

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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