self-reflexivity of filmmakers and the fact that some theorists like Pantoja Prechard realized that the more a documentary is self-reflexive, the more visibly it renders its mediating activity and its constructed nature. In consequence, documentaries that employ self-reflexivity become more critical of themselves (Pantoja Peschard, 2014).

The interviewed filmmakers were constructing migrant stories in more than one way; the selection of protagonists probably being the first in the long line of decisions that lead to their representation of reality. Nikola Ilic, the director of the film *Kanton Jugoslawien (Yugoslavia County)* was unambiguously looking to include protagonists in his film that come from different backgrounds, and like Klovborg, found difficult the task of proving a story that would represent one large group of people through the eyes of just several individuals. This is the pressure he felt because, in his opinion, the migrants from ex-Yugoslav republics living in Switzerland tend to be stigmatized and there are certain stereotypes that have been created about them in the eyes of the domestic population.

Maybe the biggest hurdle in my film was to depict what it means to be called Yugo in Switzerland since it is similar to the usage of the N-word in America, and this was very sad to me. I've noticed this extremist line even in Switzerland where 24 percent of the population are migrants. It is insane that they are labeling people like that. The way I fought against this was by including migrants from ex-Yugoslavia with different occupations and profiles. We had a violinist, a psychiatrist, an architect, and many others, so the story wasn't coming from someone who is doing this stereotypical job on the construction site.

Before adding a negative meaning to the manipulation that is sometimes used by documentary filmmakers that depict migrant experiences in their work, we must understand that one of the essential definitions of documentary by Maccarone leaves space for manipulation. Per this author's definition, a documentary "tries to elicit in us a feeling of what the real event or person was like, relying little on the obvious manipulation of images and sound in its recording, yet at the same time displaying some degree of artistry" (Maccarone, 2010). Essentially, and to a large extent, all the filmmakers interviewed for this research agreed that the films they have made were their own representation of reality and that thinking how the films were not creatively portraying reality but presenting only dry facts would be wrong. On the other hand, this does not imply that any of the filmmakers was not vigorous in searching for truth and the best way to present migrant experiences.

Analysis of the interviews in this research suggests manipulation is sometimes even seen by the filmmakers as required. Lynne Sachs said that by deciding to spend so much time with her protagonists when they were deconstructing their experiences and then rebuilding them into a play and a documentary, there came a relationship that would not have developed otherwise. Sachs has done films in Vietnam, Israel, and Palestine, but she said those were not ideal scenarios for her. "It's different, you film, and you don't have the money or the time to go back. So, you don't really have a relationship with the people in the film and that's why you call them subjects." Other than having enough space to play with this idea of what documentary really is and having space to do multiple shoots with protagonists who already knew what to expect, Sachs thinks that the

relationship that was built with the social actors in *Your Day is My Night* added another layer, and that there was a connection that helped increase the trust.

On the other hand, sometimes it is just impossible to stay in touch with the subjects from the film, something that Aleksandar Reljic brought to attention claiming that it was impossible to contact the migrants from his film since they were going through real difficulties and often had their phones seized. Adding to those difficulties, Reljic said how one of the biggest challenges came from the fear that migrants felt because they had family in their native country that could be harmed if they spoke publicly. Unlike fearing for one's existence, in which cases protagonists accepted money and filmmakers thought this was valid because it alleviated the class distance and was an important gesture to make, fearing for one's life and the life of one's family brought the sense of auto censorship to Syrian migrants being filmed by Reljic, and this made it obvious for him that in such cases the money should not be offered and that that the migrant subjects should not in any way be incentivized to speak if the filmmaker cannot protect them from harm. Most of the time, trying to mitigate that fear is not something that a filmmaker who is an outsider should do, and Reljic explained that migrants who spoke out had very important reasons to talk and get in front of the camera, but were fearing the consequences of such actions. "Generally, they didn't have a problem with being filmed, but some of them feared giving interviews and knew that telling their stories publicly might have repercussions." In such cases, Reljic offered to blur their faces or to film them while facing away from the camera.

However, there are instances when the threat for safety is not so immediate, and when having one's story told as an undocumented immigrant can improve the chances of

being documented and acquiring the legal status in the new country of residence. Sachs is the only interviewed filmmaker who mentioned being involved in the legal process that could help one of her subjects stay in the United States of America legally.

I'm very, very involved in (Mr. Huang's) attempt not to be deported, because since Trump has become president, it's become more and more charged, and he could be sent back. So, I've had to speak and testify in front of Homeland Security and I actually have another hearing on December 10, 2019.

What Sachs also wanted to be known is that there is no incentive for her to help the protagonists from *Your Day is My Night*, and she hopes that her film didn't cause any problems, despite Mr. Huang claims that it actually helped with his asylum-seeking process.

Mr. Huang claims in an interesting way that because my film was shown around China, some Chinese authorities came to his family's house and asked questions. I don't know. Maybe it doesn't matter, maybe it would have happened anyway, but no one really knows. So, they're actually (the immigration lawyers) using that as a defense for him being a political asylum seeker.

Addressing and overcoming representational challenges in migrant films

There are a number of remedies suggested by the interviewed filmmakers for certain representational pitfalls they found themselves in while making films on migrant experiences. At the beginning of this chapter, we will discuss the most important takeaways, and the first one was that an aspiring filmmaker or someone who has not done work on migrations should do their research carefully, especially because migrations are so widespread. Another pattern that occurred in the research analysis is the notion that the

issues faced by migrants are often systematic, and that one film cannot change the legislature or get the authorities to act. According to Klovborg, documentaries about migrant topics like the one he chose cannot change anything overnight, although he did other documentary and investigative work in different areas that was able to make a change. He explains this by positing that:

Migrations are so complicated, there are so many countries involved, and in the case of *Maid in Hell*, specifically, the Jordanian case we showed, it's just systemic. Imagine if a German or a Danish citizen was burnt like that Kenyan girl in Jordan, and that they lied to her German family and that she came back and died two months later, and on top of that you couldn't get a hold of the employer. That just wouldn't happen because, it's sad to say, it's Kenya and they're dependent on the money from the Middle East.

Even though Klovborg is aware systematic change requires time, he still hopes that countries from Western Hemisphere can react and get the legislation in place that would prevent the exploitation of African maids. He was trying to shed light on the injustice of the Kafala system that monitors migrant laborers in Middle East. In the end, and similar to Kalthoum, Klovborg posits that filmmakers can only do so much, and that after the film is distributed the responsibility lies with the audience.

Another solution for showing the utmost concern for the subjects but at the same time allowing them to tell their story is blurring their faces. This is a technique that was used in the films made by Klovborg, Momcilovic, and Reljic. The latter filmmaker did not actually blur the faces of migrants he interviewed, but had them turn their back to camera, and this might have been the case because the production lasted only a few days and in that way they saved time in postproduction. Momcilovic developed a relationship with Gagi, the character whose face he blurred, but also allowed to change or remove any footage that might compromise him. Showing the film to its subjects is yet another

remedy for avoiding representational issues in migrant films, and one of the questions posed to filmmakers is whether they showed their films to the protagonists before it premiered. The answers were split. Momcilovic, Ilic, Klovborg, and Sachs all showed their films to those who participated in them before broadcasting them or sending them for further distribution and, not only that, these filmmakers were willing to change some aspects of their films according to subjects' suggestions. Reljic and Kalthoum said that they were not able to organize a collective screening because they could not get in touch with their subjects, Radivojevic is still in touch with some of the protagonists but also felt it was impossible to organize a collective screening before the film premiered, and Hofer was the only filmmaker who felt that if the subject agrees to be filmed on the set, there is no need for further revisions and an involvement from their side. She justified this by saying:

There is always going to be something wrong. You can always complain about your hair not looking good or not loving your profile, so once she (Berivan) said, it's okay, you can film me, I go and film. Usually, I get my characters to sign the contract. I always have this paper with me. Once you sign it, and we say action, there is no stepping back.

Unquestionably, the most ethically and legally diligent approach was that implemented by Klovborg, and this was to be expected, since his film, more than any other analyzed for this research, had the potential to do harm towards migrants if it was not revised and edited with high ethical standards. *Maid in Hell* included interviews with African maids in a shelter founded by Caritas in Beirut, and the film crew made a double contract with the shelter because the interviewed subjects were in a vulnerable situation

and still in Beirut. This meant that after signing the contract that confirmed the subjects' intention to participate in the film, the filmmaker had to wait for them to get back home to Africa and watch the film once more and approve it. Klovborg stated that the maids had time to retract the story about sexual abuse if they thought they would be stigmatized once back in Kenya. "They had a second chance to think it all over but none of them wanted to get out of the film, and I'm still in contact with some of those girls as well."

This was not the only consideration made by Klovborg before the film was set for broadcast, since he said that there was a rigorous check done by his colleagues, lawyers, and editors, explaining that "every piece of information in this documentary was validated and looked critically upon," Intriguingly, even though a journalism piece is often deemed as being the more ethically "correct" medium than a documentary film, and as the literature review has shown this could be because journalists have their code of ethics and documentary filmmakers do not, this research showed that such a distinction is not always justified. In the film *Maid in Hell*, the director chose to incorporate the footage of women jumping from balconies because of the inhumane conditions they were subject to as maids serving in private houses but decided to blur their faces, while the same footage was shown on the Lebanese TV stations without opting to mask the victims' faces. Klovborg continued to explain his reasoning:

There is a long line of ethical decisions. Some material we couldn't include because we either couldn't have it cleared or we thought it might be compromising for the person shown in it. And if we couldn't get a hold of protagonists and tell them we would include it in the film, we chose not to.

This film was made primarily for the TV audience and such documentaries fall more often under scientific scrutiny, as was seen in the research done by Cheregi or Vickers and Rutter, but it also must be said that *Maid in Hell* doesn't fall in the same category of TV documentaries analyzed by these authors, since there was no clear proof that the narration technique used in this film presented migrants as passive victim, active treat or disposable labor. Quite the contrary, *Maid in Hell* even performed the pedagogical function mentioned by Vanhaelemeesch. It created a debate and had a much bigger outreach than Klovborg ever hoped for:

This film has been shown in the United Nations, it's been shown in villages in Africa, it's been played in Bangladesh and even in Beirut.

Hopefully, that's the best you can achieve with this kind of documentary...

It's a harsh and cruel world, and I just hope this documentary creates a debate.

Hofer's opinion is similar to Klovborg's as she can only be hopeful that her film had an effect and that documentaries can change migrants' position for the better whether this would mean better legislature, less xenophobia or just the more humane way of contemplating migrant experiences. A little gloomier view at the future of migrations and artists' attempts to bring the audience's attention to migrants' struggles was presented by Kalthoum. He was asked after his film was shown at a festival in France why he said in one of the interviews that art cannot change anything. His answer was that art without the audience is nothing. Furthermore, he stated that it is only the audience that can change something and that his film is just a small puzzle in a large mosaic.

Lastly, and most importantly all the filmmakers have said that building trust with protagonists in documentaries and not betraying it is the best way to solve any representational issues and pitfalls that might occur during the filmmaking process. This is best summed up by Iva Radivojevic who said the following:

In most documentaries, it is all about building a relationship, ideally, we shouldn't come just to take something, we are here to build a relationship and collaborate on something that is going to move people.

Some filmmakers built trust by offering an additional viewing of the film and by offering a second chance for the protagonists to change or exclude some parts of the story—or even to retract their statements altogether as was the case with Klovborg's *Maid in Hell* and Momcilovic's *Galeb u Americi* (Seagull in America). Others like Kalthoum thought that the trust was built because none of the characters spoke on the camera and therefore the risk of putting them in jeopardy because of the things that were said was mitigated. Filmmakers like Ilic, Radivojevic and Sachs kept in touch with the protagonists and some of them still do. Sachs in particular, has the concept of the film laid out and the structure presented to the characters, meaning this was not just her project but the project of all the social actors in the film. Lastly, Reljic and Hofer took a more journalistic approach, which is not surprising due to their reporting backgrounds, but this meant that the sources were protected from harm not only because the trust was built but due to the professional journalism codes they have followed throughout their careers.

Conclusion

In the realm of documentary film studies, we often see the research that focuses only on the resulting work of documentary filmmakers while the actual work process, ethical considerations, and challenges encountered during the process are less examined.

Regardless of what inspired filmmakers included in this research to make a film about migrant experiences, whether it be personal motives or an outside stimulus, they all made numerous considerations regarding the representation of migrants in their documentary work and were relying on their own sense of ethics more than they did on the industry standards. The reason for this is obvious—documentary filmmaking as an industry does not have a codified set of ethical or any other standards for that matter.

Importantly, this research provided insight into why making a documentary about migrant experiences seems different from making a film about any other nuanced topic, because migrants are often deemed to be unprotected and stateless individuals with very little legal help and without the institutional help that is readily available to legal residents. Even if immigrants are in the process of obtaining the citizenship or have obtained it, they still might question their identity and the sense of belonging. All this can contribute to the feeling that they are unwelcomed in the country where they decided to start their life anew. Ilic, Radivojevic, Kalthoum and Momcilovic realized this more than others simply because they went through relocations themselves, however, it is not only those four interviewed filmmakers that have expressed their concerns about the representation of individuals facing these difficulties. All of the interviewed subjects tried taking a step back and distancing themselves from conflicts seen in the breaking news stories about migrations and migrant experiences. Even if they included those segments

in their films, they often served as a backdrop to a larger story that tried depicting both the personal motives and the outside factors that drive people into exile.

Admittedly, all the interviewees wanted to do justice to the protagonists in their films and not betray their trust because they all had the impression of documentaries having both the privilege and the responsibility to go beyond the surface of a short TV piece that, even when the facts are right, does not have enough space to tell the larger story. Other reasons that led to such a careful and compassionate approach to the subject of migration from the filmmakers were the legal consequences their protagonists could face, primarily the risk of persecution and deportation. Last, but not the least, filmmakers did not want to betray their own sense of what the true migrant experience might be, especially by crafting their stories to be more lucrative at the cost of veracity.

The interviews also shed light on the fact that filmmakers believe there is no perfect or the most desirable structure for the documentary on migrant experiences. They did find that focusing on individual narratives rather than the story of a group avoids pitfalls that could lead to emotional fatigue in the audience. All the interviewees in this research lived up to the ideas and standards presented in the literature review, even though when asked about the outside help from other filmmakers they all responded negatively, but where in most cases referencing other documentary films on migrations and the research they have done on their own.

Naturally, the limitations of this study depended on the access to the filmmakers themselves, but it was an aim of this research to include voices from filmmakers with different genders, racial backgrounds, ages, years of experience and, last but not least, filmmaking styles.

The results from this research should be used as a starting point for similar academic endeavors primarily because there is always room to include more voices. However, I am confident that the interviews and the following analysis provided the scientific rigor and that concepts brought in this research have been in the center of the most migrant documentaries and were rarely formulated and categorized by their creators. Further, there are so many ways to tell the story of migration, but the analysis showed that in documentary filmmaking offering the statistics, facts, laws, and regulations is often not enough and that the interviewed filmmakers think that personal stories resonate much better with viewers.

This is precisely why the concern about the representation of protagonists in documentary films—particularly protagonists who are stateless like migrants often are—will remain an important aspect of the creative treatment of actuality employed in documentary filmmaking.

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Appendix I- Interview Transcripts

The transcripts from the interviewed filmmakers are organized by the chronological order in which they occurred.

Ratko Momcilovic

Q: What first attracted you to make a film about migrations and migrant experiences?

Migration goes deep in my family and me personally. I was born in Croatia as a Serbian with Serbian parents, and especially during the war (the Yugoslav civil war of 1990s) I felt that I was treated as a migrant, and then on top of that in 1999 when Yugoslavia was going through another war I emigrated to America, and I was 27 at that time, so I was a migrant myself. Therefore, this is something that always attracted me, those themes of migration, especially in the United States of America when I first came and met all the other people, all the Serbians living there, and talked to them about their stories, it was really fascinating to me; the variety of stories, some comical, some tragic, and all the difficulties that people would go through to come to a certain place. Eventually, I would have done a film about immigrants on my own with my own production, but luckily, I was approached by Vice media and they asked me would I be willing to do something similar for them. I've agreed and it worked great for both of us.

Q: How did the editing phase for this film look, did you have to cut out certain scenes?

Since we filmed under the strict control of the Vice legal department, everything we filmed was legal, but the only question was if I wanted to put some additional photograph would it pass the legal department, but the footage itself was made by following their guidelines. As for the editing, in this form that we did, and that was an interview driven

documentary with a B-roll here and there, yes I would always have the same approach. I would transcribe the interviews, synthesize them, and tell the story on paper first, with each interview, after that I would lay it out on a track and try to cut it and make it dynamic so that it follows the arc and also so that it has a certain build-up. This was the way in which I made a rough cut with a B-roll here and there, and after I sent it to Vice, they would tell me if they liked it. Sometimes they would send me their comments, then I would incorporate the B-roll. Especially interesting part was in the first story about Vlad, the guy in San Diego who crossed the border from Mexico, since we didn't have anything to cover or support his story, and luckily he was a good caricaturist, so I asked him if he would draw some scenes from that episode of him crossing the border and it worked really well. So basically that was the process, assemble the cut first, make the story from interviews, incorporate the B-roll, work on music and then polish it to make it as succinct as possible.

Q: Do you think that the industry standards and legal obligations in documentary films sometimes work against the representation of migrant stories and experiences?

In this situation for sure, but also Vice is specific in that, they give you a list of constraints, but those constraints can also work in a positive way for filmmaking, because you got to find a way to still tell the story, and in a way, you need to be more creative. It is a similar situation as in some countries where the cinema was censored, for example Iran. There cinema was so censored that people could not film anything, and still their movies were genius because they needed to be creative to pass this censorship and still tell the story, so this was the problem I had with Vice at first. I was thinking, dang, you can't do anything here, but this also triggers something in you and it makes you think

more and it makes you be more creative, but for example, our third film in this trilogy was about Nikola Tesla, and they allowed me to use only one photo of him, and this to me was absolutely ridiculous. Everywhere you can find photos of Tesla, people sell T-shirts, and in this film, I couldn't show anything, but this one photo. So, in this particular situation it was a huge obstruction and it hurt the film, but generally speaking it could be good to have constrains. What was interesting is that Vice didn't object to us incorporating the footage of Galeb (the host and the narrator) taking over the steering wheel of a truck from one of the truck drivers, even though he didn't have a truck driving license. They decided this could go, because the only time we could have got punished was at that exact time by the state police, and since we weren't punished by them, Vice doesn't have anything to do with it. On the other hand, they are really strict about licensing and paying royalties. As for the interviews, I don't know how much, and I would never know how much from this is 100 percent true, how much of it is made up from them (the interviewees), but I believe them, and it is what it is. It is that style of documentary

Q: Speaking of styles, did you have a script that Vice insisted on, and how much creative freedom did you have?

The process of work with Vice is like this, they ask you to propose a one-page document that is actually a synopsis of the action and what is going to happen in the film, so I had a general idea of what I wanted to make. The biggest challenge was to find good characters that had an interesting story and that could tell them in an interesting way with different kind of happenings. So, I had to propose to them (the Vice) what would be the three characters that could portray a problem of Serbian immigration in a real light. I had

general questions for them, but of course I had to follow a general format that Vice insists on. First thing I had to know is that each episode is going to last 45 minutes at most, so that was a challenge. How do you tell three life stories of immigrants in about 40 minutes, which left me with about 13 minutes per character if you want to split it even. Other than having to propose the characters and topics and specifically what I am going to talk to them about I had a lot of freedom. I pre-interviewed those characters, so I knew what their stories are beforehand, which means that Vice already knew whether these characters are going to fit their format and their standards, but our creativity was also weakened by legal issues. Vice is really crazy when it comes to that, their legal department is very strict, there is so much footage you can't use, and that makes it challenging in many ways. Besides that, I really did feel like I had the freedom within that style of filmmaking that they are known for, it is mostly an interview-driven style with b-rolls and it provided me with enough space and there were no obstructions, only some constraints that came from the legal department and the form itself.

Q: Can you name some of the legal issues for which you sought help?

We went with Vlad, the first character in the film, to the border with Mexico, where he was to explain the actual way in which he snuck in, and we could not show any of that in the final cut, we weren't allowed to show the people at the border, and the legal department only allowed us to use the few shots taken there for whatever reason. It is not clear to me why they are so strict, and plus they would not let me use photographs, unless they are personal photos from the characters in the film, or unless they were approved after a long process. I don't think that this hurt the representation of migrant experiences, but it didn't enhance the story. If I had a complete freedom to film whatever I wanted I

think that the stories would be much better. For example, when we went to the border with Vlad, if there weren't for Vice guidelines, we would probably try to reproduce what he had done already when he was sneaking people in to the United States, and I think the film would be way better with that. It was similar with the other guy whose face we smothered because he was in a sham marriage, but if we could have gone to his wife and spoke to her and the immigration officers it would have enhanced the story without a doubt. If I was doing the film with my own production, I would have done it differently, I maybe would have risked a law suit here and there, but Vice is a big company with many producers, and they don't want to risk getting any kind of law suit.

Q: How well do you think that the complexities of migration can be portrayed in a documentary form?

I don't think that any form of filmmaking can portray all the complexities of migrations. It is a real challenge to do that in an hour and a half to two hours, because every character has emotions, they all have a back story and that is why you can fit that in a two hour form, which was especially hard for my film that had to tell each character's story in 12 to 13 minute. However, documentaries can definitely help people understand some of the complexities which I think our film accomplished. I think it successfully portrayed some of the complexities but not all of them.

Q: One of the biggest takeaways from the film is that all the characters agreed that the sun is not always brighter on the other side and that by reaching the United States there is still a long road ahead of you before you can accomplish your desired dreams, is that the way you first felt as an immigrant?

Every one of us in the Balkans, and Eastern Europe and many other places in the world, we all think that America is land of dreams, and it's easy to make it there, but as for my personal story, I came on a student visa and then I stayed, but I knew that it was going to be hard to get the permanent residency. Many of the people I pre-interviewed for the film they were expecting it was going to be easy, basically you get there, you find a wife, get married and as long as you are across the border you are fine and then people find themselves 20 years without papers and without a way to get back to their country. I know one person couldn't visit his home country for 30 years since he wasn't able to get a green card, they all got unpleasantly surprised when they actually try to solve this issue.

Q: Going back to the stylistic choices you were making, do you think there were other filming methods and styles that could have helped you portray the migrant experiences better, such as cinema vérité?

I believe cinema vérité would have been a better and more appealing way for me to tell the story. Most of the documentaries that I watch are that style, no interviews at all, really observing and watching what happens. I don't know if you saw Gianfranco Rosi's *Fire at Sea*, it talks about migrants coming from North Africa to Lampedusa island in Italy, and it's made in this style where the action is just observed, and this style is most appealing to me. If you want to reproduce something from people's interviews you just got to believe them there is not a an actual way to say if what they are saying is true or not but when you are observing something that is happening in that time that's it, that is as close as possible you get to the truth.

Q: The documentary you worked on included a lot of participation from the host Galeb Nikacevic, is there a feeling that by having him narrate the story you lost or gained something, what are your thoughts on that?

In our case because what Galeb was saying was scripted, and because we knew how he is going to introduce the story and what he is going to say I think we gained from that because it gave a back story of the problems migrants are facing, Serbian migrants in America specifically, and I am speaking both about the episode about the truck drivers and those seeking the green card. Generally, in our case this narration helped because it was such a short form, so definitely when you must pack so many information in so little time, and when the style is driven by interviews it helps to have a narrator. But in my opinion in most of other cases having a narrator can take away some expressivity for sure.

Q: When you reached the post production phase, did you have to play down or highlight certain aspects of migrant experiences, specifically because of the legal issues?

When I was editing, I had to delete some parts because I didn't want to put the subjects in jeopardy and have them face legal consequences. Other than playing down those aspects of the story, the edit was simple, you know there was nothing too deep about this Vice documentary, it was all simple, people would tell you their story, we tried following it with some B-roll. Each of the interviews with those three guys lasted for more than 2 hours, some were almost 4 hours, so the challenge was to put the 4-hour story in 12 minutes and not to leave out anything that conveys problems migrants are facing, as well as to portray the characters properly.

Q: Can you speak about an interview or a scene that you had to cut out from the movie?

I was most worried about the guy whose face we covered, he was talking about his wife, how he met her, where they meet, and how they got married, so I was worried how that will go, and was thinking what Vice will say if we put this in the film. There was this fear that somebody can go after him, but even without Vice saying anything, I've tried to only put together the things that are not going to expose him and put him in jeopardy. Since I also edited the film, before I sent it to Vice, I had him watch it and approve it. It's not only that we were afraid someone can go after him, he was afraid, his actual girlfriend was afraid, and she was saying that if you continue speaking about specific details somebody can trace us, and those details we had to leave out.

Q: Was there an incentive for him to give you an interview, did him or any other subject get paid?

No, we didn't pay anybody, what is interesting is that all these characters were super interested in telling their stories, I think this notion is in all of us as humans. When you go through challenges in life or problems that you've overcome, you want to speak about it. Many people were willing to talk, almost anybody who I approached, only one girl, or actually a couple, I wish we had it in a film, she spent two weeks in a migrant jail on the border with Mexico while being pregnant and she tried to cross. I would have loved to have talked with her, but she decided not to speak, not because she was afraid of any legal issues, but I believe because she was just embarrassed, probably thinking that if her family and friends knew about this it would be embarrassing, and she wanted to keep it to herself. Other than that, no incentives, everybody was willing to talk, you would be

surprised how people are willing to talk especially when you give them a chance to tell their personal story.

Q: Do you think that the reason they are willing to talk is because when you turn on the camera it is almost like a therapy for them?

Absolutely, it is something innate in us that makes us tell our story when you go through difficult times, and when they pass, and especially that is true when you turn on the camera. So many times you see on TV, or in documentaries, when you turn on the camera and start the interview people cry, there is something about it, when you turn on the camera the emotions come up and people just open their minds, so I believe it is therapeutic because I also believe that they know many people are watching them and how this is their chance to be really truthful, to be really honest and true to themselves, tell it like it is, and show the feelings and emotions.

Q: Has any of the characters from the film had a chance to give you a feedback on the film after the film was finished. Did you send them the copy of the film before it premiered?

I showed a rough cut to all of them, before I sent it to Vice for approval, so they all were happy with the story, and all the things that were included in the rough cut, only remark was that they wanted the film to be longer. As I said we had more than two or even three hours for an each interview and I had to squeeze it in 10 minutes, so that was their only regret, they were telling me, o man, I wish you could have put this part of the story or that part of the story, but in general, yes, they had a chance to provide their input and if they asked me to change something, I would do it, because I wanted it to be a fair game. I

asked them if they wanted to participate, and since they were willing, I didn't want to go against them, so if they wanted something changed, I would have fulfilled their wishes.

Q: Do you think that it is best for your characters to see the film before it premieres, especially if the film is about migrants?

It depends on various circumstances and what you really want to say, if you really feel that some part is important for your topic, for your goal and what you want to achieve, and your character doesn't agree with that because he is not that familiar with filmmaking or whatever, I would first try to have them accept my arguments, but if that wouldn't happen, then maybe in some situation I would still go with it as long as I don't put them in jeopardy.

Q: What is the biggest goal a film about migrants can accomplish, can it maybe change the legislature of a country and specifically the laws on immigration?

I don't think it can go that far to change the legislature. My goal was to portray different challenges and for that I wish I had an hour and a half. I was proposing to Vice to make a series from it, to make multiple episodes just about the process of getting the green card, because we had so many characters with so many powerful stories. So, my goal was to portray those stories so that people can see real difficulties that come with becoming a permanent resident of the United States of America. Also, some of the stories were comical and they didn't end up in a film, and others were tragic, but overall my goal was to portray the reality and the difficulties that come with this process of crossing the border and coming to America in search of a green card. It is not as easy as it seems, and people go to such extremes to achieve that.

Q: You feel that one film cannot change the world, but that a number of films on immigration or migrant experiences can at least bring the public attention to what is going on?

Yes, I think one film cannot change the world, but it can contribute to opening some people's minds, provide an information to them so that they can start thinking about it and after all people can get a little entertained also.

Q: That seems like a best way for them for public to learn, through entertainment?

You could have told the immigration story in a different way, just with the facts, officials, with the laws and regulations, but personal stories touch you the most. You can tell the statistics as much as you want and provide the data, but one story can stay in people's minds for way longer than just pure facts.

Q: Did you get any advice from other filmmakers on how to approach the topic of migration?

No, but I consider myself to be a film, and especially a documentary buff. I watched so many documentaries, I watched at least one documentary a day for the past 20 years, so no, I didn't spoke to any fellow filmmaker on how to do it, primarily because I had a format I had to honor. I could have maybe talked to somebody about the interview questions, but this really is the simplest possible form that involves interviews, b-rolls and a narration from a host.

Q: Did you feel an outside pressure to depict migrant stories so that they would support the leading ideology?

I didn't have any pressure from outside factors to tell the story.

Aleksandar Reljic

Q: What first attracted you to make a film about migrant experiences?

In mid August of 2015, Hungarian government started erecting a barb wire wall on the Hungarian-Serbian border in order to prevent migrants from entering their country, and that fact by itself was enough for me to start shooting the film. We wanted not only to film the building of the wire, but to see how this will affect what turned out to be the beginning of the migrant crisis. For me personally it was important to document that Hungary was erecting this wall, especially because it was a wall that was the first of its kind in the entire world, and it is in direct opposition with human rights, therefore, it represents a discriminatory act. The film Zid (Wall) was shot in only four days, because the TV station I am working for didn't invest more time and money and didn't recognize that this was a big story.

Q: Was this also the biggest challenge in the making of the film?

The ignorance of your superiors is always the biggest challenge and the biggest obstacle. At the moment when I was making this film, migrants from the Middle East were far more open for discussion since they believed that with the media's help they could depict the real truth about what was happening to them in Syria, especially since the world didn't know much about it at that time. Some of us maybe knew that there was a war going on there, bombing of some sort and some divided parties, but what was really going on there, we didn't have a clue and we didn't dive deep to find out what was the crux of this problem. Some of the migrants, even at that time, were afraid that if they

appeared on TV and the footage was seen by people in Syria, there was going to be retribution against their family members that remained in Syria. There were a few protagonists in my film that requested of me not to film their faces, to turn their back against the camera or to blur their faces later on in post production. At first those were the prime reasons to avoid the media, but later on they started avoiding them because of the way they were stigmatized.

Q: Did the style and the documentary form you choose have the ability to present all the complexities of Syrian people's migrant experiences, and do you think that documentaries have a greater expressive power to portray those complexities in comparison to the more traditional TV stories?

Documentaries definitely have a greater expressive power because they show the life of protagonists, and the audience can therefore become more compassionate to them. You can evoke audience's empathy, and you can also go beyond news and delve deep into the essence of the problem. The best example are demonstrations at the Serbian- Hungarian border when the migrants were trying to break the police cordon and enter Hungary thinking that it is their human right to have the freedom of movement and also that it is their human right to get help because there is a war going on in their country, so in order to be granted a chance to report about this on TV there has to be conflict- either that the police are using a teargas or that they are fighting migrants- this is when it becomes news. From this perspective you are only showing the conflict and putting it in the center, you are not dealing with people and their problems, their rights and what led them to break the police cordon. I think that journalism is a humane profession and that as such the human being should be the focal point of every story, but media today stopped paying

attention to the human, and started looking for the sensation. The news is sold as a product. On the other hand, I cannot claim that documentary films are not going through the same issues, and that revenue is sometimes the driving force, however, I still think they are prevailing and resisting the pressure and that the main postulate of documentary filmmaking is still untouched- a human in the center of a story. In essence we don't have a story today in documentary filmmaking if we don't have a main protagonist, a human of flesh and blood.

Q: The film Zid (Wall) involves a lot of interviews, is this because it was made for the TV audience, or was this your directorial decision?

I thought it was really important to record migrants' testimonies and that showed me how they all have one unique problem, and that is escaping the horrors of war and finding a safe haven. Their stories overlap, but also have personal details. It was important to me to hear them speak, and that is why I excluded any kind of narration from my end. What was crucial to show hand in hand with their testimonies was the development of a wall that was slowly being built regardless of what migrants were going through and what they had to deal with. An arrogant erection the wall and an attempt of stigmatizing those people, spreading xenophobia and fear as if migrants were terrorists and masking their problems by saying that their plight was a constructed attempt of spreading Islam on the Christian Europe and all that nonsense. That type of propaganda was not only heard in ultra right wing circles, it was also apparent that the media around the world led a propaganda in the same direction and it's doing that at this time too. My intention was to portray the fear of domestic population through their testimonies as well, and to show

how they too felt fearsome, despite the fact that most of the Syrian migrants were just going passing through Serbia.

Q: If you had more time, what would you change in the film? Would you have followed just one individual or one or two families but more thoroughly from the beginning of their journey until the end instead of doing just one interview with multiple subjects?

In the center of my story was the build of that wall, but what I would do different if I had more time was to track the whole process of how the tensions were rising and how they culminated with violence. I would have showed what happened later when the shut down the Hungarian border, and when migrants were forced to go to Croatia instead and all the problems they encountered because of this. Even if I couldn't show what was going on in Croatia, the story about the erection of a wall would be completed with the escalation of violence at the Serbian- Hungarian border. Because the focus of the film is on the wall, my idea was not to show the profiles of migrants and to go that deep into the details of their experiences, but I would certainly like to make one such film too. Although, if the circumstances were ideal, I would have probably followed one migrant from Syria and his attempt to get across in spite of the wall. For example I would follow a migrant that went through the forest, got captured and was deported back to Serbia. I know this happened since one of the protagonists in my film failed crossing the border two or three times. For me, the idea itself to build a wall is undoubtedly a historical event, especially after the fall of the Berlin wall, that someone came up with an idea to make a barb-wire wall in order to prevent the people from saving their bare lives is a tragedy. It was so absurd, that the only thing left for them to do was to put electricity through that wire and then the picture of just how welcome migrants were would have been complete.

Q: Did you consult any other filmmakers when you were making this film or has the work you have seen in any other migrant documentaries inspired you?

I haven't personally consulted any other filmmakers about the concept of the film, but I did watch a lot of documentaries with a similar subject and that has certainly completed the picture I had about just how unjust the treatment of migrants was by the European Union. On the other hand the experiences I had when I was reporting from the Yugoslav Civil War made me think about the human rights in a different way, and if it wasn't for that war I would have probably stayed a punk musician instead of becoming a journalist.

Q: How did the editing phase for this film look, did you have to highlight or play down certain aspects of the story in order to tell it in a way that you consider to be a true testimony of migrant experiences?

For every story you are examining you would want to tell the truth, but this truth can and should be told with the tools at your disposal that are going to enhance the expressivity. The story must be made interesting and my system because I was a musician for so long is to look at the story as if it is some sort of a music composition that has its own rhythm and dynamic and if I can make a story "sing", there is all the more reason for me to believe it is good. To me journalism was not enough to tell the story in a way that I would want to tell it and to use my creativeness and this is why I started making documentaries.

Q: Did you stay in touch with the protagonists from your film, and was their initial approval to be filmed enough for you to have their stories edited and broadcasted, or did you try to reach out to them and listen to what they have to say about the film before it was aired for the first time?

Unfortunately it was not possible to stay in touch with the migrants I filmed because they were going through some serious problems, and often had their phones seized so they weren't in a position to call me later. Most of them had really good reasons to openly talk about everything and stand in front of the camera, whereas others also had good reasons no to. Generally, they didn't have a problem with being filmed, but some of them feared giving interviews and knew that telling their stories publicly might have repercussions. In the end I think that there is no perfect form or a perfect style to depict migrant experiences, because different directors managed to show migrant experiences pretty voraciously using different techniques. That is the case with the two films about migrations I liked, one of them is Taste of Cement, and the other one is Unspeakable Crime. The first one is a creative documentary without any interviews, and the second one is a current affairs documentary with a lot of "talking head" interviews. They are two totally different genres of documentaries, and they both bring a new dimension of the migrant suffering. I cannot tell you which style is better, because that depends on the story, if I knew what the story concretely is, I would have been able to tell what form I would have used.

Q: Did you seek any legal advice for this film?

My strategy is always "no plan B", and then later we will see how to overcome obstacles. Most of the time I am overcoming them by myself because I rarely have the help from the producers or legal experts that will help me acquire the rights to use certain music and this is why most of the time I hire my fellow musicians to help me and I also ask permission to use the archival footage on my own. This takes up a lot of my time, but I

find it easier to make a film with the intention of it being as true as possible, and then I can solve the problems that might come from acquiring the rights to the music or footage.

Lynne Sachs

Q: The first question would be what first attracted you to make a film about migrant experiences, and especially the experiences of Chinese migrants?

I was interested in domestic life and in urban life. Initially, it wasn't even necessarily immigrant life. I was interested in how people find themselves in living environments in which they are thrown together, but they're not a family and how we adapt to find family and find a sense of something very different from ownership, sort of more micro community in which you find solace or you find grounding or you find love or you find the tensions that come with family. All those things that young people often have, because at least in the United States, when they live in a dormitory, they have to adapt. But I was interested in how adult lives would intertwine and find mutual dependency and support and all of that. So, I happen to hear about something called a "hotbed house" because I have a distant relative, and he told me on his 90th birthday about the night in the 1960s, when a plane crashed in the middle of Brooklyn. So, there were two planes, TWA which doesn't exist anymore and maybe United or Pan-Am, anyway two airlines that don't exist anymore, but they were the big ones back then. They crashed over Staten Island, one went down in Staten Island, and the other one went along a little farther, got to the middle of Brooklyn, Flatbush Avenue, and crashed. I asked him how many people were killed who lived on the street, or you know, in the neighborhood? And he said, well, Lynn, I don't know, there were so many hot bed houses, you couldn't tell, and I said, what's a hot bed house? And then he explained to me that it's where working people,

often immigrants, who can't afford rent and have jobs in a big city like New York, have a place for them to live in, but they might have another home elsewhere or they might not even have a home, or their home could be in another country. Their possessions are not with them. They're more, let's say, transients. So, they call it a hot bed house because the bed stays warm. I immediately, in my filmmaker mind, wondered how that manifests itself and how it exists today, and people are so connected to their material things and to their domestic spaces. What would it be if you didn't have that relationship, but you still were trying to find that grounding? So, I started to look up "hot bed house", but if you, in your research, look up hot bed house, mostly you find x rated websites. Then I took it a little further and actually spent a year researching it and trying and it took me not very long to find out that the name it's also called is "the shift bed house". Then, I started to talk to academics and people who work in housing in New York. Immediately it became clear that whereas in the 1960s in New York, when that plane crash happened, men who would come here were Irishman, and they came here to work on the ships, and today it's Filipino domestic workers, or Chinese restaurant workers or Mexican immigrants, whose number, at least in New York, has increased drastically since I first moved here. Then it became evident that Chinatown was kind of our place, where so many of those people were living. And so I thought in my eagerness to find out more, well, I would just go to some housing agencies, and to people who dealt with public housing and talk to them and they would find people I could talk to. They said we're not going to let you in anybody's house, so I got discouraged, but I'm quite persistent and I thought, well, I made experimental films, I'll read about this, and then I'll write a scenario. Then I went to a theater troupe in Chinatown, and they were all interested in this, but they were middle

class people with education to a degree, and they couldn't really relate to this topic. Also, they thought it was strange that I didn't even have a script. They weren't into the idea of improvisation or devising a scenario together and collaboration, and after about two meetings it didn't work out. That is when I went back to the drawing board, and then I met with a scholar from Hunter College, and he said, that there's a man in Chinatown who fancies himself as the mayor of Chinatown. His family goes back many generations, and we thought that maybe he can help as he actually works in public housing. We met and we walked around, and he guided me to more archaeological or anthropological awareness.

He said, if you see an apartment that's a kind of a typical size, maybe a little bit bigger, and it's got garbage three feet high or four feet high or five, then there are probably more people living there. He taught me that, and so we walked around together and he was super helpful, I told him that I was willing to work with people as performers on this, and he said, well, why don't you go over to Mott Street in Chinatown because there's a senior community there, and perhaps the people will audition to be in your movie. I just went over there, walked in and they happen to be having a karaoke competition. There were about 50 people there, and I stood out immediately. Afterwards, the director of the organization, it was called Lin Sing Association, and so everybody there was into music and performing. The director said, why are you here? So, I said, I'm looking for people to audition for my film, and about 40 people signed up. After that, I came back with a very good friend from this neighborhood, who's Chinese-American, and since she was keen to helpm we went, and conducted auditions. The auditions were more like documentary interviews, I asked them about their immigration experience, and have you ever lived in

this very, very small apartment you had to share with other people? Out of that group, the seven people who are in the film came forward and, as you know from doing this kind of journalistic work, you are also drawn to people with charisma and with stories to tell. I'm not necessarily drawn to people who know how to act. I asked, do you have any stories that revolve around a bed? So, I chose those seven, and I don't think the other people were offended. After that, I went back and did much longer interviews with them.

Q: When you were doing the interviews, did you have an interpreter? Did your friend help you, or was there someone else too?

One of the people who auditioned was from Hong Kong, and she is my source now. She speaks Cantonese, and most people in Chinatown, the older ones at least, speak Cantonese. They can understand Mandarin, but they prefer Cantonese. So, she spoke Cantonese, English and Mandarin perfectly. She was willing to help behind the scene and behind the camera rather than in front, as she was actually much younger than everybody else and didn't have a story that had anything to do with the shift bed and apartment experience. She came here with all the right papers; her son was in college, but she just wanted to be here. Eventually, she ended up becoming critical and became a part of every single shot.

Q: And how exactly did that work, who was on the set when the filming happened?

I'll tell you the whole story. I did these pretty long interviews, about 40 of them, and then I took those interviews had them translated. That took a while, but after that I took each interview and worked with a playwright, he's actually Puerto Rican, and we created what I called, the documentary distillations. So, we took the parts of their stories that you

might call the selects. Mostly the things that interested me and that I saw connections between other people's stories. Also, I wanted everyone to have a “bed story” and they did. We shaped them (the stories) and turned them into a monologue that would be part of a performance. Obviously, after that I had to have them translated back into Chinese, and I gave them back to each person. As a suggestion, I kind of said memorize them, which they took seriously. For me there was this conceptual leap around documentary because we have this way in which we privilege the first; the first time that someone says something, we think it's fresher, we think it's more authentic, we think it is from the heart. We also think it's not mediated. I was not someone they knew well, we become great friends later but at that time I was an outsider. I'm a New Yorker, they're New Yorkers, but I'm not an insider to their community. Most of them do not know any non-Chinese people at all but the fact that they had a script gave them a foundation in a sense, and it was also a validation that this was in fact their story.

Q: Does this mean you didn't take anything away from the story or add anything to it?

I would say I played a little bit, that's why I call it a hybrid story. For example, Ellen Ho, she tells the story about when she was sleeping with her grandmother and then she had got eggs, and I wrote that she got a dozen eggs for her birthday because she had actually said a few eggs and then I made it into a dozen, and then she corrected me saying that nobody would ever give her more than one egg. I played with it a little bit, that's why I call it a hybrid documentary. There is a scene with Mr. Che, where he's doing the massage, we were on set shooting in a tiny room with these bunk beds, and I actually had a camera person with me (there weren't many people on the set, there was an audio person, a camera person, translator and myself), but because it was such a small room, I,

as the director, had to be a little bit outside, so that I can whisper to the camera person.

The interpreter at the moment when Mr. Che started talking about the stone bed said he's leaving the script and basically thought we should stop. I intervened and said no, that's fine, it's his story. There wasn't a moment where I was going to confront them, firstly because of language, but also because of respect. We have established these parameters, I'm not going to take you out (the protagonists) into another zone where you're going to feel insecure because the cultural differences were profound.

Q: What about the location where the filming happened? The house where most of the filming was done, wasn't necessarily a house where they lived?

I actually had to do some location work and had to find a house. After I found it and paid the money, we get there (the crew), and it was pouring rain. This was on East Broadway, we were right there, and we had to go up the stairs, and finally we get to the apartment that I had rented for a few days, or at least for the initial shooting and one person who lived there said no. Even though the other person had made the arrangements, so there we were, and then Mr. Wong, the wedding singer, said, just come to my house. We went to his house immediately and that became our set for the next year and a half. We would shoot, then I'd go home and edit and then come back. We became like a group of friends, and every time we shot, we'd go have dinner afterwards.

Q: Other than the seven people who agreed to participate in your film, did you include any other people who happened to be in the apartment during the filming? For example, there's a cooking scene with some additional characters?

Yes, there were other people, but they weren't necessarily the characters. In the very beginning of the film, you hear a youngish man talking about sharing a bed with his father. I don't have him on camera, but he lived there. This is why this film is unlike the narrative film where the space is very hermetic, and the intention is to have control. On the other hand I think hybrid implies that the environment is very porous, so I actually don't find having complete control very interesting. When you're in the moment, you think, oh, that's too bad, his roommates came home; for us, we just said, that's okay, as long as they don't mind, we'll just keep going. I think this adds to the texture and authenticity. There were scenes when they start cooking duck, right on the floor, you know, cutting it on the floor, I couldn't have planned that. Other things too, for example, when people write phone numbers on the wall; that's not something I could have created through our art direction. I loved that, because there's this notion, well, there's isn't a paper, and I just have to "make do". This isn't my wall. I don't really care. Although, there is a respect for the space but there's also this "make do" kind of construct. The film is a documentary, but there is a performance side to it. While we were shooting, the people in the film kept telling me that it was going to be very boring, and that no one would be interested in seeing it, they said our lives are not interesting, why are you making this but we are having fun? A lot of them were my parents age, and I know that my parents would never have agreed to be in this film; we would shoot together, then I would say let's do something around the mattress because I know Mr. Che does collect mattresses and the rest of you think it's ridiculous because mattresses on the street or dirty. Throughout the filming process they kept saying there's no story, but I like movies that don't have a character with a plot, but they felt exasperated with it. That's why I

thought it needed a little spice, and because I knew quite a few young Puerto Rican actors and intellectuals, I said, what would happen if a young Puerto Rican woman moved in? This might be kind of fun, let's see what will happen. They were elated (the protagonists), they loved it because it gave it a little awkwardness and it gave them something they would not normally have done.

Q: That's the only scene, when Lourdes walks into the house for the first time, that tells us this is not a classic documentary, so was this part scripted?

It wasn't scripted, they wrote it, and they came up with what they were gonna say. The other thing is that I actually despised that scene. And I first got it back and said, no way am I going to use this. The light is bad. it seems so self conscious, and that's why I didn't even translate it. It was put away, but then, out of curiosity, I thought, let's just get this translated. Soon after, I discovered that the Chinese women said these hilarious things like "take your shoes off", and things like "what's she thinking coming in here", and I thought that was actually kind of fun and spunky. Then I brought it in, I thought I'm gonna have to live with this, even though I don't like it aesthetically and it's not like the rest of the film, it has the fluorescent lights, it's not as nuanced, but there's something about it that adds this kind of whimsy, inventiveness and theatricality. So I kept I kept to it. What happened was, as I was editing the film and originally there was a little bit of romance, a connection between mr. Huang and Lourdes, the whole context was that mr. Huang disappears and Lorna stays responsible. I didn't really know what I was doing, it's not my expertise, so I showed it to a few people, and they said it was horrible. There's an obstacle here, and I thought to myself, am I making a narrative film or a documentary? At that time, I didn't call it the hybrid documentary, I just didn't know what it was. Then my

husband said to me, you just really need to get it out of the computer somehow, and let it live, you've been working on it for over a year. The film also got to live in the theatre, I think it was on Facebook that someone wrote about this community center in Williamsburg, the post said that they are looking for people to come and do performances around the theme of hospitality. Even though I thought we couldn't make a stretch, also I thought the home is a zone of hospitality. And actually, I knew that the people in my film liked performing, they like being in front of an audience, but they're used to being in front of the Chinese audience exclusively.

Q: Were they performing in Chinese, or did they have to adapt, and have it done in English?

We got there and we did this live performance in front of maybe 30 people, and people loved it. Even more than that, the people in the film, loved it too, because they were engaging face to face with America or New York, something they have never done before. It was very gestural, they actually don't speak because it was a mixed media piece, we already had subtitles. So then when the talking happened, we had clips from the film, and it was very woven together. Everybody was excited about this, and soon after we started doing this play all over New York. We did it in Universities, we did it on the Lower East Side, and they were (the protagonists) enthralled because they were transported to different places where they weren't familiar, but we also did it very close to Chinatown, so that all their friends could come, and gradually that became part of the film, this more performative side. Since, I still wanted to make it into a film, and it eventually did become that, and the film is more complex. But there's a quality to the performance that's kind of electrifying, and I consider this film to be a reality-based

performance. You look at your media, and you say, got it, but also you can come back and do more filming. I've done films in Vietnam and I've shot films in Israel and Palestine, but it's different, people go and then you have it and you don't have the money or you don't have the time to go back. So you don't really you have a relationship with the people in the film and you call them subjects. They don't have a relationship with you either. We also developed a connection by screening the film in Chinatown, we did it at the Public Library there, they have a theater at Chatham square, and this added another layer for them. One man from the film has died, so when he was on the screen everybody started crying, but they were also happy that we had that image of him. This man was Mr. Cao, he talks about how his family that went to Taiwan, and how he was waiting for them. They left in 1947, he thought he would see them again, but he never did. He actually worked in Confucius Plaza, which is the tallest building in Chinatown, and he was beloved by a lot of people. One more difference from the traditional "paratrooper" documentary was that I paid everybody, so in that way I wanted to make them feel more elevated rather than having this feeling that I took something from them, and they something from me. It was between \$40 and \$100, but we would shoot all day, and Miss Ellen Ho, she actually lives in Flushing, so she would commute every time and she was 80 at that time. She would come on the subway and arrive at mr. Huang's apartment an hour and a half early. So there were elements that made them feel professional and I felt that almost anytime I work in documentary I should pay people. Especially, if they're not, shall I say, middle class people, but if I feel that there's a class difference or a comfort zone difference, I feel it's more than just respect, and that it's also saying your time is

valuable. There were a lot of funny things, Mr. Huang as you saw in the film always had a lot of cash.

Q: He came up with that it's not something you scripted?

Yeah, exactly. He wanted people to know that because of his job and how he was often paid in cash. We would eat in these restaurants that he sometimes chose, and we would often have a tension between what the Fujianese like to eat and what the Cantonese like to eat, because Fujianese tend to eat like all the parts of the chicken and Cantonese wouldn't eat that. So we'd always have a little tension about where we go to a restaurant. He was Fujianese and sometimes he would pay behind my back.

Q: Did you have to consult any legal experts in case your subjects were living as the undocumented immigrants, and what obstacles did you encounter when trying to veraciously depict and represent some else's stories?

Even the words, documentary and document, it's interesting, at least in English, they're the same, but they have to do with that kind of validation and a proof of reality, and whether this reality is legitimate or not. I should say they're (the film protagonist's) immigrants, but all of them except Mr. Huang are legally here, and he mentioned that in the film, that he has a son living in China and how he is not able to go there and see him. I'm very, very involved in his attempt not to be deported, because since Trump has become president, it's become more and more charged, and he could be sent back. So, I've had to speak and testify in front of Homeland Security and I actually have another day on December 10, to do that.

Q: Where all has this film been shown?

I was invited to show the film in China. So, I kind of had a tour in China, sponsored by the China women's Film Festival in 2014. Which was fantastic. It was amazing. You know, for me, and it was like a dream come true. I can't believe I'm able to do this. And it was very, very interesting. Because my film was a depiction of America that they hadn't seen before. They said that looks so hard, why don't they come back to China, why would they suffer? Also they were drawn to it because it was like a China that almost doesn't exist for them, in some ways, they said that it's like the China of the 70s that our grandparents lived in you know, like breaking the beans and the certain kind of cooking and things like that. They're also preserving so many things, culturally and in an anachronistic way. Because they've taken their culture, but it's also frozen in this sublime way.

Q: Did you see yourself as an outsider when you were making the film?

The outsider part I think was intriguing to them, it was almost like travel for them within this country, it was like a psychic travel, because some of my crew, for example, I had a person doing the sound, he speaks Mandarin, he's Chinese American, but he's lived his whole life in the United States. So that was helpful. But then, my main cinematographer is not Chinese, and they loved him. He's just very gentle and friendly. We pretty much have the same group. So there became a friendliness to it. This aspect of the Chinese community I wasn't aware of before was how physical it was, so when I would walk around with the women, for example, we would always hold hands and Americans don't do that. We're not that intimate with people we who don't know very well. You see that in the film. A woman named Sheut Lee, the woman with short gray hair, and when she walked around with Lordes, that's the Puerto Rican woman (Her real name is Veraalba)

and you'll see in the credits she's it says Lordes- Veraalba, and when they walked around together and Shuet Lee is kind of showing her China town, Veraalba as a character, they held hands. And that was very typical. That was not the performance, I would never had asked an 80-year-old woman to hold the hand of a 35-year-old. It wouldn't even occur to me that she did that. And then when I walked around there with her, she will do that. And they both would. And there was kind of an intimacy that developed over time. There was also a man named Mr. Tsui, he's the one in the scene who sings Happy Birthday out of tune, and his son had a couple of grandchildren over the course of the time that we were making the film. So, you know, I would always ask about seeing pictures of his grandchildren and sometimes we had to arrange our shooting based on when he did babysit for his grandchildren. And there was a trajectory that would never have happened in a more conventional documentary situation where you would know that someone had grandchildren and then you would see their pictures. And then you would talk about it.

Q: There's hundreds of stylistic choices you could have made, filming in the moment, observational documentary or opting for a more scripted version of it, or even having a narrator but because it came from a play and you had to make it into a film you could've made a turn to the left or to the right so many times?

That made me realize that every narrative film is a document of a group of people who got together in front of a camera, they're all documentaries. That's a documentary of people acting like they're someone different than who they are. I find that in a traditional documentary there is this sense that the only person who gets to be creative is the director in collaboration with the cinematographer, and the cinematographer is creating something aesthetic and aesthetics is everything. For many of us, I won't say necessarily people in

the news, but we privilege aesthetics because our job is to create something beautiful from something that's ostensibly not beautiful, like people who have to live in homes. And so, that became really problematic to me how we aestheticize and how people (documentary filmmakers) do take one, take two, take three anyway in documentary, in straight ahead documentary. They say (to their subjects) "Can you say that again?" all the time, but actually, often. And how many documentaries do they take out? Most, they take out all the "uums" all the "like" called? They take the texture out anyway. It's all a construction.

Q: Do you think that the claims to reality are not always well-founded?

I think there's a tendency in documentary practice by the director to have everything move in the direction of their thesis. "I'm trying to say this, and I want you to believe it, so my selects are going to work and support my idea". For me, I often have ideas but mostly I'm proven wrong.

Q: And the style of filming you use allows you to change your concept as you move along?

My theory is that the thing that proved you wrong is probably the most interesting thing, because you were keenly aware of dynamics. As for the immigration issue, because you asked me how do you film people who don't want to be filmed? My answer is maybe they want to be filmed, but they're scared. So the question could be, what is the difference between your camera and the camera up on that wall? It's all surveillance.

Q: Don't you think that there is a difference, knowing that when they (the immigrants) are doing it willingly and exposing their experiences willingly this attract unwanted attention, whereas they cannot control the surveillance camera?

You still don't have control of where that material is going to go. For example, Mr. Huang claims in an interesting way that because my film was shown around China some Chinese authorities came to his family's house and asked questions. I don't know. Maybe it doesn't matter, maybe it could have happened anyway, but no one really knows. So they're actually (the immigration lawyers) using that as a defense for him being a political asylum seeker. I hope it works. I hope it works for him. Also, I'm sorry if my film caused him any problems, he doesn't really care. And when the film came out, there was a lot of press in Chinese newspapers in Chinatown. They're not just Chinatown. There's actually a lot of Chinese papers that are for all of the world for people who are immigrants, primarily on the web, and not even just on the web. So when we had our premiere and it was at the Museum of Modern Art, they had a Chinese TV station there. And they were into it.

Q: Going back to the representational issues, do you think there's another way to do justice to the migrant experiences in a documentary form? And have you talked to any other directors or filmmakers, to seek advice from them while you were making this film?

I made another film with immigrants, it's called the Washington society. In that film, which is also a hybrid, and it also was a performance, we had even more, many more, issues around filming immigrants. So conceptually, I had to push that. Originally, we did it as a live performance, and it was about laundry workers, and the laundry workers here,

they're actually Latinx, so not here legally, necessarily. We were very interested in this relationship between the people who give their clothing to other people and there's a kind of intimacy there, but it's an intimacy framed around service. People who hand their clothes, they have more of a security in place, but they still need something as basic as clean clothes. So, they hand it over to people who don't have the security. And then those people clean it, and then they give it back. It's very much tied into urban life here, New York probably more than any other place in the U.S. The question was, how does that work and how someone becomes both knowledgeable about the person whose clothes they, I don't know your name, but you would know my name, that sort of thing. When I was researching all of that, nobody wanted to be on camera. That's why we listen to the stories, we wrote them down and then we created a script with that material.

Q: What do you think is an end goal of a filmmaker that is making a film about migrant experiences? Is to ease the transition to a new country or to help immigrants obtain the papers they need? Often enough domestic filmmakers are criticized and deemed as paratroopers that landed somewhere wanting to use immigrant experiences for their own benefit and that prevents them from portraying those nitty gritty details of immigrant's daily lives and prevents them from understanding their culture. Some researchers even say that the only way to do justice to migrants is to give them cameras and help them make diaries of their own experiences?

There's a great film from the 80s called aka Don Bonus, and it was probably the first film that did that (gave cameras to protagonists). It was a breakthrough film. Such a brilliant film, the filmmaker, I think he was Cambodian, gave a camera to a high school kid, I don't know his name, but he called himself Don Bonus, and for years he shot, so

everything is filmed from his perspective. So, this was one distinct way for documentary filmmakers to try and depict the immigrant experience.

Q: And you drew something from that?

Did I? That's interesting. So I wasn't involved in that kind of exchange, but I was aware of how to let the people in front of the camera tell their own story. Also, I tried not having too much pathos. I think there's a tendency in documentary to always think you have to make your audience cry. Also, there's a lot of humor in that film (*Your Day is My Night*), and I think the humor that comes in documentary is super interesting because it's a humor of recognition, and hopefully your audience is not laughing at someone but they're laughing with the situation, like a birthday song scene. Everybody can kind of relate to that. I'm a middle-class person, and that's one of the challenges, how do you reveal who you are? Also, there's a tendency, almost always in a documentary to shoot from the outside in, and I've made an effort to try to shoot from inside out. There's a trend today with people trying to figure out who they are in their work, and I've made a lot of films about other people's lives, and I guess there is an antidote to that; for the last three decades I've been shooting a film about my family, because there's a lot of complicated dynamics in my own family, and most families have that. I just finished this film about my father, and it's very much looking in. Some people who work in documentary never do that, and I feel extremely vulnerable. I don't feel extremely vulnerable about this film only, but with everything I make. A friend of mine asked, are you sure you want to do this and really expose yourself, but I feel like that's justified, because I've exposed a lot of other people and I need to equalize.

Ziad Kalthoum

Q: The first question I have for you is what first attracted you to make a film about migrant experiences?

I am from Syria, and when the revolution in Syria began, I was a soldier in the military service. So, I was witnessing the beginning of war in Syria, I was surrounded by the sound of the war, and was between tanks every five minutes. Eventually, I found a way to run away from the military service because I refused to hold a weapon and kill other Syrian people. So, I run away from Syria to Lebanon, and I found myself in Beirut, which is such a noisy city, because as you know, Lebanese people spent more than 15 years fighting during the civil war, and when the war was finally over, they invited Syrian workers to rebuild the country. So, the noise of the city (Lebanon) is the noise of the construction site, which is the opposite of the sound in Syria where we have the sound of the war. Because of these contrasting sounds, I tried to follow the sound of construction and I found myself in a huge Syrian community in Lebanon. We are talking about 1 million workers and how the system uses them as slaves, and especially after the Syrian war, because they have nowhere else to go, and they don't have a shelter anymore. So, they often find themselves in Lebanon, and the only job that allows them to collect a little money and to survive and buy food is at the construction site. Unfortunately, it is a developed system, and the government (in Lebanon) is using people as slaves. We included a sign written in Arabic in the film that shows that Syrian workers are not allowed on the streets after 7PM. My film talks about how towers that are being built became prisons for these people and how they became prisoners. I found myself in front of these huge communities that don't have the right to talk about their houses in Syria because they are afraid of al-Assad regime and they don't have the right to talk about

their conditions inside the building because they are afraid of the owner of the building, and they don't have the right to go outside after 7PM when their work is finished. What's interesting is that this community is not only big, but mute, they're not allowed to express themselves, just allowed to work 12 hours every day. The main topic for me here is how Syrian people are building houses in Lebanon and at the same time losing their houses in Syria; another theme is this space between two wars, one from the past that was fought in Lebanon, and another happening in Syria during our time. What I tried was to talk about the history and the present moment, and these workers are stuck between the past and the present. It was very important to talk about this group of people because everybody is Syria, they are busy fighting, except these people because they refused to kill so they decided to run away and do something positive. The act of building is opposed to the act of killing. From there I started looking for subjects, and I was following the sound of construction sites in Beirut and slowly discovered what my subject is.

Q: Were the subjects scared to show their faces in front of the camera, and if so, how did you overcome that? Also, what do you mean in specific when you say that you "followed the sound", does that mean you didn't have any interviews in the film?

I decided from the beginning to have no interviews. It probably would have been easier to put a Syrian worker in a very beautiful frame and let him speak for 10 hours, and then go to the editing room and to reduce that to five minutes, provoke the emotion and let the audience cry. It's not my job to make my audience cry, and it's also not easy to invite someone to talk about their pain. I don't do that as a filmmaker, I believe this style is more appropriate for TV, for a video reportage and for journalists in general, but for me, I had this challenge to make almost a silent film. The main story was about the Syrian

people that are against the act of killing. All of them came together to Lebanon, and now the system is using them as slaves, so my film was made from the perspective of the system. The system doesn't let them have names, biographies, histories, they are not allowed to have any human connection and they are dehumanized group of 400 workers laboring together for 12 hours and going to the basement after that; they spend their time after work in this black hole watching TV and seeing their houses getting destroyed in Syria every day. It was very clear to me that the system is using and punishing them, and you don't need a better proof than that sign that prohibits them from going out of the construction site after 7PM. When you are standing in front of this tower it looks beautiful, but when you scratch under the surface you see that the system and the society is shameless. My question in this movie is how Lebanese people could have spent 15 years fighting and losing 1 million people and deciding after that to use another war and the struggle of Syrian people to their advantage. This to me is the ruthless capitalism. This question will come in front of the Syrian people in the future when the war finishes, and we will have to ask ourselves, how are we going to to rebuild our country? This is a big question for our current system and the new system coming after this one, will we invite people from the outside, keep them as slaves, and use them in the same way? I don't think so. Nobody should use slaves to build their home.

Q: What do you think are the principal representational challenges of making a film about migrant experiences? How might a filmmaker overcome some of those issues or challenges? You said that that interviewing someone and making the audience cry is not the best solution, so what other stylistic choices are there for a filmmaker?

Depends on the filmmaker, and what is the story they are trying to tell. In the end it is not my job to give all the information to the audience. In cinema, I believe our job as filmmakers is to transfer a feeling, not information. Transferring Information is very easy, I can do a film where I would invite my characters to speak extensively and add sad music to make my scene more moving, and to have the audience discuss what someone said in the film, it shouldn't be like that. You should use your language as a filmmaker, and know how your subjects should be treated, in what way will the footage in the film talk about your subjects, how will you get the audience to arrive to the location where the film was happening. It was a big challenge to invite the audience and show them what it's like to be one of the workers. For example, if you are only listening to one of them (the workers), you are only following their direction, but if you let the silence play its part, and if everything exists in front of you, you don't need any explanations, because it is apparent. Also, the sound design was my language and helped me tell the story. Most documentaries don't care a lot about sound, for some of the filmmakers only important thing is that the sound is clear and that they have some music playing. For me it was not like that, I had the sound of the war and the sound of the construction, and it's hard to tell them apart sometimes. For example, the tank in Syria that destroyed home by home makes a similar sound as the crane at the construction site. Why did we spend 15 years fighting in Lebanon, and we didn't learn anything, and maybe it's just Middle East, but we have these periods of building and destroying and they change almost as seasons do. I tried to involve machines as main characters in my film so that the reason why I juxtaposed the tank, the crane and the cement mixer. In one of the scenes, I attached a camera to the cement mixer that was moving on the road, and by that I wanted to show

how the worker's life resembles that of hamsters, because they are both moving in circles but without going anywhere. Every day, they use the same elevator to reach the roof of the building, then they work for 12 hours, and come back down on the same elevator; they've been doing this for three years, and this circle represents the same routine that they go through every day. I wanted to show Beirut from the cement mixer perspective, because when I was doing my research, I found out that after the Lebanese war ended in 1990, the first machine that started working 24/7 and it did not stop until today is the cement mixer. By choosing this perspective, I avoided anyone telling the audience what was going on, and as a filmmaker you have this challenge of using your elements and telling the story without talking head interviews. We hear a poetic voiceover in *Taste of Cement* for only six minutes of the film that lasts 85 minutes. The voiceover speaks about the feeling inside of a human being, and on the workers speaks about how the story of his father who was also a worker, and how he remembers the moment when his house in Syria collapsed while he was sitting in it. The title *Taste of Cement* is therefore symbolic, since people in Syria had to taste their houses, if they were lucky enough to get out of them alive after the bombing, because they would come out from the house full of cement.

Q: When the immigrant life and their experiences are so repetitive, as was the case with the characters in your film, what do you think are the biggest issues in portraying these complexities? What I mean by this, is that migrants often don't have a face, they're often portrayed from the perspective of numbers and statistics, and is there a way to fight this?

The TV I believe is a different medium than cinema, and in the news, they are showing images of countless refugees, and those images are shown from someone's agenda, using

propaganda to tell the story they want to present to the audience. Our job as filmmakers is different, we must take a step back to look what's going on from the outside, my job is to transfer the feelings of my characters to transfer his, to let the audience enter their mind, and to let them know how they are thinking and whether they are suffering. For example, if they are crossing the ocean to reach to the other side, you have to show the whole trip, and on the other side, the media they don't know how to transfer the story from the perspective of migrants. They never show you the details of their lives, their memories, their secrets and their full background. Most of the mainstream media just see them as objects, so that's why our job in cinema is very different from the news, we have to dive inside the character of our subjects and figure out how they are feeling about this journey. If you were looking for what's going on in Syria right now, you would see a panorama of the city and how one house got suddenly bombed. If you did a close-up on this house, you would see all these details inside the house and all the memories that were there. It is our job as filmmakers to go deeper, unlike journalist that are seeing the story only from the outside. When you suddenly put a camera in front of someone, after one minute they will start to cry, because the people that are going through war are full of pain. I didn't want to do the same, and my goal was to let the audience see the film protagonists from a different angle.

Q: You said that you wanted to tell a story through sound as well, what does that mean specifically?

During the shooting, I was collecting all these sounds from the construction sites, the sounds of the various tools making noise. I was recording everything in order to have this melody that is a combination of construction site sounds included in the film. This was

my language of narration. They were living in this basement underground, and it's like a black box. And for me, this black box where they are sleeping and eating and resting after work, represents the sound of war, because they are watching on TV how their houses are being destroyed in Syria. In contrast once they move to the top of the building, they are surrounded by the sound of the construction site. Basically, above we have the sound of construction, and down underground we have the sound of war. Through sound, I was building this atmosphere of claustrophobia that my characters were feeling every day.

Q: Was that the biggest challenge you had while making the film?

In the beginning my producers told me “What are you doing man?”, it is not a documentary if you don't have a main character. They told me “You don't have someone telling his story, all you have are beautiful images shot on the construction site”. I told them to let me finish, and that we will discuss everything later step by step. Because to me a revolution in Syria is not just about al-Assad regime, it is about our language. My challenge was to create something new, I was fed up with the films where subjects are talking non-stop; you can shut your eyes during those films and just listen, and I don't think that cinema is made just to be heard. I thought that the audience needed to see how the mix of images and sounds can create the story and can tell you everything you need to know about the subjects and their situation without one word. We did it in the end because I had a great team and they believed in me, and they were with me until the end. What happened to me in the beginning when I arrived in Germany, I started working with one famous video editor but after two months we reached this moment when he started asking me, why isn't there anyone speaking in the film, why don't we have a main character speaking? That's when I decided that I will not continue to work with him, and

soon after I invited another video editor who never worked on films. His technical skills were very good, and it served him better that he didn't have any experience in editing feature films because his mind was clear. Although the producers were telling me I should edit the film with the first person who they suggested, but I told them it wasn't going to work, and that what someone has on their resume should not be the only criteria for hiring the video editor for this film.

Q: There are some articles that have been written about the perspective of a foreigner making a film about migrations, and how it is different from the perspective of someone who was making the film from the inside, do you think that this was the problem with the first video editor you started collaborating with?

Everybody is focused on the war in Syria and because this crisis is now in focus you can make a lot of money by reporting on it. For example, when I just arrived in Berlin I was looking for a producer to continue my project, and I've met with a lot of them, and I know that I was an object for them just because I am from Syria, and everyone wanted to work with me, because it is a hot topic, and they thought they could make money. That's how I decided that I am not going to work with them and that I needed someone who believes in my project as an artist and as a human being first. This really made me understand what's going on inside this industry. A lot of the producers were interested in the subject just because I'm Syrian and that could make them money. On the other side of the spectrum were artistic people, who loved my style and those were the ones I was looking for.

Q: Did you get any advice from other filmmakers on how to approach the topic of migration?

Not really, but I met a lot of people during my shooting and even before the filming started. The Lebanese and the German producer, they tried to introduce me to different filmmakers that would show me how to make this film, and I refused this because I thought that no one can or should teach me how to make my own film. I don't mind talking about my project or anyone else's project, but in the end it's my language and I am the only one who knows how this film should be made. I didn't feel the need to follow the traditional rules and to listen to advice on how to make something stereotypical.

Q: Do you feel that if you listened to their advice it would not have been your version of reality and truth, and that you would have depicted someone else's version of truth?

Exactly, I think that in documentary you have an option to follow the system, and you learn how to do that from A to Z by watching clips on youtube. They will teach you how to make a classic documentary with interviews, with one main character, but the real challenge is to make something people have never seen before. This film screened in about 200 hundred festivals around the world, and all the time the audience would tell, it's the first time we are watching a film like this. This means a lot to me because it shows that my language moved them. So, I think the biggest challenge for filmmakers both in fiction and documentary is to create something that has never been seen before. Also, if I was weak, gave in, and let my producers control the film, I would have been persuaded to have one main character and to include interviews.

Q: Did the subjects in your film have any control during the making of the film and did some of them see the film before it premiered? Were they at all concerned about their representation, and did they trust what you were doing?

It was impossible to build trust with 400 people, obviously they are afraid of everything after what happened to them in Syria. Also, I was waiting for my permission to enter the construction site. No one is willing to let you inside and allow you to show the world what's going on inside the construction site. It took us one year to get this permission, and when the owner of the building asked me why we are here, I told him the film we are making is about how beautiful this building, and I never told him it was about the Syrian workers. He gave me 10 days to enter the site and told me not to go underground to this black hole where people were sleeping and spending their time off work. I disobeyed and sneaked down with my team and we spent five nights until he found out about everything and kicked us out. When I found myself in front of the workers for the first time, and in front of this black hole and saw how they were (the workers) getting out from it, I realized that these people were slaves, and because I got the permission to film from the owner, none of the workers had the right to object. It was a great responsibility once I got this access and I had to know that there was a thin line that I shouldn't cross. I tried to tell the workers that I am not there to misuse their trust but to show to the world how they are being treated at this construction site. It was not so easy because I didn't have a lot of time and it was very difficult to do to build trust in such a short period of time.

Q: Did you feel the shift in their mood as time went by and as you spend more time at the construction site? Were they more trusting towards you?

It took two days for me to talk with people, and to create this eye connection between us. I told them that I'm not from a TV station and explained that I am just a filmmaker that's there to support them. Once they felt more relaxed around me, they started inviting me down, opened up their rooms for me, and showed me their private space. This trust we

built was most apparent when I was filming a reflection of a bombed house in Syria in one of the worker's eyes. There was just one centimeter between my lense and his eyes, it was a very sensitive moment. This is why it is really important to build trust between you as a filmmaker and your characters. When you find yourself in such a peculiar situation, you have to trust your team as well, but in the little time we had, I feel like we were able to gain trust with the workers.

Q: Do you think that limits you were facing maybe even helped you? Were you able to use this to your advantage?

I think that you build your own form, and also because they were moving constantly in this circle, it was pretty repetitive, and you couldn't change anything from this circle. I am not only talking about the movement on the construction site, but about the movement in the system too. I am talking about the capitalism and modern-day slavery. People ran away from the war to find themselves in this situation.

Q: Was there a change at the construction site after the film? Did the owner decide to improve working conditions?

One journalist asked me when this film was screening in France if art can change something in our lives, and I said that I don't think it can. This story got published in the local newspaper, and in the Q&A after the film, one guy, about 55 years old who was holding this same newspaper, asked me very angrily why my answer was no and why was I making this film if art can't change anything. I told him that my job is finished once the film starts screening, and that it's audience's turn once they've seen the film to go home and think about their mothers, sisters, and neighbors and to remember this

moment next time they go out to vote. Art without the audience is nothing, they can change something, my film is just a small puzzle in this mosaic. My job is to transfer the truth and to put it in front of the audience, and even though there are hundreds of films about the Second World War, it taught us nothing, and we're still fighting wars. I also don't like when the audience claps and after that they forget everything.

Q: Were there any legal issues for which you sought help?

No, because the people in the film are not speaking, and there isn't a main character, the protagonists are not speaking to the camera, so they are not in jeopardy or at risk. The short voiceover we have is also not directly aimed against any system or against the regime, it is about the whole system. Also, if the owner of this building or the regime sees this film, they can't accuse anyone of anything. I would never use my characters like that and put them at danger, because I would not like to be the same as the owner or the regime.

Iva Radivojevic

Q: What first attracted you to make a film about migrations and migrant experiences?

My case is perhaps an obvious one, we (my family) moved and left Yugoslavia in 1992 when the war broke out and we moved to Cyprus where I grew up. I was 11, almost 12 years old at that time and I grew up as an immigrant in this small island, and then again when I came to the US, so I lived most of my life as an immigrant with a migrant experience let's say. I was going back to Cyprus to visit my family who is still living there and I noticed a new kind of migration that was happening and attitudes that were changing with the way these people were welcomed or unwelcomed, and having lived

through an experience, obviously we all have very different experiences, especially based on where you come from, the color of your skin, religion and so on, but I believe I felt a need to talk about that.

Q: Were there any representational issues you encountered in making of the film?

There always are, and I think that is the job of somebody who is taking on the task of talking for or about other people, and for me, one of the ways I try to get around it, I say ok, I can talk about it because I had an immigrant experience, I can talk about this because I come from a country that has been torn by war, I can talk about it because my parents come from different let's say "tribes" of this country, but obviously our experiences are very different, because my skin is one color tone, their skin is maybe something else, religious backgrounds also, and one way to try and overcome this was for me to provide a background. Even though I didn't necessarily want to put myself under the sun or be the narrator, I felt like I had to because I wanted to be very transparent and make it clear who is talking about the situation, how, why, what my perspective is, through what eyes I am approaching this and know the differences between us, so the viewer can decide whether they want to believe me, trust me, not believe me, and so on. I also chose to do it in Greek, because I felt that I grew up on the island, I speak the language, it is very much a home for me, but at the same time I am an outsider, but I think once you speak the language you understand the culture, but you are more of that place, so again, it was important to stress that I am an insider but I am an outsider at the same time. This was (the film) solely done for the Greek speaking audience, Cypriot audience let's say, because obviously nobody else would have that feeling, and I speak Greek the same way that I speak English, which is with an accent so it was a sort of

unmasking, there is a purpose to it, and there is also a vulnerability through which you are sort of exposing yourself.

Q: Do you think that the documentary form does a better job of explaining the complexities of migrations and migrant experiences in comparison to other mediated forms such as TV pieces?

I think it depends, some things are meant to exist as articles, some things are meant to exist as audio interviews, some things are meant to exist as documentaries, and I just think that if you are going to use a documentary form, even within that, it can be a small realistic piece for example, like something done by Vice, and I think the purposes of each are very very different. Are you trying to sensationalize, so I think we have to look at the purpose? Are we trying to dissect why things are happening, what is behind a certain story, it just depends on what the purpose is, and I think documentaries are a powerful tool, but it is also a very nuance sort of way, what form, what structure, what voice we are using and that is going to dictate what effect of that film will be.

Q: Do you think that certain stylistic choices can hurt or help the veracity of migrant experiences?

It depends from work to work, and I think that at this point where so many films, articles ought to be made about the refugee, and what the west calls the refugee crisis, I think there has to be a very nuanced, considerate and nuanced way of approaching it because everyone has become desensitized based on what's out there already, and they (the audience) see the film about refugees and they don't want to watch it, because their

reaction is, ooh, I know this story, so we need to think of the ways on how to tell it in a way that has not programmed us already for a certain thing, using the same images, that are subverted to say something else. Maybe the answer to that question is who is talking about it and why and how, this particular subject is very tricky because it's been overflooded with interpretations. This is the question somebody asked me in Cyprus, why did you make the film, why you and why didn't a Cypriot make this film, and I told them that only I can talk about Cyprus in this way, because I am an immigrant to Cyprus, and if it was made by a Cypriot it would have been a different film, but the most important thing is to be considerate and aware.

Q: Did you have to highlight or play down certain aspects of the migrant experiences during filming or during the post-production phase?

The choices to hide somebody's face were not made in the post-production, they were made during the filming, and if somebody says I don't want to be in the film, I have to respect that, so there are definitely people who don't want to be on camera, and it's not even about the legal repercussions, it could just be their decision not to participate in that way, so those were the choices I had made very early on. There is music in this film, I don't often use music, and the short I did on migrations for the Field of Vision (Notes from the Border), had absolutely no music, but I didn't use music to highlight emotion, and I don't know that I know how to do that. I think I use music to set a mood to certain observational scenes of the Island (the Cyprus), it has nothing to do with the people who are portrayed in the film. I did use the musical sequence when I was trying to be very transparent in the film and when I was talking about my own experience, for example, I would spend many evenings with different migrants and refugees and then I would go

and hang out with my friends, and they have a very nice rooftop, and they would sing; this experience is available to me, but it is not available to many of the people who I was with. It was a stark difference of reality, and I couldn't continue to film without talking about that, and there is a moment in the film where I actually include this. This was the way to show that this the reality that is available to me, and it is not available to them, and I used music in that sense, I don't necessarily use it to enhance some emotional peak of the film.

Q: What part of the film presented the biggest challenge to the representation of migrant experiences, and did you feel an outside pressure from the producer/distributor or anyone else to depict this story in a certain way?

I don't think I ever had the pressure from producers even in my new films, and with *Evaporating Borders* the pressure was coming from myself. I was talking about a very serious subject and so I had a self-imposed pressure to try as truly as possible to cover the theme from multiple perspectives and to make it nuanced and complicated and sometimes what I end up having to do is use this style of clinical interviews which is not my favorite way of expression and not my first go to way of explaining things, but I felt this self-imposed pressure to give the historical context or to give information, and if I had to do the same film today I am not sure I would impose this on myself.

Q: Did you get advice from other filmmakers on how to approach the topic of migration?

No, I've watched different films, I researched, and I read many books, but I didn't go to any filmmakers who have made films about migrations.

Q: How much control did your subjects have in making of the film and were they at any point concerned about their representation in the film?

Q: I don't like to call them subjects I call them protagonists, because calling them subjects insinuates a hierarchy. People who were concerned and didn't want to be on camera, weren't on camera so I respect their opinions, and people that didn't want to be in the film are not in the film, as I really try to respect everyone's wishes.

Q: Did any of the protagonists get to see the film before it premiered, and were they able to make some decisions about the final cut of the film?

No, and that largely has to do with people migrating very fast afterwards. People left for Turkey, people left for Indonesia, those that appeared in the film, and it would have been quite impossible to line everybody up and have them watch the film, and communication, even the internet, five years ago in some of these situations was spotty. But not even that, even if this was an option at that time, I don't know what decision I would have made at that moment, because these are not the people that I saw once and never again, these are the people that I have a relationship with, that I still have a communication with and I think they trusted me to relay their story. That is the case with most documentaries, it is all about building a relationship, ideally we shouldn't come just to take something, we are here to build a relationship and collaborate on something that is going to move people and that is the ideal situation.

Q: Were there any legal issues in making of the film?

Just in general, there were some things that I use in the film, like YouTube clips, that had to be cleared for those purposes, to make sure you are using them for fair-use, but other than that, no.

Soren Klovborg

Q: Can you describe what first attracted you to make a film about migrant experiences?

Yes, I was coaching Lebanese journalists about investigative journalism and how to make documentaries. And so, I went to Beirut for several times and then at a specific time they told me about these women that were coming from abroad and working there, and I was wondering how I didn't see any of them in the street or maybe very few. And when I heard there was a quarter of a million of them in Lebanon, I was just, you know, curious to find out what happened and then they start to tell you about the situation and that's how it started. I was supposed to do something on trafficking or modern slavery and initially I actually wanted to look at the situation in Qatar, but then Guardian and BBC and other started before me, you know, making stories about workers that were building the World Cup stadiums, and I thought this was a more interesting topic. So that's, that's how it started.

Q: And were there any representational issues you encountered in making of the film, for example, in the Maid In Hell film, one of the limiting factors for you was the access because you were not able to spend time with those girls that were coming from Africa when they were at work, and I saw you overcame that was with infographics and other statistical data you provided in the film?

Yeah and with the agent Maher Doumit who allowed me an access to their private home as well. We tried to ask a lot of families but as you can imagine it's very difficult to get access to a private home in Lebanon, no matter what the topic is and when the topic is critical, You know, if a woman is abused, there's no way in hell that you're going to get access and film, so that's why we spent time with Maher, and that is why I wanted him to be in the film. So, it was not just about the victims, I wanted to present the Lebanese way, or their side of the coin, so to speak. And then adding up with the women at the shelter and all the video footage that they filmed themselves was how we tried to, you know, get around it, the scene from Jordan when these girls from Ghana were coming in, they would not allow me of course to film as the employer picked them up. So, since this was not possible, I did it the way I did.

Q: And was what was the name of the host or the agency owner?

Maher Doumit

Q: Did he have a chance to watch the film? And was he satisfied if he did?

Yes, I invited him to Copenhagen before it was broadcast, so he watched it here in Copenhagen. It was also shown in a movie theatre in Beirut a few months ago, and he turned up as well as Emma the senator from Kenya, so they were both present and we spent time together- all three of us. He was happy about the film, but he was not happy about the debate that followed because people from all over the world were just telling him, that he was a slave owner. They blamed him for everything, which was really unfair, it's okay with him if people think what he does is controversial, but of course, he doesn't like to be blamed for things he is not responsible for and that's what happened in the

aftermath, sadly Facebook can be a brutal place in the aftermath. I'm still in contact with him, and I'm going to visit him next time I go to Lebanon, so he is happy about the film, he found it fair.

Q: And what about the girls that participated in the film, they probably didn't have a chance to see it before it's premiered?

Yes, some of them did. We made a double contract with the shelter, because they were in a vulnerable situation and still in Beirut, so first they signed that they wanted to participate in the film, but I had to wait until they were back home. Most of them were from Kenya. And then they had to accept once more and watch the film. So, it was kind of like they had time to retract a story about the sexual abuse, for example, if they thought they would be stigmatized in Kenya. They had a second chance to think it all over but none of them wanted to get out of the film, and I'm still in contact with some of those girls as well.

Q: What do you think are the principal representational challenges of reporting about migrations and migrant experiences in documentary films?

The ideal way of doing this would have been to follow one girl from her village in Africa and the Philippines, be there for two years and follow her back home. But that's not possible, and I knew that very early on. So if you have migrants being oppressed or badly treated, that's just difficult to get on film, also because they are in a vulnerable situation, there are many Ethiopians in Beirut and other places who have gone underground because they have been there for two years, they have been beaten or raped so that's why they live underground, and if you expose them, they will be in danger. The same thing

goes for Saudi Arabia. Early on, I decided not to go to Saudi Arabia which is, I guess, where the abuse is by far the worst, but one thing is my own personal risk, I couldn't show any faces of women living in Saudi Arabia because they would be in danger. There were many challenges here, Qatar as well has no free press and no way are you going to go in and get access. No way you will be able to film freely and work on this topic, but in Lebanon it is easier to work around and since I was with the agent that kind of cleared the way for me. That's the controversial part, since he allowed us to film that also gave us access to the women and the apartment. Another thing was the shelter, they wanted to protect the women so I think it's the first time they have allowed anyone who wants to film the women without them being blurred, but that was due to the contract that gave them time to think and if necessary retract their testimonies after being sent home. But these women really wanted to be in the film so as it turned out they all announced it's not a problem. However, in the worst case if they all had said no, and told us they have regrets and that they don't want to be in the film anymore, then the footage would have been wasted and we would have given up on the idea of having them in the film, but we didn't know that back when we filmed it.

Q: How did you, specifically in this film, overcome representational challenges? We mentioned something earlier about having to use the recordings your protagonists made on their own, that's obviously one way, but are there any other stylistic choices you can make that would hopefully improve the veracity of this film?

We tried to make it character-driven without a voiceover which is challenging because it's a complex subject and if you chose to follow this direction you have graphics and the spoken word, and that's it. This makes it difficult to structure, and that's why we tried to

put the archival footage to set the macro or the big picture really. We called these agents and this conversation was included at the very start of the film when the agent is saying that you must take the passport and how to avoid paying a maid. We did a number of those phone calls to document that there are a lot of really bad agencies in Lebanon and all the other places, and then we went on to Kenya where we film the senator and the burned woman from Jordan. There are thousands of stores like that, but the problem with it is documenting it. Some of the stories that were not included in the film were from Madagascar for example, where a woman died but they didn't know the name of her family, some of them thought they were going to Dubai, then when in Dubai, they changed their papers and sent them to Saudi Arabia, so they didn't know where they were. And then some of them will starve to death, some were killed, one was found in a freezer. But you know, you can't just put that out there if you can't confront the specific employer. There were many challenges in actually validating the stories I got from Asia and Africa, but this film could have been a lot worse. This is not the worst, I have I had cases when I chose not to include some scenes because they were so cruel and brutal that you wouldn't want to watch it.

Q: And it doesn't really do anything for the families. Unless you can confront the villains and the perpetrators and those who did the harm?

You at least have enough of what was going on in real life portrayed in this film. I think it's a good example with the Jordanian woman, I had quite a few elements to try to piece together that story, but since the agent did not want to give the address of the employer, I couldn't find an employer, so I chose to let the Jordanian agent present his point of view and he's saying it was an accident. Then again, back in Kenya, they didn't know that she

was in the hospital for I think was 42 days, but I cannot document exactly what happened in that apartment because the woman died. She gave her testimony, but the accused party was not reachable, so that's why it was structured the way it was. I leave it as an open question, what happened? No one took the time to inform her husband, not knowing his wife was being very badly burned and not knowing she was in the hospital in Jordan for 40 plus days, and then they sent her back assuring him on the phone that she was fine and that she can walk, which was obviously a lie. I'm just giving you an example of how difficult these stories are because how can you document stories from these women and make sure who is telling the truth. That's been a hard part and I of course must be critical and not just accept the story and think it's 100% true.

Q: They're hidden from the public eye and they have no access to media and obviously the people who fired them are not willing to let a filmmaker in their home. And during the post production phase, did you have to highlight or play down certain aspects of the migrant experience? Can you explain how did the post production phase look for this film?

Regarding what was included in the film and what was excluded, because it was a co-production with seven or eight countries involved (supposed to be on BBC World and broadcasted all over the world) we tried to make it as balanced as we could. I excluded a story, for example, from Madagascar, where woman was brought back home from Saudi Arabia. She called back home and said to her husband I'm very ill, I'm going to die, you must take care of our two children. And he of course, was completely desperate. He didn't know where she was, and she couldn't tell him, and then she died. The body was brought back to Madagascar, and that was filmed when they unwrapped her, she was in

white bandages and weighed not more than 30 kilos (66 pounds), so she was starved to death. Her husband has been trying to seek justice, but he's an illiterate man, very poor, so nobody cares. I did not have a name and the address of the Saudi employer, so I didn't feel I could include it in the film, even though it was an absolutely grotesque story, but it should be investigated by police and someone should be held responsible, but it's not the way it works in Saudi Arabia, and there were many choices like that. Also, when you are making a character-driven film, as you know we were following primarily two characters, Maher and Emma, you use that as a lead and have to decide from there which storylines you can include and which you have to let go.

Q: It seems that documentary filmmakers can bring someone's attention to a problem, but they cannot resolve all the problems, and the logical question that comes from that is can documentaries that portray migrant experiences change something, maybe even the legislature?

I have been at a number of festivals where people have asked the same thing, they want something to happen here. But the problem is this is this is a story of a poverty dilemma. People will travel, if they don't have an income, they will go to work as maids, they will go into prostitution, they will do whatever it takes to feed their children. And I guess you and I would do the same if we were in that situation, and as long as they have that legislation with the Kafala system in the Middle East, I think the only way of changing this is by the Western world to put pressure on the system because these poor countries, there's no way that they will stop sending their people. You see that the individual bans are not working. You can put up a ban but then you have the corruption in the upper levels, and that's also in the film; they simply pay airport officials to let the women pass.

In Manila, they will have travel documents showing they're going to Hong Kong, which is legal. and then in Hong Kong, and agent changes the papers and sends them to Saudi Arabia. Some of these women, they know where they're going, they have heard all the bad stories, but they just hope that they will be fine. That's also in the film when the last woman arrives to Lebanon, she's been there before, it was a really rough experience but despite that she chose deliberately to go Lebanon because at least she knows what she can expect and she knows that Saudi Arabia might be worse. It's a harsh and cruel world, and I just hope with this documentary that it creates a debate. This film has been shown in the United Nations, it's been shown in villages in Africa, it's been outplayed in in Bangladesh and even in Beirut. It was great for me to get a chance to show it in Lebanon, I didn't think that was possible, but it was, so I did that a few months ago. Hopefully that's the best you can achieve with this kind of documentary. There's no way that it's going to change everything in the Middle East overnight, that's just not going to happen. People want easy solutions and they want action, some even get frustrated because this film ends with a funeral, you want most documentaries to offer some kind of hope but right now there is no hope so I don't see the point in pretending to the audience that something dramatic is happening that will change the whole situation. It's step by step and it will take years and I don't see any signs of things getting better, I don't know if you do, if you're doing something about migration it's really depressing, and I think it will only get worse.

Q: What I've noticed is that there's this emotional fatigue that shows how no one really cares anymore because it's been over reported on, especially on TV, and I guess whenever you see a documentary, if you're human you have to feel some sort of empathy

so in my opinion that's the power of documentaries, and this is not as apparent in a TV pieces or a reportage.

In Denmark, we already did one film about this subject and it had okay viewings, it was 300,000 which is quite okay out of 5 million, but the impact of having it shown in so many other countries is much greater. The BBC Africa, they did a Facebook version that was cut down to six minutes, and I think it was shared 25,000 times in Africa only, so it kind of exploded virally. It has created more debate than I ever dreamt of when I started out. I've never worked on a project with a bigger outreach, but that's due to many stations chipping in and participating on the co-production side. The BBC World, of course, has been a great place to have it shown, and it's not all been depressing. It is a narrow subject and it's similar to climate, people say they want to hear about it, but they really don't. I was struggling with the story and the structure of the film to make it as appealing as possible. Also, Maher Doumit, the agent, they got (the viewers) angry at him but he is actually an interesting character because he showed us what happens behind closed doors. And if the film just showed the story of one victim, I don't think it would have made any difference, this is very sad, but we wouldn't feel like watching it. I wouldn't have made it if I couldn't get the other site to participate somehow.

Q: So going back to the power to change something with documentaries, I guess documentaries by themselves are not capable of doing something dramatic, but if you get enough of the social platforms and verticals involved, as was the case in Africa and with the Facebook video you mentioned, does the power increase, and can you maybe change something then?

I have been involved in many documentary projects and some of them have done the job of having the legislation immediately changed or someone prosecuted but it depends; if it's an investigation in Denmark or Europe, where you expose something illegal and it's heavily founded with evidence that someone has committed a crime, then yes, there are many examples of documentaries actually made a change. Unfortunately, the topic of migration is just so complicated, there's so many countries involved, and in case of this film (The Maid in Hell), and the Jordanian case we showed, it's just systemic. Imagine if this happened in Denmark or Germany; that a German citizen was burnt like that in Jordan, and that then they lied to her German family and that she came back and died two months later, and on top of that you couldn't get a hold of the employer, that wouldn't happen, you know! It's just because, it's sad to say it's Kenya, and they're dependent on the money from Middle East. There are many negotiations, and then they get some oil money (the African countries) and all the problems disappear, so we tried to build this layer into the film as well. With some cases, which can actually damage a government in Africa, they will say this is too bad, and they only do something with the high-profile cases. Knowing that thousands of people go there and that almost 27% of the BDP comes from remittances and people working abroad. If the 27% of your economy depends on that you can't just distract that from one day to another.

Q: It's such a global issue, and as you mentioned, it might not affect you personally if you are living in the Western Hemisphere, and it seems that if you're not present there, you're probably not going to feel the need to change anything?

This is the complexity of it. In the Philippines is 10 to 12%. And then you have societies with 1 million maids as is the case in Saudi Arabia, 250,000 in Lebanon. They don't have

kindergartens, they don't have nurses, they have nursery homes, but they are incredibly expensive. So even for lower middle-class families in the Middle East, this is a cheaper and more convenient way of having your children taken care of, getting your house clean, nursing the elderly, so they (the maids) work 18 hours days and they make \$200 a month. It t is a good deal for a Middle East family, and if everything works out it's actually often also a good deal for women from Kenya, if it wasn't for the abuse and the beatings.

Q: What part of the filmmaking process presented the biggest threat to the representation of migrants and the biggest obstacle for your film?

There were gruesome stories I spent hundreds of hours researching and have gone to places where I didn't want to be stopped, but this is not relevant because what you see in the documentary is what is relevant. There have been many obstacles and many considerations, asking ourselves questions like could we go to a specific country to investigate a specific case? You can just google this topic and then see the amount of returned results, that was a big surprise to me. If you google “maid mistreated”, “maid raped”, “made found dead” it's just hundreds of thousands of articles and if you google it in other languages like Bengali, Indian, Swahili, the amount of cases is just absolutely overwhelming. The biggest obstacle was that the research was huge, and in the end, we had to kind of focus and choose the storylines. An enormous amount of research and an enormous amount of possible cases you could have included. And then in the end I had to choose a country where I could film, and Lebanon and Jordan where the best places to do it as they presented a lesser risk than Qatar or Saudi Arabia.

Q: You can almost be punished for filming something on the street or be taken to prison?

Yeah, definitely. There was a Danish team trying to do this main migrant story from Qatar, and they were arrested one hour after arriving, they were immediately arrested, even though they had all the permits. Everything was fine. But they were arrested and then sent out of the country. So that's definitely a risk you take.

Q: And were there any legal issues for which you sought help? When you were masking someone's face? Or did you have to acquire the rights for the YouTube clips you were using?

Yes, line by line by lawyers from my own company and the BBC, you go through every spoken word and you go through every clip, and see if you can use it or not, if you pay for it or not, and every piece of information in the documentary is validated and looked critically upon, not only by me, but by lawyers and editors. So that's kind of a normal procedure with BBC and DR, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation as well. We do that with every critical documentary. And if something is out of bounds, some of the women that are blurred in the film, that's because we couldn't get in contact with them and thought that they might be compromised by the way they were filmed. The footage of women jumping from balconies, we blurred them, even though they have actually been shown Lebanese TV, but just our ethical consideration, and it's a long line of ethical decisions. Some material we couldn't include because we either couldn't have it cleared or we thought it might be compromising for the person shown in it. And if we couldn't, get a hold of them and tell them we would include it in the film, we chose not to. But there is a delicate and a difficult balance of what can you include and what you can't include. Sometimes it's not ethical, because, you might be legally allowed to use it, but if it feels ethically wrong and you just must let it go.

Q: And did you seek advice from other filmmakers that have made films about migrant experiences?

No, not really

Q: And how did the collaboration between the Danish network and BBC happen?

It is because of the organization that was started by BBC and DR that's called the "Why", you can check it out. They did another serial called Why Democracy, 7 documentaries about democracy, one of them won an Oscar. They did Why Women about women's rights, and this was their third series (Why slavery). They contacted (Danish Broadcasting Corporation) the BBC, as well as the German, Swiss, Canadian and Japanese television, and we also had Swedish and Norwegian television included. Then they started with the funding, and all these networks were chipping in. They take important but narrow subjects like slavery or women's rights or democracy, the next one that is coming out is called white plastic; where they tried to look at the plastic, the pollution and what impact does it have. Also, the stations are not obliged to show the stories, my film was moved from BBC Three to BBC Two, which was great because it's a bigger audience, but few of the films from the series did not make it to BBC. They look at the quality and the topic and see if they have a platform. For CNN and another American station, they wanted the film to have American characters and only one of the six films had an American character and they only showed that.

Q: And did you ever feel an outside pressure to depict certain stories so that they would fit someone's agenda or ideology? Or even a pressure from producers, or maybe distributors to finish the film on time and was that a limiting factor?

Not at all. There's no limit, I had the creative freedom. Of course, you have a time limit because it's got to be release at a specific date, but that goes for every documentary. On this topic you could have continued for 10 years, but is it worth spending 10 years on it, isn't it better to just get it out? So that deadline can be kind of a relief, because then you are forced to get it out and make the world see it.

Eileen Hofer

Q: Can you describe what first attracted you to make a film (My Honeymoon) about migrant experiences?

I was reading a newspaper in Switzerland, it's called Le Courier International, and in this magazine, they're translating interviews and articles from all around the world, and there was one article that has been written in Bulgaria and translated into French. I read the article of this Bulgarian journalist who was explaining the story of Syrian refugees arriving to Bulgaria and Sofia. The Bulgarian government, and Bulgaria being a very poor country, they were not prepared to accept so many refugees. That's why almost 1,000 people got stuck in a school in the suburb of Sofia, it was actually an abandoned school. So, no electricity, no heat, no water, but at least they had a roof over their heads. The people living around the school got touched by the story and they all decided to help, so almost everyone came with a blanket or pillow or clothes for the kids in this school. The journalist was very impressed by the support from this community, knowing that people from the area are struggling and they live in one of the poorest countries in Europe. They are struggling with poor salaries, sometimes working three jobs at the same time in order to maybe get 600 euros per month. I got very emotional by this article and I emailed the journalist who wrote the story and said that I would like to do something. In

this email I explained to him that I am going to travel to Bulgaria and asked him could we meet in this school and if I could interview him and other people in this school, and so that was the starting point. I bought myself a ticket, and I spent five days there. Before I went to spend a long weekend in Bulgaria, I wrote on Facebook, telling my friends about this article I've read and how it depicted the situation in Bulgaria; I've also told them that I will be there within two weeks and that we should try and get some money so that we can buy some food and other necessities for those refugees. I got around \$2,000, which was quite okay knowing that we had so little time. Once I went to Bulgaria, I stayed at my friend's house and this friend of mine is a film director called Kamen Kalev. He's a very well-known Bulgarian filmmaker and had his films shown at the Cannes Film Festival, at least five movies. So, he's known worldwide and he's known in Bulgaria of course, and thanks to his group of friends, some of whom were producers and cinematographers, I got contacts I needed and just accelerated the rhythm of filming. It also helped me get the authorization, because I did ask for a permission to enter the school earlier but was denied. I couldn't get the access as a journalist because, well, I'm a journalist. That's why I decided to use the \$2,000 that I had to buy food and to get a truck that would allow me to get into the school, not as a journalist, but as a humanitarian. Once we entered the school, I had my camera with me, but I'm not a cameraperson and I needed help with that. Also, in order to avoid the military, we were distributing the food and at the same time using my small camera and a small microphone to film a lady that was the only one who spoke English. I interviewed her in her small room, and we were hidden, and that's how I got the audio, and some of the footage, but in the end, it was Kamen Kalev who shot this film with me and helped me with the footage. Basically, we

decided to do the filming on the spot, and decided to film her (Berivan). As I already had dialogues with her, we wanted to discover the situation and the environment in which they were living through her eyes.

Q: And this one long shot, when Berivan is walking in the hallway was shot by Kamen Kalev?

Yes, we wanted to have this long sequence, but obviously we had to make the cut at one point, since the film is 4 and a half minutes long, and again, our biggest obstacle was to try and avoid all the soldiers that were around.

Q: You had a lot of limiting factors and one of them was finding the protagonist for the film. So was the only reason why you chose Berivan her knowledge of English?

Obviously, I needed to have someone who speaks languages that I am fluent in, because I didn't have a translator with me, and that was one of the reasons. The second reason why I decided to go with her, is because she does not represent the image of a typical refugee that you would see on TV; a refugee woman with a scarf and 10 children, this lady (Berivan) clearly had a European mind-set. She went to a University, so I knew that she was educated and that she came from the city, and as a European citizen, when you see this destruction (in Syria) you don't compare yourself to people like her. So, if it was a woman with a scarf that came from a farm, and had 10 children, you can't (as a European citizen) compare yourself to her, so that's why it maybe wouldn't have created this empathy, and that is something I wanted to signify.

Q: Do you think that this is the biggest problem with the TV journalism and the fact that most of the time we only see footage of women with scarves or families with 10 children

that are crossing the border and they're usually portrayed as villains or perpetrators? It also seems that in most of the documentaries, we at least get to know them a little better, so how would you compare a classic TV reportage to a documentary form?

There are so many refugees that are doctors or teachers, poets or journalists, and you don't really often seem them (in the mainstream media). We usually see the mass, and don't see each person. Also, from what I understand, when you see a refugee camp with 10,000 people living in it, you don't feel empathy for 10,000 people, but when you follow and keep track of one person from A to Z, you see all the drama of their lives, and that's when audience will start to feel empathy for this person. I just came back from a trip to Rwanda, where they had one of the worst genocides in history, that happened in 1994, where within a hundred days, almost 1 million people were killed, most of them by a machete. No one did anything during those hundred days. Why? Because it's a mass and it's far, far away from us in Europe, it's black people, and you can't relate. You can't understand just how much this number is, it's like 1 million died, but what does that mean? I don't understand it, it's a number, for me, it doesn't represent anything; but when you start listening to each story of each survivor, the way they struggled and the way they had to drink the blood of the dead people next to them because otherwise they would die of thirst and malnutrition, that's when you start feeling the empathy and start thinking why didn't we do something at that time. To me the big history is linked to the small history, and the story of each individual. Each person, the anecdote of each citizen, that is more important to me. Therefore I only wanted to have this woman (Berivan) on the camera and to follow only her and only show her perspective.

Q: And did you do any documentaries before this one? Or was this your premiere in the documentary film world?

Actually, I did short fiction films, but also linked to the themes of immigration. I did three short films before 2013 when *My Honeymoon* came out. Also, in 2012, I did my first feature documentary film that lasts for about 85 minutes, and it was shot in Azerbaijan. It is also a similar, because the film is about a small family, so everything is connected through the eyes of this family. After that, in 2015, I did a second documentary feature on another topic in Cuba.

Q: And the film you made in Azerbaijan (*He Was a Giant With Brown Eyes*), was it about an immigrant family?

It is the topic of immigration, but it's not the same as in *My Honeymoon*. It's the story of a girl that had to follow her mother as they moved to Switzerland, while her sisters stayed with her dad in Baku, Azerbaijan. The mother married a Swiss guy, so she started growing up and going to school in Switzerland and after five years, she decided to spend a summer in Baku. She went back to Azerbaijan in order to see her father and sisters that she hadn't seen for five years, and I wanted to follow her because it was a true story.

Also, I wanted to see the reaction of this girl that has been growing up in Switzerland and had this amazing, fantastic idea of her country and of Baku. After spending this holiday with her, she realized, life is not exactly the way she remembers it; she's a grown-up person now, and there's all these Muslim restrictions that she forgot, but that she rediscovered. So, the theme I was following was, how is it when you come back to your own country after a while, and where is it between the reality and the dream? What is the pattern?

Q: Going back to my research topic. Since you've already done work around immigration issues, what do you think are the principal representational challenges of reporting about migrations and migrant experiences? Was it the limited access you had, making the right stylistic choices, editing the film, or something else?

One of the biggest challenges for me was that I only had four days, and out of those four days, when I arrived to Bulgaria, I met with several people. I arrived on Friday, went to meet with those journalists who wrote the first story, and with two other guys that were working as volunteers. They told me that on Saturday morning at 5am, we are going to leave Sofia and go to the border with Turkey where there is another camp, where the situation is even worse. They told me how they will head there with two trucks full of food and clothes, and after arriving that they will be organizing a big distribution. It was a group of about 20 people, and they asked me to join them and told me that we would be back on Sunday evening. And so I decided, okay, let's do this, it's a great opportunity. I spent two days in this camp, distributing food and clothes and meeting not just the refugees from Syria, but also African refugees, or refugees from Afghanistan or Iran. Even though I only had two days, I was always spending at least one hour every day getting to know at least one person. We would just walk around and suddenly there was a connection with someone. Whether it was a woman that invited me to sit next to her and then we started talking, or a man that invited me for a tea and then you get to know the whole family and also there was someone who would come and act as a translator. There were even teenagers traveling all alone, I had some contact for a while with some of them, but not anymore. Step by step I started realizing that I was secure, and that I didn't have the police behind me. They were leaving me alone and they didn't know I was a

journalist because I was with those volunteers. I cannot talk to you but the press in general, or journalist in general, but it is obvious that some of them are coming in to the camp and spending two hours, and then they have to leave because they're in a rush. People that are doing documentaries tend to have more time. For this film in particular, I wasn't planning to do a documentary. I was just reading the newspapers and that article interested me so I wanted to see the situation at the school, but I could only spend one weekend there, because I was working full-time for the newspaper so I had to be at my office at one point. That is why I only spent one day in the school where this short film was made.

Q: What about the style and the structure you use in the film, was that maybe mandated by the footage you had, and perhaps because you had little time to do the filming, didn't have a chance to experiment much, and practically knew from the beginning how the film was going to be crafted?

It is the same way I always work, even with features such as the film *He Was a Giant With Brown Eyes*, even with the film *Horizontes* that I made in Cuba. When I am filming, I have no idea how I will solve certain things, and I come to the realization on the spot. When I arrived at the location, I was distributing the food, but I was also looking around and getting the information and trying to focus on finding a subject that will be good for this. I was asking these questions: where are the women going, what is the corridor, where should I go? What was the most important thing was to go through this corridor, after that it's very easy, you just make the story, so that's my technique. It's an unusual way of working and it's very difficult for my cameraman and my sound engineers to work with me. That's the reason why I always work with the same people,

they are used to it. It's improvisation all the time. Let's say we are setting up an interview in one room and at one point I would make a sudden stop and tell the crew, ok, let's just leave now, we have two minutes to film the other people that are in this bathroom, and so it's improvisation all the time and it comes down to reacting on the spot and very fast too. Sometimes it happens that you have a cameraman or a sound engineer that will say, I'm sorry, I need preparation and we need rehearsal. My answer is no, then it's not going to work and we cannot work together if you want this from me. I didn't go to a film school, so my process is a little different, and I would say that I don't know how to film in a traditional way.

Q: Would you say that your approach is more journalistic?

Absolutely, I am capturing the moment, I don't want to rehearse. I don't want to ask someone, except maybe a comedian, to repeat something and show the same emotion. I would never say to my protagonists; can you please cry again? No, they cried once, and it's up to you to get the impact of the moment and you must do it on the spot.

Q: You have mentioned earlier that you kept in touch with some of the immigrants, did you keep in touch with Berivan, and did she or any other character from the film (My Honeymoon) get to see the film before it premiered?

No, unfortunately not, I don't have her contact.

Q: And in an ideal situation, would you have her see the film before it premieres and maybe let her have a say about the film and let her change something?

No, because there is always going to be something wrong. You can always complain about your hair not looking good or not loving your profile, so once she said, It's okay,

you can film me, I go and do the film. Also, I usually get my characters to sign the contract. I always have this paper with me. Once you sign it, and we say action, there is no stepping back.

Q: Also, were there any legal issues in the making of the film? Some of the filmmakers that I interviewed had to blur faces of their subjects, and some of them had to clear the rights for the music they were using?

No, that wasn't a problem for us. It's obvious that the girl is talking to me, and that she accepted to be filmed. Although, for the film we did in Cuba there was a contract with a lawyer and everything was set up in advance.

Q: Did you talk about this film with other filmmakers or other journalists before you made it to seek their advice? Or did you have an editor who told you go to Bulgaria and do the reporting?

Not really, as I said, everything happened on the spot, and I had this friend, Kamen Kalev, that told me you can come and stay at my place and my production company is also there to support you. Also, I didn't include the army personnel in this film and I purposefully left it unclear where this school is. so we were protected in this sense too. I didn't speak with any filmmakers in advance and regarding the editing, I had no money to do this film, so I wasn't even expecting this film to be made. Eventually, I did the editing by myself, and since I'm not an editor, I was learning quickly how to use the Final Cut.

Q: Was there ever an outside pressure to make this film according to someone else's wishes, or even a pressure from the distributors or producers to portray the film in a certain way, or did you have a complete creative freedom?

I was the only one behind this project. There wasn't a producer. I never really worked with a producer, except for the last film I made, that's the one we did in Cuba (Horizontes), where I had a producer who had his point of view to share, but with this (My Honeymoon) no one had a say in it, except me. So, I had total freedom. The thing you should know about this film is that it was done with just the price of the plane tickets. Other than that, I spent maybe \$5 to buy a memory card, and that's it. After the film was done, one very important shorts film festival in Switzerland, called Winterthur liked the film, and it was at the time when the extreme right wingers in Europe were uprising and people were starting to complain about the immigrants coming in Germany, and to Europe in general. They started talking about building a wall and so on, and that's why the people from the festival asked me, can we use your film to fight this xenophobia? After that they sent this film to about 20 other film festivals, and so they all posted this film on their websites. But at least 20 other film festival showed My Honeymoon, some of them really were really big, I think one of them was the Palm Springs festival, and thanks to that it became a hit on Vimeo.

Q: Do you think that documentaries have the power to change the way we see immigrations, or even the legal framework? Also, was there a change in a general perception of the public that immigrants from Syria are coming to Europe because they are escaping the war?

I certainly hope so, I have no idea about the effect of my film, but that's the reason why I was showing this girl that came out of the University, just got married and didn't want to risk her life by staying in Syria. She could have been your neighbor, she could have been your colleague at the University, she could be the one in the gym next to you. She could be you! Actually, after this film, I was trying to do another short film, but I just gave up, because it ended up being too complicated. I had contact with this girl, she was based close to Damascus in Syria and was about 22 years old, she lived there in spite of the bombs that were dropped. She explained to me through WhatsApp, that she was a Zumba teacher. I liked that and thought okay, again it's a it will touch the people to see that. Everyone is talking about Damascus and how it's being bombarded, and she's a Zumba teacher. Unfortunately, this film never happened.

Nikola Ilic

What first attracted you to make a film about migrant experiences?

I guess because this is my destiny too and all my films have some sort of a personal line. Some 13 years ago I've met my current wife Corina who is Swiss while she was studying in Belgrade and even at that time, we had talked about making a film together even though neither of us was a filmmaker at that time. Also, I had to leave Serbia to truly understand what it means to be a migrant because I was born and raised in Belgrade (the Serbian capital).

How long did it take for you to get used being a migrant and to understand what that exactly means?

It really did take a while. As soon as I got to Switzerland, I got a job in a theater and they forbade other employees to talk to me in English, and since they all had to communicate with me in German it was really chaotic for me in the first year or two. I didn't understand anything, I worked at this theater as a light technician and at that time I thought how I'll never learn this language, and even now, 13 years after, I can't claim that I am speaking it perfectly. As one of the film's protagonists said, I think we'll only be able to get close to them (the Swiss people), but we will never become Swiss. Some people try to fully assimilate by changing their last name but too me this is insane.

Do you feel that documentaries can portray some of the complexities of migrant experiences, and are there any obstacles or restrictions within the documentary form that prevented you from presenting those experiences?

Honestly, I needed to get out of Serbia to really understand where I am coming from. I grew up with English punk, had a band of my own and was riding a skateboard as a kid. All of this, and especially the skateboard, were deemed to be out of this planet in that form of communism we were living in at the time. Knowing that I grew up with a foreign music, I never really got in touch with the domestic "folk" music, but in Switzerland I understood why people from my region tend to cherish it. Far from the fact that I love this "folk" music, but it is much closer to me now. I started hanging out with all sorts of people and even became really close friends with one guy who is a violinist and plays the "folk" music- despite the fact that I don't really like this music, I still go to his gigs to support him. Maybe the biggest hurdle in my film was to depict what it means to be called Yugo in Switzerland since it is similar to the usage of the N-word in America, and this was very sad to me. I've noticed this extremist line even in Switzerland where 24 percent of the

population are migrants. It is insane that they are labeling people like that. The way I fought against this was by including migrants from ex- Yugoslavia with different occupations and profiles. We had a violinist, a psychiatrist, an architect, and many others, so the story wasn't coming from someone who is doing this stereotypical job on the construction site. At first I wanted to have one person from each of the republics that constituted ex- Yugoslavia, but because of various circumstances it turned out a little differently.

So, your idea to fight the stereotypes that Swiss have about ex-Yugoslav people was to cast a wider net and incorporate as many migrant professions as possible?

Strangely enough it seems to me that in other countries, especially in the United States, you are accepted better as a stranger, whereas in Switzerland as soon as they hear that your last name ends with an "ić" (typical Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian last names end like this) they put you in a box. I didn't go through all those things that people from ex-Yugoslavia have when they were fleeing the war but the stories I heard from them have surprised me. For example, one girl told me how she first called landlords in Switzerland introducing herself with a last name Mayer, and then switching it to Ristić which is her real name. In the first instance all 9 landlords let her see the apartment and in the later case they all rejected her.

Since your film relies on interviews, was this a conscience choice you have made, and do you think that migrant experiences are best presented through their recorded testimonies?

At first, I wanted to make a film without any narration, but soon I realized that for this film this was not possible. At the end of the day, the best style is your style that appears

intuitively. I still don't know what my style is although people have been telling me how they recognize my style. For this film, without the interviews and with the production means I had, it would have been hard to tell the story. Although I know it's easiest to bring the audience closer to the topic with talking head interviews, I still believe that that documentaries are better with little to no text and narration and with more images. I definitely believe that an observational documentary can best depict what migrants are going through but it seems easier for filmmakers to make a project with interviews.

And what do you think about the construction of reality that happens in documentaries, we saw in your film that the first scene seemed as if it was scripted?

Yes, the protagonist that storms into the room with a diploma and says "People, people, from today I am Swiss" is a man that I met before and that I have followed a little longer. He had a test to become a Swiss citizen, and the framed diploma he was holding is actually his citizenship. I practically made a surprise party for him with the music and all. By the way, the song with which the film begins is by an author who is very popular in Switzerland. The song is about the shame, and the fact that some Yugoslav migrants are ashamed of who they are is something I find strange. What's even more strange is that they are proud to be from ex-Yugoslavia when they are among their counterparts, but in front of Swiss they become small. As for this character that became a citizen, I even went with him to the test he had to take and have recorded him studying the night before the exam that is far from easy, especially for an older gentleman like him. It is unbelievable how much you need to know in order to become a Swiss citizen, and luckily, I never had to take this test because I got the citizenship through my wife.

And why did you decide to leave out that part of him taking the test?

It just didn't fit with the rest of the story. The film came to existence in post-production as is the case with all my films. Three or four characters were not included because they didn't fit the topics I was researching. Those themes or chapters have dealt with who Yugoslavs are and with the theme of a burnout, a concept that doesn't exist in Serbia or at least we don't have a name for it, and I also wanted to portray all those themes with a bit of humor. Mainly based on those themes, and there ended being about 3 to 4 of them, I assembled the film structurally.

All the film protagonists are talking about their personal experiences and have showed a great deal of trust towards you, how did you make sure that trust was not betrayed and how did you make sure that their testimonies were shown realistically? Also, did they have a chance to see the film before it premiered?

I made a pre-premiere just for them during which I also showed them a small "making of" sequence edited just for this occasion. They were all really satisfied with the film except for Sanja. The scene in which she gives an interview and her child is playing while she talks how she had enough of Switzerland and that she wants to come back to Bosnia was problematic. I even filmed her husband who because of his problems with alcohol turned out really gray in all this, and that's why I decided to exclude him from the film knowing that it's going to serve him well. She decided to leave him, and there is a sentence in which Sanja talks about her resolve to see her plans through and come back home. In that pre-premier her husband Igor approached me and said, "thank you Nikola for showing me how my life is falling apart", and I invited him to talk about it, because I didn't know they had problems- he refused, and since then they haven't talked to me. The good thing is that this film provided them with a reality check and apparently brought

them back together. It seems to me that they both had a chance to think things through and that the film really snapped them and I have heard that since then they had a second child.

Appendix II- Weekly field notes

Week of August 26, 2019- As for my master's research project, this week I have made headways in making the film for this project, and those include: securing the interview sources in Canada and planning a trip, watching documentary films about immigrant topics (The New Americans) and designing questions that will be used in the interviews. I hope to perfect my camera skills while filming in Canada as I will be using the equipment I have not used a lot before, and I also hope to secure at least one of the interviews for the research part of my project. First on the list of people to contact is Iva Radivojevic, an NYC based filmmaker, and since I have her email, I will try to schedule a time for an interview

Week of September 2, 2019- I finally took a chance to go to Canada and do some filming there for my capstone project. The trip was really worthwhile as I got a lot of great material for my documentary.

Week of September 9, 2019- I have sent an email to Iva Radivojevic, one of the potential interviewees, and I am awaiting her response. I feel that my time management could have been better, and that I could have done more on my master's research project, but I am determined to do more in the following week.

Week of September 16, 2019- I was able to tentatively schedule my first interview with Iva Radivojevic, as she responded that the only time she would be available for an in-person interview is October 15, or the week after, so I am still negotiating the date, and will hopefully have it set by next week. Additionally, Sarah Stillman, one of the leading

journalists and writers that focuses on immigration policy has also tentatively agreed to an interview through my colleague at work, and I will contact Sarah in the coming days.

Week of September 23, 2019- I am still obtaining sources and looking for interviewees, and other than securing one interview (with Iva Radivojevic) in mid- October, I have sent an email to Ratko Momcilovic, and have tried to get to at least two more interviewees, namely from Al-Jazeera Balkans documentary unit by contacting a friend who used to work there. Ratko Momcilovic has responded from Africa and said that the best and probably the only way we can do this interview would be through WhatsApp, as the network signal is poor. Additionally, I have tried to get a contact from an American director- Steve James, whose info I am hoping to get through my other two committee members Stacey Woelfel and Robert Greene. I have also tried setting up an interview with Sarah Stillman, but my email was not yet responded to, however, I can obtain Stillman's phone number, and if I don't get an email response in the next two days, I will try to call Stillman.

Week of September 30, 2019- I have called Ratko Momcilovic, a director of the Vice docuseries *Galeb u Americi* that portrays life of Serbian immigrants in the US. I had to interview Momcilovic over the phone since he is currently in Gambia (Africa) working with peace corps, but we were able to have two half hour long conversations during which we touched upon all the relevant questions already posed in the research proposal. Momcilovic mentioned that he will be available for any follow up questions if the need for them ever occurs while I go further ahead with my research. I have also transcribed the first half hour of this interview and I am drawing most important ideas and takeaways from the interview. I have also contacted Sarah Stillman once more but did not get an

answer in spite my coworker and her previous assistant emailing her to introduce me again. While waiting for Stillman to respond, I have obtained a contact from Josip Saric, the director of the *Irish Dream* documentary film that premiered on Al Jazeera.

Unfortunately, Saric has not responded either, even though I have texted him to his personal phone number and was introduced to him by a mutual friend. Additionally, I have expanded the list of interviewees to a total number of 10 subjects.

Week of October 7, 2019- I have expanded my list of interviewees to 14 names. All of them, except one, have been contacted, but only three more interviews were scheduled. One of them will likely happen this week with a 60 minutes correspondent Sharyn Alfonsi as she wrote in an email that as soon as the weekend is over, I should reach out to her again and then we could set up a time. I have also been lucky to find Lynne Sachs, a filmmaker based in New York that has made a documentary film about migrant experiences and was able to schedule an interview with her in person for Sunday, October 13. The third person that has agreed to an interview is a documentary filmmaker from Serbia Aleksandar Reljic, and he has implied that we could talk on today.

Week of October 14, 2019- I completed two more interviews, one was with Aleksandar Reljic, the filmmaker that made a documentary about Syrian immigrants coming through Serbia on their way to Western Europe, and the other one was with Lynne Sachs who made a documentary about the life of Chinese immigrants in New York. The latter one was my first interview in person with a filmmaker, although both interviews proved to be very successful and have provided me with a lot of takeaways and new ideas that could be incorporated in the graduate project. The interview with Sharyn Alfonsi had to be rescheduled, since Sharyn apologized and notified me that she had to suddenly leave for

El Salvador and that I should try to contact her as soon as she gets back, which should be next week. When looking for other filmmakers that have done work about immigrants, I was able to connect with Ziad Kalthoum who made a film *Taste of Cement*, and he responded with a message telling me that he would be willing to participate in an interview and that I should follow up with him in the next few days. Additionally, I am hoping that Iva Radivojevic will respond to my new email and that she will be able to meet with me in the coming week, since she has previously stated that we could meet in New York around the 15h of October.

Week of October 21, 2019- I have finished two more interviews, one was with Ziad Kalthoum who made the film *Taste of Cement*, and the other interview was with Iva Radivojevic whose work on migrations was presented in the film *Evaporating Borders*. While working on these two interviews, and transcribing the one with Iva Radivojevic, I have started re-reading the literature review and all the academic articles I hope to use for the analysis of these interviews. I also contacted yet another filmmaker who made a documentary about migrants, Damjan Kozole- *Borders*, and he has responded via email but is not sure if and when he will be able to take a phone call due to constant travelling but would be willing to respond to my questions in an email. While I am awaiting to see what other members of my committee think about doing an interview this way, I am currently corresponding with Soren Klovborg- the Danish director who has agreed to be interviewed and has shared his phone number with me. I consider his work to be relevant for my research since he has directed a film *Maid in Hell* that speaks about the experiences of African maids that are forced to work in Middle East countries.

Week of October 28, 2019- In the previous week I have interviewed three more filmmakers which brought the total number of interviewees to 8. Among those interviewed in the past week were Eileen Hoffer from Switzerland, a journalist and the director of a short documentary *My Honeymoon*, Søren Klovborg from Denmark, a director of the critically acclaimed documentary *Maid in Hell*, and Nikola Ilic, a filmmaker born in Serbia and working in Switzerland whose film *Kanton Jugoslawien* presented the life of economic migrants from Yugoslavia in Switzerland, which a similar feat to my own filming project. Also, half of the interviews have been transcribed.

Week of November 5, 2019- I have finished transcribing all 8 interviews and have started work on the analysis of these interviews. The literature review I had prepared for the research proposal helps with this, but I had to inform myself a bit more about the topic I've chosen for this project by reading additional articles and books. I am hopeful that I will have the first draft of the master's research project submitted on time, which is in this coming week.

Week of November 12, 2019- In the previous week, I was able to finish transcribing and writing the grad project. My first version of the grad project was submitted to Stacey Woelfel, committee chair, on Friday, November 9.

Week of November 19, 2019- I have sent a revised version of my grad project to the other two committee members.

Week of November 26, 2019- I was in Missouri defending my project, and besides that, I had no major breakthroughs or accomplishments related to my master's research

project. What is left for me to do is to follow-up on all the comments my committee members gave and submit the final version of the project.

December 4, 2019- Final version of the project submitted.

Apendix III- self evaluation

In general, I feel good about the project and have a notion that all the tasks that were set out to do ended up being accomplished. The initial struggle proved to be finding filmmakers for the interviews, and what at one point seemed absurd was that at least three of them corresponded with me and promised to find time but ended up having to reschedule interviews and finally dropped the idea of helping my research altogether by not responding to my emails.

What really helped with finding the interviewees and expanding the list was asking the first interviewed subjects about the films on migrations they have seen, and then asking if they have a contact of those filmmakers or any other industry professionals that have been involved in the production of such films, therefore, networking proved to be the best strategy for getting filmmakers on board and willing to participate in this research. Towards the end, when the interviewees list was exhausted I sought help from Vladimir Perovic, a documentary filmmaker himself with whom I used to work for the same TV company in Serbia, and since Perovic was also a programmer for documentary film festivals in Montenegro, he provided me with the names of Eilen Hofer and Nikola Ilic and they ended up being the last two subjects to participate in this research. From this perspective and after almost all has been said and done, with a film that is pending but will be finished in time for the *Stronger than Fiction* student film festival in May, it seems that festival programmers can be a great liaison between a documentary journalism student and the industry professionals, not only because they have contacts, but because they have seen numerous films on almost every subject and can provide a student with insightful information about the most niche topics.

As for the film that I am making, it is a little contradictory that the production phase of the film got done far before the written analysis portion of the project begun, and that the postproduction has been stalling the whole project ever since. However, I am still excited about the film as much as I was when the idea was pitched to my professors and during the production. Even before the filming started, I thought that the post production was going to be just as seamless, since I see myself as a video editor or doing the postproduction work in future, but the time constraints and the fact that I had a full time internship, classes to attend and filmmakers to interview just kept me out of the loop and unable to devote my time to the completion of the film. This is something I intend to fix, and if the circumstances allow, after the first two parts of the film are edited (sequences shot in Sweden and Canada) I would maybe look into getting a third character in before the deadline for the film in May of 2020. Obviously, I would correspond about this idea with my professors from the Documentary School of Journalism at the University of Missouri and act based on their advice accordingly.

When looking at what seemed to be a more daunting task- writing a project on representational issues and pitfalls in documentaries about migrants, and despite the reluctance or the inability of some filmmakers to share their thoughts about this subject, there were no other major issues in getting this project done on time and with valuable, practical advice that I or any other aspiring filmmakers could incorporate in their work going forward. This project set out to examine what different filmmakers found problematic when portraying a story that focuses on migrations or migrant experiences and also to see if there are certain universal precautions for a filmmaker to take before starting the production, and in the end, there were numerous considerations listed and

remedies to the issues of portraying migrant experiences, nonetheless, universal measures were not established as filmmakers dealt with each issue of telling a migrant story from case to case. However, in general, a good rule of thumb was not to do anything that would betray the trust of your protagonists, put them in danger, and also not betray the trust of the audience. As was expected what was the biggest difference in not betraying the trust of any other subject whose personal stories are relayed by filmmakers in comparison to migrant subjects was the risk of legal repercussions and having the subjects apprehended and possibly deported from the country. Similar expectations were met when filmmakers spoke about the audience they were targeting since they all felt an obligation to do a slow reporting on migrations and migrant experiences, and not the type of reporting seen daily in news broadcasts. That said, and being on both sides- the daily journalist side and the documentary filmmaker side, I must conclude that even though both have their restrictions and limitations, there seems to be far more creative freedom in filmmaking and the lack of constraints, if approached methodically and diligently, can help paint a better picture of complexities that come with migrations.

Despite not everything going as planned in getting the filmmakers from the initial list to participate in this research, working on this project was a joy, and interviewing industry professionals from such different backgrounds that have recognized the topic of migration as a major societal and humanitarian issue helped me grow, not only as a filmmaker, but as a human too, and it must be said that my impression is how one rarely goes without the other. My hope is, however, that this research did not only help me grow, but that it will help other scholars or students with an interest in this topic to

become more cognizant of representational issues in documentaries about migrants and some of the ways in which to address them.

Appendix IV- Research Proposal

Introduction

The documentary films about migrations have been used not only to depict the sheer numbers of people seeking asylum or citizenship outside of their native countries, but also the causes of migrations, their patterns in different regions around the world and perils that come with relocations. In the opulent body of documentaries about migrations, there is a wide variety of migration tendencies presented, and there seems to be a film about every major migration process that happened in the past 30 years.

However, when presenting immigrant topics in documentary films, authors have to be extremely diligent and pay attention to the vulnerability of subjects whose identities are not only being reexamined by themselves but often reshaped by others. In his work on tracing borderscapes in documentaries on Central American migration, Dutch researcher Jasper Vanhaelemeech (Vanhaelemeesch, 2018) analyzed the work of anthropologist Shahram Khosravi and philosopher Giorgio Agamben and stated that the act of relocation that characterizes the migrant experience, regardless of the motives, typically leads to a discarding of the nation's political and legal framework for the insecurity of the journey. Following this reasoning, undocumented migrants are then regarded as “unnatural” “pathological” and “criminal” in the logic of the nation state as their performance expresses a desire to shake off the shackles of citizenship to return to naked, depoliticized life as *hominis sacri* (Agamben, 1998).

The logical question coming from this rationale is whether documentaries in their quest for truthfulness are even able to grapple with the representation of stateless

individuals. The counter argument to this would be that documentary films, even though not omnipotent, have much greater power in presenting the paradoxical nature of being a migrant in comparison to other visual forms of narration, mainly fiction films. This is reaffirmed by those who claim that attempts at presenting migrant stories in a documentary form have seen a major change for the better since the early days of ethnographic research. Pantoja Prechard argues that ethnographic research only provided a false scientific rigor and that instead, films employing self-reflexivity have a much greater expressive power that can at least get somewhat close in rightfully presenting the position of migrants.

A self-reflexive documentary -- despite being determined by and imbued with the social, political and cultural conditions under which it is produced – has an open-ended form, a form that challenges its own closure and thus suggests other possible closures, inviting other possible meanings. And it is here where the value of self-reflexivity lies (Pantoja Peschard, 2014, p. 208).

Despite the variety of issues that documentaries depict, the topic of migration probably bears most concerns when it comes to the question of "How do we treat the people we film" (Nichols, 2017), and this question relates to much more than the sheer treatment of people during the filming process, since it speaks to all the pre and post-production choices available to the filmmaker.

As an aspiring filmmaker myself, and as someone who has started work on a short documentary film about the lives of freshly-settled immigrants in countries around the world, the aim of this research is to combine the academic work that analyzes documentaries on migration, interviews with documentary filmmakers and the analysis of

the films they have made about migrations and immigrant topics. What this mixed method is hoping to accomplish is a better insight into all the representational pitfalls found making a film about migrants, and also how a documentary filmmaker's "way of seeing the world" (Nichols, 2017) can be made complementary to the way a migrant sees the world.

The authors that have already theorized about documentary filmmaking such as Bill Nichols might already have an answer to this, but even though the advice to "do nothing that would violate the humanity of your subject and nothing that would compromise the trust of your audience" (Nichols, 2016) could not be more true, the question is how do filmmakers accomplish this when their subjects are migrants.

This proposal will examine the distinct forms of migration documentaries and lay the groundwork for a project consisting of interviews with relevant sources and an adjoining film about the lives of migrants from the southeast Europe (Balkans).

Recent migration trends

Migration of the untrained, skilled or even highly educated workforce from underdeveloped countries to economically stable countries has been ever-present and whereas influxes of economic migrants happened throughout the 20th century, from a historical perspective, numbers of such migrants are higher than ever at the present time. This is reaffirmed by the comparison of the annual reports from the intergovernmental economic organization comprised of 36 countries called *The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD). The most recent OECD publication, entitled *International Migration Outlook 2018* (OECD, 2018), is the 42nd report in the

continuous reporting system on migration. This publication shows the growing trend of migration, especially across OECD countries. Statistics reveal that at least one out of ten people residing in OECD countries is foreign born (OECD, 2019).

Unlike the countries that are unable or unwilling to accept immigrants, some of the countries with high emigration trends face a different problem. Constant “brain drain” from the Balkans is making the population of that region one of the oldest in Europe and it also puts the economic growth in these countries to a halt because the skilled workforce is lacking. In recent years, most of the ex-Yugoslav republics have witnessed their citizens fleeing newly-formed countries in great numbers, with emigration tendencies particularly rising in the last 15 years (OECD, 2015). The root of the problem has changed throughout the decades for the Balkan countries, but for most of those occurrences, the underlying cause was a pursuit of higher living standards abroad.

A later section will provide an in-depth description of the film to be made about the migrants from the Balkan countries, but in essence, the film will try to find an answer to the following question: Is the pursuit of higher living standards abroad worth losing one’s national and cultural identity? Additionally, both literature review and the methodology section of this proposal are there to inform us about the representational issues that occur when making documentary films on migrations and they are also there to inform us on how to frame the questions that will be used in the series of interviews with the filmmakers.

Literature review

Since one of the end goals of this project is to make a documentary film about migrants from southeast Europe (Balkans) that will examine how their identities are changing or forming in a foreign country and knowing that a portrayal of such a complex topic requires a lot of ethical and representational considerations, we will observe the work done in other documentaries with migrant topics and consult the academic articles and books that focus on similar issues. The observed work will also help inform research questions and the interviews that will be done with filmmakers that have made documentaries about migrations.

Presentation of migrants in documentary films

Since the capstone film that will accompany this research will be made about the immigrants from the Balkan countries, we will briefly describe and recount the most relevant contemporary documentaries that have dealt with migrations from this region of Europe. One of them is VICE media's film *Galeb u Americi* (Momcilovic, 2017) that focuses on the lives of Serbian immigrants in the United States of America; other one is Al Jazeera Balkans' and the film *Irski San/ The Irish Dream* (Saric, 2018) that examined the lives of Croatian immigrants in Ireland.

Galeb u Americi (Momcilovic, 2017) is a three-part docuseries, and for this research proposal we will focus on the first two episodes of the series as they relate more to the recent migration trends of the Serbian population, whereas the third episode focuses on the biography of the most successful Serbian immigrant to the United States- Nikola Tesla. The name behind the series title could literary be translated as *The Seagull in America*, and since *Galeb/Seagull* is the first name of the series host Galeb Nikacevic, this title is quite self-explanatory. Nikacevic takes participation in the most common jobs

done by Serbian immigrants in the United States, such as truck driving and construction, offering a dose of self-reflexivity to the audience, however, he is not the director of this film, and whether this direct participation was scripted or instructed by the series director Ratko Momcilovic would be one of the questions for him in the interview phase of the research.

The direct participation from the series host was there to explicate the level of difficulty and the pros and cons of certain jobs that are easily accessible to Serbian immigrants in the United States. Because the series was mostly concentrating on the occurrences that have already happened and since social actors/subjects of this film describe their previous experiences, with rare examples of observational footage, it is safe to say that Nikacevic as a series host had more of a journalistic role and that he was asserting his authority through the journalistic norm of objectivity (Bock, 2012). Due to this, hosts' and filmmakers' point of view, and especially their views on the position of Serbian immigrants in the United States of America are hard to trace. This means that in order to formulate the questions that could explicate the representation of immigrants in this docuseries, we would first have to analyze at least some parts of this film using Entman's framing functions. A similar approach was used by Cheregi who was able to select frames and codify them in documentary films about Romanian migrants living in the United Kingdom by observing four framing elements: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments and suggesting remedies (Entman, 1993) (Cheregi, 2015, p. 105). Observation of these elements will be done by mostly focusing on the voiceover commentary in this docuseries and by focusing on each change of the speaker.

Similarly, there is a great possibility to employ the elements of Entman's framing theory when analyzing another migration film that relies heavily on the voiceover commentary, that one being *Irski San/ The Irish Dream* (Saric, 2018). This short, half-hour documentary made by Al Jazeera Balkans is also very structured with a lot of voiceovers and talking head interviews. This speaks about the fact that there seems to be a desirable documentary form to be used for television, at least in the Balkan region, where the usage of traditional narrative techniques in documentaries seems to be prevalent. Once again, framing theory will be used to analyze this film so that the questions for the director/producer of *Irski San/ The Irish Dream* (Saric, 2018) could be formulated.

Moving on to a film about migrations that falls out of the conservative TV documentary style, and that was made with high regards to the representation of immigrants in Cyprus, we will focus on *Evaporating Borders* (Radivojevic, 2014), a documentary made by Iva Radivojevic. Since Radivojevic is a director of Serbian descent who emigrated to Cyprus at a young age before going on to settle in the United States of America, there is a great deal of self-reflexivity in her work that comes not only from being a migrant herself but from realizing that borders are often a psychological construct more than they are a physical barrier.

Since Radivojevic's film seems to have been made with respect to Derrida's theories of hospitality mentioned in Pantoja Prechard work, the ones that posit how ethics and politics of hospitality should be an alternative to political relations determined by membership to a nation-state and geo-political borders, the question of Radivojevic's familiarity with this concept would be raised in the interview phase of this research. On

the basis of the analysis of documentary films about migrations that have held high standards when portraying the migrant experiences done by Vanhaelemeech, we could also see that unlike the first two films mentioned in this section of the literature review, Radivojevic's film adds a different stylistic approach that also performs a pedagogical function, informing viewers about the social reality behind migration and offers a complex aesthetic cinematic experience (Vanhaelemeesch, 2018). This aesthetic experience was colored by a series of vignettes, poetically guided by the filmmaker's eye and personal reflections that shed light on the experience of asylum seekers in Cyprus.

The title "Evaporating Borders" corresponds to the idea that the erosion of boundaries and borders (both physical and metaphoric) defamiliarize the narratives of selfhood through which identities take shape and reproduce themselves. The flow of populations, commodities, and information is associated with loss of traditions, memories and histories. This poses a threat to national identity and translates to discrimination, prejudice, and intolerance. What is apparent in Cyprus is emblematic of hierarchical racial structures around the world, looking to cultures and peoples outside Western borders from a position of superiority. (Radivojevic, 2014).

Another documentary that was crafted in a similar fashion is *The New Americans* (James, 2004); a seven-hour documentary series, directed by Steve James, one of the most renowned documentary filmmakers of the current time and age. Although this film is also presented through a series of vignettes fitted together in a compelling collage, it only slightly resembles the technique used in *Evaporating Borders* (Radivojevic, 2014).

There are definitely more observational elements than in the first two documentaries mentioned at the beginning of this literature review, but even though *The New Americans* was advertised as being a strictly observational film, this is not entirely true if we look at the classic definition of documentary modes by Bill Nichols. This author states that the observational mode emphasizes direct engagement with the everyday life of subjects as observed by an unobtrusive camera, but apparently there are also elements of other modes in *The New Americans* (James, 2004), mainly the expository mode; this is reaffirmed by the fact that the verbal commentary in this documentary series engages in the “argumentative logic” (Nichols, 2017).

Nevertheless, an access that this film had in following subjects from Africa, Middle East and Central America as they emigrate to the United States of America, and the way in which it used this access with high ethical standards, speak enough about the integrity of the filmmaker and interviewing him would be very beneficial in search of the potential pitfalls and distorted realities seen in some of the documentaries that provided distorted visual representations of immigrant experiences. Questions to be raised in the potential interview with the director would relate to the stylistic choices in this film, and whether opting for one of them was enough to ethically present the migrant experience(s), or whether there were other considerations to be made alongside the stylistic choices.

The purpose of this section of the literature review was not just to present four distinct documentaries about migration, but to see how different stylistic choices used in them helped or hurt truthfulness and claims to reality that accompany almost every documentary project. The next section of the literature review will deal with the academic

articles that have looked for false and malicious presentations of immigrants in documentaries. In doing so, we will also look for the theoretical framework embedded in such academic work and observe if some of the theories used in it could be useful for our research.

Issues related to telling migrant stories

In their critical approach to the documentaries that were broadcasted on the BBC Two and Channel 4, Vickers and Rutter implemented the Marxist analysis of British capitalism, the capitalist crisis and the economic and political position of migrants. By analyzing the discourse of three separate documentary films, the authors were able to conclude that the representations of migrants can be grouped into three categories “disposable labour, passive victim, and active threat.” (Vickers & Rutter, 2018, p. 486). Authors argued that “these discursive roles reflect and reinforce capitalist exploitation, by constructing ‘migrants’ as a mutable ‘other’ to divide the working class” (Vickers & Rutter, 2018, p. 486).

This research is important for the research proposal because it shows how a mix of texts, sounds and images can be used to change or reinforce viewers’ beliefs or attitudes. Authors have provided an analysis of “how discourses reflect and contribute to material exploitation” (Vickers & Rutter, 2018, p. 491). Furthermore, Vickers and Rutter were able to conclude that all three analyzed films, *The Truth about Immigration in the UK*, *The Hidden World of Britain’s Immigrants* and the Episode 2 of *Benefits Street* suggested that the recent migration is unlike any of the previous ones, not only quantitatively but qualitatively. According to the findings from this research, such representation of immigrants was there to provide false evidence on how new immigrants

pose a threat to the old ones and their descendants, and authors deducted that the creators of these three documentaries wanted to strengthen the current power structure by omitting messages that reinforce the culture of fear.

Since there is a high likelihood that the analysis of the interviews that will be proposed in the next section of this research will be done by using the grounded theory approach, and since this theory suggests that the researcher is “granted the freedom to enter the field and discover the main concerns of participants and analyze ways they resolve these problems” (Jones, 2005), work done by Vickers and Rutter could be beneficial in rendering this research more efficient and could also help formulate the questions for the interviews, especially those about the solidarity that is often missing when portraying immigrants in documentaries.

We found migrants consistently portrayed as distinct and separate, reinforcing Moore and Forkert’s argument that depictions of migrants disidentify them from the working class and thereby mask their exploitation and undermine the potential for classbased solidarity. (Vickers & Rutter, 2018, p. 498)

Misrepresentation of immigrants in TV documentaries is also a major part of the research done by Cheregi. This author goes into great depth when searching for recurring themes in British documentaries about Romanian immigrants. Cheregi recognizes the role of images in framing the stereotypes about Romanians and findings from this approach proved fruitful in pinpointing another pitfall of migrant presentation in documentaries; that one being introducing private issues in public context and subsequently redefining the public sphere.

The British television mostly use economic (images of pauper Romanian villages), political (images of politicians discussing about the Romanian migrants), and national security (images of homeless Romanians rough sleeping) frames in the coverage of Romanian immigration. The media also infer the polarization between “Us” (the British citizens) and “Them” (the Romanian migrants). (Cheregi, 2015, p. 96)

Cheregi’s article combined the framing theory with dispositive analysis and it is yet another research approach that could be used in developing hypotheses about the representation of immigrants in documentary films. Justification for this mixed approach is to be found in the reasoning that images appear more closely linked to reality than words are, even if they are “human made artificial constructions” (Messaris & Abraham, 2001, p. 216). Cheregi claims that the relationship between words and their meaning is purely a matter of social convention, while the relationship between images and their meanings are based on similarity or analogy. The author went on to point to the three qualities of images in Messaris and Abraham’s perspective that constitutes “effective tools for framing and articulating ideological messages” (Messaris & Abraham, 2001, p. 216).

Messaris and Abraham are not the only ones that realized the potential that images have in dispersing ideological messages, since Nichols also mentioned the potency images have to move into action and appeal to the feelings of the audience with either artistic or artificial proofs. Nichols devoted a whole chapter of his book *Introduction to Documentary* to deliberative films that tell us what to do.

This is the domain of encouraging or discouraging, exhorting or dissuading others on a course of public action. Political issues of social policy such as war, welfare, conservation, abortion, artificial reproduction, national identity, and international relations belong to this domain. Deliberations face toward the future and pose questions of what is to be done. (Nichols, 2017, p. 105)

Since national identity is firmly embedded in most of the documentary work on migrant's experiences, once again, Nichols' thoughts on how the audience constructs categories and concepts can help filmmakers be aware of the identity politics that does not originate with documentary but in society at large. Importantly, "documentary filmmakers strive to find the means to represent these issues in ways that retain a sense of their magnitude in the lives of the people who confront them." (Nichols, 2017, p. 242)

While it is now obvious that documentaries that depict plights of the migrant population do not construct these social occurrences but report on them, Nichols does not recount any filmmakers' experiences on how to inventively and respectfully portray these experiences and retain a sense of their magnitude. Work done by Juhasz & Lebow might help with that.

A book titled *A companion to contemporary documentary film* (Juhasz & Lebow, 2015) presented a series of essays in which documentary filmmakers explained what they thought to be the best approach in portraying migrant topics with the highest level of ethics and without misrepresenting the migrant experience. This approach is closest to the methodology this research wants to incorporate.

The voice from Mieke Bal might prove very useful in shedding light on innovative ways of filming and editing migrant documentaries with high representational and ethical standards; this cultural theorist and visual artist calls her own ongoing self-reflective practice “autotheory” (Juhasz & Lebow, 2015, p. 90). Bal sees art making as a form of thinking and the reflection on the film as a continuation of the making. Her process of filmmaking should allow for a better connection with people beyond the limits of traditional writing and additionally; she wants to “break the loneliness of the migrant not so much to offer a condescending ‘voice’ but to build a ground of empathy based on a shared participation in migratory culture”(Juhasz & Lebow, 2015, p. 91).

Another documentary theorist, Ursula Biemann, has been uncovering and visualizing geopolitical lines of migration and mobility across the globe. She explains that she uses the video camera as a cognitive tool to write counter-geographies, which, rather than reinforcing regimes of border control, document the ways in which people subvert and transgress borders. What seems to be the most important take from this school of thought is the idea that documentary aesthetic should mostly focus on reproducing the experiences of migrants themselves. For Biemann, borders that separate countries isolate the filmmaker from her subjects and her audiences and erect boundaries among genres, disciplines, and methods. This author points to the video essay as the only appropriate form in which to do proper justice to the movement of people, “Her films adopt a non-linear narrative structure and a subjective logic that embraces discontinuities and even contradictions” (Juhasz & Lebow, 2015, p. 90).

Unlike these filmmakers and documentary theorists who, rightfully so, center the stories of migrations around the migrants themselves and their lived experiences, refusing

to portray such transnational phenomena from a perspective of one country or one border, other work analyzed in the literature review showed that there are a lot of documentary films that do not have such an experimental approach and that are framed to support the power structures.

Therefore, in conclusion, based on the discussions above, I propose two research questions that are of significance to the study of documentary filmmaking:

RQ1: What are the principal representational challenges of reporting about migrations and migrant experiences in documentaries?

RQ2: How might filmmakers address/overcome those challenges?

Methods

This study will use a qualitative phenomenological approach that seeks to identify “the essence of human experience” (Creswell, 2014) about the specific phenomenon of the experience of filmmaking and subject’s personal conceptions of these actions. In order to explore and scrutinize these experiences, in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews with filmmakers and professionals from the documentary field will be utilized. According to Fontana and Frey, semi-structured interviews offer a chance for the interviewing process to be directed by the interviewer with questions that are already constructed but leave enough space for the interviewer to ask the follow-up questions (Fontana & Frey, 1994). This implies that the preconceived categories may limit the field of inquiry, and therefore, the researcher should ask follow-up questions in order to get a better understanding of the pre-defined concepts and hypotheses, however, the respondents should remain the experts and direct the research. For this to happen, a

certain level of previous study in the research topic area is required and that is why the general prompts for the interviewing phase will be constructed by analyzing the literature review.

Furthermore, there is evidence that the quality of the interview guide fundamentally influences the results of the study (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016), and an important step in formulating a guide, other than informing the interview questions on the findings from the academic work analyzed in the literature review, is to test the interview questions by looking for an assessment of these questions from the external specialists. I find my committee members extremely helpful in this, as they can not only help in formulating relevant questions but also offer guidance about the wording and the arrangement of the questions. That is why a first draft of the interview questions will be offered at the end of the procedure section of this research proposal.

Procedure

My goal is to conduct all the interviews in person. Per Fontana and Frey the human to human interaction is of utmost importance, and to understand filmmakers experiences and search for nuances in their artistic approaches I would ask two types of questions, the general, and the more specifics ones. One could lead to another, however, some of the more specific prompts will directly relate to the films analyzed in the literature review section of this proposal.

To clarify this, the specific questions that come from the more general ones could occur if the interviewees report that they found a way to avoid representational issues in

their films by looking at the work done by other filmmakers, and a logical follow-up question to this would be, whose work are they referencing.

On the other hand, the specific questions that relate only to certain films will at times direct the conversation towards the one scene, or to the way a scene was edited or selected. Concretely, in the context of the films that portrayed the migrations from the Balkan region, one potential question to the filmmaker would be: “Was portraying the life of Serbian truck drivers in the United States of America there to perform a semiotic function and act as a conduit to larger issues?”. In a similar vein, the director of *Evaporating Borders*, Iva Radivojevic would be asked distinct questions that relate only to her experiences when making a documentary about migrant experiences. Since this filmmaker posited that her work corresponds to the idea of erosion of boundaries and borders, Radivojevic would be asked what this exactly means, and whether she managed to present this idea in her film.

I plan to begin each interview with an open-ended prompt such as "Can you describe what first attracted you to make a film about migrations/migrant experiences?" or "Does a documentary form have the power to present all the complexities of migrations?" Each of these prompts should allow for follow-up inquiry about details I hear in their responses. Leech suggests to include unstructured formal probes with each question, or the list of desired response details for each question (Leech, 2002). Thus, the two types of questioning, informal and formal, can assist the other in achieving the desired response details. Example of potential questions, both the general and more specific ones will come after this chapter.

If an in-person interview is not possible, I would first look for other relevant filmmakers, producers or video editors who might be available, but would also try to schedule the telephone interviews with the directors mentioned in the first section of the literature review. When choosing to analyze four films for this research proposal, there was a deliberate effort to find the films about migrant experiences of the population from southeast Europe as they are complementary to the film that will be made as a capstone project, but also an effort to include other approaches in order to bring the depth that comes from analyzing migrant experiences of other nations and ethnic groups.

Once finished conducting the interviews, I will transcribe them and analyze the responses in the form of a written report. Since the initial inquiry on the academic work that analyzed migration documentaries did not return any results that included interviewing as a method, and since this will be one of the first attempts to articulate the representational issues of migrant experiences by using this research method, I do not yet have a pre-conceived approach for coding my findings. However, the approach used in grounded theory seems to be the best fit for my research, as grounded theorists look at areas that have either never been studied before or those that are “inundated with disparate theories” (Jones, 2005), and based on the conducted literature review, this is exactly the case with the academic articles that were in the search of representational issues of migrant experiences in documentaries. Moreover, it has been proved that the grounded theory provides a detailed, rigorous and systematic method of qualitative analysis, which has the advantage of “reserving the need for the researcher to conceive preliminary hypotheses, thus providing greater freedom to explore the research area and allow issues to emerge” (Jones, 2005, p. 144). This theory proposes three levels of coding

the results; open coding is the stage in which the raw data is initially examined, followed by selective coding that allows the researcher to filter and code data which is determined to be more relevant to the emerging concepts, and lastly, theoretical coding occurs when the saturation point is reached in the first two stages (Jones, 2005). In the case of this proposed research, theoretical coding could be the best analytical criteria in developing the conceptual relationships between categories of representational issues in migrant documentaries, since the interviewed subject might share the same experiences and concepts that were an integral part of their filmmaking process, in contrast, distinct and unique concepts about the representational issues might also emerge through the implementation of this approach.

Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

Representational Issues and Pitfalls in Documentaries About Migrants

Part One- general questions:

1. Can you describe what first attracted you to make a film about migrations/migrant experiences?
2. Were there any apparent representational issues you encountered in making of the film about migrant experiences?
3. Does the documentary form have the power to present all the complexities of migrations?
4. In what way do the stylistic choices help or hurt the representation and the veracity of the migrant stories?
5. During the post-production phase did you have to highlight or play down certain aspects of the migrant experience and why?

Part Two, potential follow-up questions:

1. Was there ever a fear that the personal experiences of the subjects would not be interpreted in the right way?
2. What do you consider to be the best documentary filming and editing style in portraying the migrant experiences?
3. What part of the filmmaking process presented the biggest threat to the representation of migrant experiences in the film?
4. Did you ever feel an outside pressure to depict migrant stories so that they would support the leading ideology or someone's agenda?
5. Did you get any advice from other filmmakers on how to approach the topic of migration?
6. How much control did your subjects have in the making of the film, and were they at any point concerned about their representation in the film?
7. Were there any legal issues in making the film for which you sought help?
8. How do industry standards and legal obligations in documentary films relate to the representational challenges, and do they work against each other at times?

Sampling

The main criteria for the selection of interview subjects will consider their previous work in documentary filmmaking, and if their opus consists of films about migrations or immigrants. Furthermore, this research will look to include interviews with the filmmakers that have made documentaries about immigrants from the Balkan countries, since that directly relates to the professional project of this research. However, since it is not possible to achieve relevance by focusing only on documentaries from the Balkan countries, we would look to interview other filmmakers whose work has dealt with migrant experiences in other regions of the world.

The question of what may constitute a sufficient sample size may be more difficult to answer. Boddy suggests that "qualitative research often concerns developing a depth of understanding rather than a breadth" (2016), which I believe is true in the case of this study. Ideally, the sample size for this project will include more than six filmmakers, and an estimate from Boddy might be helpful in achieving the right sample size: One study based on theoretical sample-size found six in-depth interviews began to show signs of data saturation, and after twelve in-depth interviews became fully-apparent (Boddy, 2016). In accordance to this, here is the list of potential interview subjects for this research:

Filmmakers:

- 1) Steve James: *Hoop Dreams* (1994), *Stevie* (2002), *The New Americans* (Nigerian story director) (2003), *The Interrupters* (2012), *Abacus: Small Enough to Jail* (2017)...
- 2) Iva Radivojevic: *Mixba* (2012), *Evaporating Borders* (2014), *Field of Vision* (TV Series documentary) (1 episode) (2015), *Natto* (2019)
- 3) Ratko Momcilovic: *Eyes Manouche* (2010), *Karen: On the Edge of Existence* (2011), *Galeb u Americi* (2017)
- 4) Josip Saric: *Sjeverna Koreja: Gladna Djeca Komunizma* (2011), *Irski San* (2018)
- 5) Marc Silver: *3½ Minutes, Ten Bullets* (2015), *Who Is Dayani Cristal?* (2013) and *When Loud Music Turned Deadly* (2014)

Some of the filmmakers from this list have already been contacted and have generally consented to participate in the research, like Iva Radivojevic and Ratko Momcilovic, whereas others will hopefully be reached by looking for their contacts online, through mutual friends and connections that the Murray Center for Documentary Journalism has both with the industry professionals and with the True False Film Fest. As for the relevance of the filmmakers chosen, here are a few words about each of them.

Steve James is an Oscar-nominated American film producer and director of several renowned documentaries that have already been mentioned, and his perspective on what it is like to film migrant experiences both in their native countries and in the United States will without a doubt prove useful for this research. Since James was the director of the Nigerian part of the series about the *The New Americans* (2003), a film that is perhaps one of the most extensive documentaries on the life of immigrants, there is a lot to be learned and conceptualized about the observational style of filming that he implemented. Also worth noting is that the whole project was filmed over the course of four years. If necessary, an interview will be conducted over the phone, but the preferable choice is the interview in person, and since James was already a guest lecturer at the University of Missouri, I would look to get to him through the professors at the Murray Center for Documentary Journalism who organized his lectures in Missouri.

Iva Radivojevic is a filmmaker born in Yugoslavia and an immigrant to Cyprus. In her film, *Evaporating Borders* (2014) the themes of migration, tolerance, identity, and belonging are examined through the lived experiences of middle-East migrants to Cyprus. Radivojevic is based in New York, where I intend to spend the Fall semester of 2019 and interview her. In the last email I have received from Radivojevic, she said that it would not present a problem for her to participate in the interview but that currently, she is in South Africa. Luckily, during the fall months of 2019, Radivojevic will be in New York, and ideally, this interview will be conducted in person.

Ratko Momcilovic is a documentary filmmaker born in Croatia, but with the majority of his professional work done in the United States. Momcilovic moved to Chicago in 1999 where he studied film at Columbia College. Most recently, he produced

and directed three 45-minute documentaries for VICE Media about the life of Serbian immigrants in the United States entitled *Galeb u Americi* (2017). This docuseries is thematically divided into three chapters. The first one is specifically about the immigrants who pursue a career in truck driving, the second is about the ways in which immigrants seek asylum and the third one is about the most famous Serbian immigrant, Nikola Tesla, and those who try to follow his footsteps. To the best of my knowledge, Ratko is also living in the United States, but in a brief response to my email, Momcilovic mentioned he was currently in Africa, but that he will be willing to participate in this research.

Remaining two filmmakers are yet to be contacted. As for Josip Saric, there is a high likelihood that I will be able to reach him through mutual friends, mainly because some of my ex-colleagues from Serbia recently started working for Al Jazeera, the same company Saric works for, and also through knowing Sabahudin Topalbecirevic who has made many documentaries for Al Jazeera documentary unit. The only potential obstacle is that, to the best of my knowledge, Josip Saric lives in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and therefore, this might be the only interview that would have to be conducted over the phone.

In the context of migrant documentaries most commonly seen in the United States of America, but also in the context of its innovative approach, the film *Who is Dayani Cristal?* (2013) and an interview with its director Marc Silver could prove very helpful in outlining the distinct ways in which migrant experiences are portrayed in documentary films. This film emphasizes migrant deaths at the US-Mexican border by retracing the steps of an unidentified deceased migrant with a tattoo across the chest that read 'Dayani Cristal'. While the medical examiners and forensic anthropologists try to identify the

victim through science and technology, interviews with Dayani's relatives and friends gradually reveal more about the migrant's background. During the trip, Latin American actor-activist Gael García Bernal's voice-over not only serves to inform us about the migrant's identity but also to transmit the filmmaker's personal reflection and social critique. There has not yet been any contact with Marc Silver, but there is a possibility to get to him through Rodrigo a press officer for this film. Brandao's contact is available online.

This is not the final list of filmmakers or industry professionals to be interviewed for this research. As was already mentioned, the desirable course of action for each of the interviewed subject is to have them answer the questions in person during the one-on-one interview session. All the filmmaker's responses will be kept on the voice recorder, transcribed and logged.

The biggest obstacles in accomplishing the set goals for the interviews are observed in the unavailability of the subjects, but those obstacles will be dealt with accordingly; firstly, by planning the interviews several weeks or months in advance, and then by looking for alternative interviewees if the ones from the list are not able to participate. Additional problems and limitations might come from the interview questions, especially if the filmmakers do not see any representational issues in the documentaries about migrations. If that is the case, all the implications observed in the literature review will be there to inform the interviewees about several instances where documentaries fell short from presenting the migrant experiences in a respectful manner.

Potential outlets where this research could be published besides the platforms such as Filmmaking Magazine, Variety and IndieWire, are diaspora publications, mostly

those published in the Serbo-Croatian language. Among them is the Balkan City Magazine, a monthly magazine published in Chicago, with topics that relate to migrant experiences of the Serbian population in the United States of America. Editor-in-chief of this publication Goran Veselinovic already expressed interest in publishing this research. Additionally, there are some trade publications like the European Visual Artist Publication where this topic and the adjoining film could be presented.

Overview of Project Film

The project film *My Fellow Countrymen* will record the experiences of several emigrants from the Balkan countries, specifically those that have relocated in the past ten years, and their process of assimilation after arriving in a foreign country. The project will also explore whether the national identity of the economic emigrants from southeast Europe is dissolving and if they are treated differently both in their new country and at their place of birth. This will all be done in the form of a documentary film that will represent a capstone effort required by the Documentary Journalism curriculum at the University of Missouri. To give a thorough introduction to the film, its goals and its tone, I am including a one-page used in the Jonathan B. Murray Center's 2019 annual pitch forum. After the one-page, there will be a brief section on how the film will work in conversation with the literature and interviews.

One-page

MY FELLOW COUNTRYMEN

Aleksandar Petrašković

Logline: A film about three emigrants from the Balkans and their struggles to start their lives anew in a foreign country while reexamining their national identities.

Synopsis: Emigration from the Balkan countries is reaching an all-time high. The initial struggle of the post-war Yugoslav republics was that of reconciliation, but as time went by, focus shifted to economic stability and so far, Balkan countries are failing on that front. Consequently, the number of economic migrants is on the constant rise, and those who leave, rarely get their story told.

My Fellow Countrymen will follow three individuals and their families, emigrating from Balkan countries and finding their “home away from home” in different locations around the world. The film will portray what obstacles immigrants encounter as (il)legal aliens, the period of adaptation that includes finding work and housing, filing residency papers, learning a new language, gaining friends and dealing with cultural shock. While filming those daily struggles, question of national identity will arise. The inherent drama in observing these personal dilemmas is best exemplified by following subjects as they raise their children in a multilingual, multicultural and diverse environment that willingly or not is making them apatride.

The film will mix an observational style and in-the-moment interviews. Footage will show subjects on and off work, providing insight into numerous cultural and language adaptations required of them on daily basis. Subjects will talk about what decisions led them to flee their country, and how their identity changed because of that. Despite immigration being frequently reported on, in those reports, we rarely see the personal reinvention required to get integrated into a new society. The story is personal to me because, as a Serbian, a lot of my childhood friends live abroad, without a clear idea of when and if they will be coming back to our home country.

The first character is a Serbian citizen, Miloš Marjanović, who exiled to Sweden and after 4- years in the suburbs of Stockholm, Miloš and his wife Milana are proud of their daughter Maša learning to speak three different languages but at the same time scared she will forget her origins. This makes the Marjanović family think daily about going back home to Serbia. Similarly, the Ivanović family, a mixed Croatian- Serbian couple, currently residing in Columbia, MO, are stressed about their daughter growing up so far away from home. However, waiting to get US residency is keeping them from going back. The third character will be an individual living without their immediate family, and this choice has been made to provide the audience with a variety of reasons for emigrating from Serbia.

Whether it is because parents think their children’s future will be brighter in a foreign country or a lack of money, the rising numbers of emigrants from the Balkans deserve to have their story told and especially by asking if their national identity is hard to let go and if they are aware of it dissolving? This question is important to answer because of the predominant perception of the Balkan people being particularly proud of their origins.

Relevance to Professional Component

This analysis will be essential to the professional skills component of my project because I will be making a documentary film about immigration. It is important to see if documentary filmmakers, in their preparation for a film about immigration, think about avoiding victimization or over simplification that takes no account of the bigger picture of migrant experiences. My research will help with guidance as I am making the film about immigrants from the Balkan countries living abroad. Even though one part of the filming was already done in Sweden, there is still a lot that could be gained during the second filming stage and in postproduction by following the instructions from the interviewed subjects. Additionally, representational pitfalls observed in the academic work done on migration documentaries should be beneficial in making of this film.