

# OPEN CONVERSATION IN CLOSED COMMUNITIES

**Subjectivity, Power Dynamics and Self  
in First Person Documentary Practice  
about Closed Communities**

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# DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Iris Zaki, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:  Date: \_\_22 September 2017\_\_

## ABSTRACT

This practice-based research was born out of the short documentary, *My Kosher Shifts*, which was made for a Master's in Documentary Practice at Brunel University, London. The film was shot in an ultraorthodox Jewish hotel in London, in which the filmmaker worked as a receptionist and used an experimental documentary method to capture her interactions with random guests. The success of this documentary method, which was reflected in the ease with which subjects opened-up to the filmmaker and to the camera, encouraged this practice-based research and the further exploration of the method via the production of two more films, in two different communities. For this purpose, a number of key elements were identified in the filmmaking method of *My Kosher Shifts*, including: the filmmaker's occupation of a customer service position; the abandoned camera technique (the use of fixed unmanned recording devices); the interaction with subjects through conversation rather than interview. Two films were produced for the following research, which aims to apply the method with these key elements: *Women in Sink*, was shot in a Christian-Arab hair salon in Israel, where the filmmaker took the position of hair washer for the purpose of making the film; *Café Tekoa* was shot in a West-Bank Jewish settlement in which the filmmaker was unable to gain a position in a local business and instead conversed with subjects in a pop-up café/studio in the commercial centre of the settlement.

The research demonstrates that where there is a harmony between the filmmaker and the community, the method outlined above works to effectively create immediate and intimate interaction with subjects, as shown in *Women in Sink* and *My Kosher Shifts*. However, when there is a conflict or dissonance between the community and the filmmaker – as occurred during the production of *Café Tekoa* – the immersion of the filmmaker into the community and her immediate interaction with random subjects may become difficult to establish or sustain. The following research suggests additional adjustments that could be made by the filmmaker in order to address and overcome these issues. Moreover, the research sheds light on artistic and ethical processes within the documentary practice, from the perspective of the filmmaker.

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## PREFACE

When I entered the small Kosher hotel on my first day of work, I experienced an almost childlike excitement, as if I was travelling to a new country. I felt I had been given a key into the mysterious world of ultraorthodox Judaism, which, as an Israeli secular-Jew, had fascinated me for years. Becoming the receptionist at this hotel, I also got another key in my hands: the one that opened the rooms. This unique position was the beginning of a rather peculiar interaction between our two seemingly distant worlds. The guests not only communicated with me in order to ask for things for their rooms or for London sightseeing recommendations, but shortly after they realised that the modestly dressed young lady was actually someone who lived in a parallel, secular-Jewish world, they just were as eager to interact and gain knowledge of me.

Hours of chats with many guests – all practicing Jews from all over the world, who chose this very hotel owing to its strict Kosherness – revealed a picture that was more complex than the one I initially had in mind about this community. Everyone had different reasons and motivations for their beliefs and ways of living; with many I found common ground and similarities in our philosophical views and desires. I came to understand a deceptively simple concept: that groups are not as homogenous as they seem from a distance. Under the monolithic surface of a collective identity there are many individual selves, and ingrained stereotypes function as blankets, covering spots which we have little or no knowledge about.

During my time studying for a Master's degree in Documentary Practice I was required to make a short documentary. My peculiar workplace seemed like a documentary-worthy subject, and I decided to shoot at the hotel. Marc Isaacs, a noted documentarist and one of this PhD's supervisors, was a guest lecturer on our course and introduced to us his short, *Lift* (2001, Marc Issacs) which served as an inspiration to the project, as we were both capturing our encounter with subjects in one location. After receiving Shternie Gorman's (my open-minded manager and dear friend) approval, I started to bring a camera to work with me,

and during the summer of 2010 I captured my conversations with over twenty hotel guests who agreed to be filmed for my academic project.

I made a number of key decisions before shooting *My Kosher Shifts*, in order to achieve the most authentic documentation possible of our receptionist and guest conversations. The first decision was to keep the one-on-one intimacy, and therefore not to bring a cameraperson; however, as being behind the camera and occupying the filmmaker's role would change the unmediated receptionist/guest dynamic, I decided to avoid that too. I therefore put the camera on a tripod, set it and left it running for the entire conversation. I later called this unmanned camera technique 'the abandoned camera', and this is one of the core elements of the documentary method which this practice-based research explores. I have also kept the interaction with the guests in its natural space – the reception area, and the nature of the interaction as a conversational one. Non-scripted and spontaneous questions were asked from both sides, they answered mine and I answered theirs.

The film showed a variety of characters engaging in casual yet intriguing conversations about religion and life. I was pleased that I managed to bring about a distinctive representation of the ultraorthodox community, a representation which echoes the experience I've had with individuals and perspectives from a community which is sometimes considered mysterious and about which people often hold prejudicial views. Screening the film at festivals – ethnographic, documentary and Jewish – was the point at which I realised how important it is to gain exposure to viewers' responses. I learnt how crucial the stage of showing the film to audiences is to the filmmaking process and to the consequences of the ethnographic representation. This is where the film can establish new meanings, many beyond the ones its maker originally had in mind.

Fascinated by this circle of documentary practice, I decided to go on an academic and artistic journey, to further experiment with my method for documenting my interaction with subjects from different communities, by making two more films. In addition, I wanted to investigate my documentary filmmaking



as a process: from the decision to create a film to its distribution and reception; to reflect on and scrutinise the ethical and artistic decisions involved at each stage of production; to address the tension that exists within the triangle of filmmaker, subjects and viewers.

The following practice-based research is the result of this journey, one which has not taken place in a library or a lab and which revealed to me things that I could not learn from books alone. It was a very challenging experience, professionally and personally. Many times, it was lonely, I felt frustrated and outside of my comfort zone; an insider/outsider: in London, in the academia, in the communities I've visited and depicted. I've experienced many things: from carrying twice-my-weight of equipment in the blazing sun, to walking on red carpets all over the world. This journey has taught me so much about the documentary practice, the ethical struggles of working with human subjects and the responsibility of representing people and societies; with sleepless nights of worrying that a subject who had put their trust in me would hate their character in the film. It also showed me how important it is to be vulnerable in the process of exposing others, and how this vulnerability is key to finding other people's vulnerability in return. I learnt a great deal about societies and audiences, about people, and about myself.

# INTRODUCTION

This practice-based research is an artistic, ethical and academic journey, of exploring the experimental method that was developed during the making of the short documentary *My Kosher Shifts* (2010,) by creating two documentary projects, in two different communities. The submitted practice work consists of these two films: *Women in Sink* (2015) that was shot in a Christian Arab hair salon in Haifa, and *Café Tekoa* (2018) that was shot in a Jewish settlement in the West Bank. The submitted thesis serves as an exploration of the process of first person ethnographic documentary filmmaking, emphasising the personal and the ethical dimensions within the practice.

## **Context: Documenting Communities**

The film through which this practice-based researched documentary method was developed (*My Kosher Shifts*) is a first person documentary film. It presents a mosaic of ultraorthodox Jewish characters via casual conversations with the filmmaker, who served them at the front desk in a Jewish hotel in London. This documentary portrait of the ultraorthodox community presents nuanced voices of orthodox Jews, individuals that may not have been chosen as subjects for a documentary film about the ultraorthodox community had it been produced with a specific orientation or agenda in mind. Indeed, the ultraorthodox community has been a popular subject matter for fiction and documentary films, many of which tend to highlight the more marginal and extreme voices within the community. These are typically films about rebels and outsiders, about people who left the insular community and reflect on it, or about exceptional or controversial phenomena. Such films include: *Jews*, *The Prisoner* (2008, Vanessa Engle) which follows a Hassidic Jew from North London who is jailed for drug trafficking; *Trembling before g-d* (2001, Sandi Simcha DuBowski) concerning the struggle of gay and lesbian ultraorthodox Jews; and *Sacred Sperm* (2015, Ori Gruder) in which the film's Haredi director goes on a personal journey to explore the taboo of masturbation in Judaism. This tendency reflects a documentary common trend, to show societies by focusing on the extraordinary phenomenon or individuals. In his documentary *In the Basement* (2014) Ulrich Seidl offers a grotesque insight into Austrian society by showing

the private basements of extreme Austrians fetishists. The legendary documentary *Grey Gardens* (1975, Albert Maysles, David Maysles, Ellen Hovde and Muffie Meyer) relates the story of the decline of American high-society and its values, via its focus on the reclusive figures of mother and daughter, Edith and Edith Beale. In his documentaries, Louis Theroux often travels to outsider communities (as diverse as neo-Nazis, fundamentalist Christian groups and swinger communities) and subtly provokes extreme responses from its members, a method which has become a signature style throughout his documentaries. Representing a community through the unusual individual means dwelling on the extreme, when, in reality, there are many ordinary people which perhaps have less potential to create incendiary encounters, but whose stories are no less valid.

A different approach to the one above for documenting communities tries to bring a distant, outside look, focusing on the community as a whole and pointing out the common and general. This could be the traditional style of TV informative documentaries, made by BBC, National Geographic or the History Channel, for example. This documentary mode, which Nichols (2001) has referred to as expository, highlights the shared traditions of the community members in a didactic manner, usually by the use of facts and figures, such as population, geographic, demographic or socio-economic data, usually combining talking-heads interviews with the use of voice-over narrator. Examples of such televised documentaries about the ultraorthodox Jewish community include the Australian documentary mini-series *Strictly Jewish* (2016, SBS) or National Geographic's *Secret World of Hasidism* (2013). Another mode of this outside look is the observational ethnographic film, with works that were made by anthropologists such as David McDougall and Robert Gardner, or a more recent example, Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Ilisa Barbash's *Sweetgrass* (2009). These observational films aim to minimise the encounter aspect of the documentary process, either by smothering it in 'objective' information or by seeming to reduce the contact to the presence of a camera as a machine, with minimal human encounter involved.

The documentary approach in *My Kosher Shifts* and the two documentaries created for this research, *Women in Sink* and *Café Tekoa*, centres exactly on the encounter between the filmmaker and random individuals from the community. The filmmaker places herself within a community for an ethnographic journey, which results in a first person documentary. The aim is to explore societies but to do so from a very personal gaze and experience. Alisa Lebow deemed this form of documentary, 'first person plural', in which the filmmaker uses her personal voice to explore the world around her, yet not the domestic or personal circles but rather the more social and political external ones (2012: 1).

Several filmmakers, who put themselves at the centre of an ethnographic-documentary journey, practiced a similar first person approach. Agnès Varda goes on a road trip in *Gleaners and I* (2000) to engage with the various people who, for her, represent the phenomenon of gleaning from a contemporary point of view. Varda captures her interaction with individuals, interested in their motives and self-consciousness, yet at the same time she inscribes her own identity, feelings and thoughts onto the film. Originally driven by the historical March of General Sherman during the civil war, Ross McElwee found himself in *Sherman's March* (1985) fascinated by the people (predominantly women) he comes across, asking questions about love, American society and happiness, while constantly putting his own vulnerability and curiosity at the centre of this quest.

Where these two filmmakers used their subjectivity and self to explore societies, some documentarists also experiment with the position of the filmmaker in order to advance the documentary encounter with subjects. In *Lift* (2001) Marc Isaacs claustrophobically places himself inside an East London lift in order to impose intimate communication with the residents and, through this micro-cosmos, to explore the multicultural human fabric of this side of the city. He begins this journey with a fly-on-the-wall position and gradually becomes more active and communicates with the residents, asking them generic questions, such as what

did they dream about last night; eventually the residents come to trust him and confess to him and to his camera.

In *Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman* (2006) Jennifer Fox is led by her desire to explore her femininity in the contexts of other women from all over the world. She experiments not only with her position, but with that of the camera, using the rationale that holding the camera means having more power. Unlike Isaacs who keeps the traditional role play of interviewer/interviewee, Fox tries to challenge this imbalance by sharing the filming authorship: she swaps the camera with her subjects, the one who asks questions holds the camera while the other answers and is filmed. She also exposes herself to them, making herself an active subject.

The documentary method that is researched in this thesis also seeks to experiment with both the position of the filmmaker and that of the camera. It does so, as I will outline below, by offering unorthodox means in order to reduce the formality and the role-play of the more traditional interview techniques.

### **The Filmmaker's Position and the Abandoned Camera Technique**

The position of the filmmaker here is challenged by her positionality in the community as well as in the location. The filmmaker functions as a participant-observer, she places herself within a community, occupying an active, commercial role – such as a hotel's receptionist or a hair washer in a hair salon – which promotes interaction with individuals and a certain immersion into the community. Unlike Fox and many filmmakers, who achieve intimacy by interacting with family members, friends or other pre-established relationships, the challenge here is to create an 'instant' intimacy with subjects who are random visitors, who 'enter the scene' with no previous arrangements such as research or pre-interview.

Additionally, the conventional filmmaker's position is further challenged by the interview technique: aiming at creating a more balanced interaction dynamic, one of a conversation, where both sides ask questions and share, leading each

other to create more organic, unplanned discussions. The filmmaker thus becomes one of the subjects, occupying a role beyond that of pure observer or interviewer.

In contrast to the bigger and more polished documentary productions that tend to bring the subjects to a studio, and have an entire crew prepared for the taking-heads shoot, first person documentary filmmakers aim to achieve authenticity and intimacy in their encounters with subjects. Therefore, many subjective and personal documentaries are filmed by the filmmakers directly, without a cameraperson, knowing that the presence of even one crew member affects the dynamic and increases performativity. In addition to this, being behind the camera also imposes a defined, physical power dynamic of filmmaker and subject, of interviewer and interviewee. If Jennifer Fox tried to balance the authorship by sharing the camera with her subjects, the method of the abandoned camera attempts to do the opposite: to free the filmmaker from holding the camera in order to shift her position in the documentary filmmaking process and to encourage more casual conversations closer to that of the everyday, in which no one holds a camera. This method also allows the filmmaker to keep maintaining her position of serving customers while filming, potentially leading to a far less mediated communication.

A fixed rig has become a common technique in many television factual series, such as *One Born Every Minute* (2010-, Channel 4), *24 Hours in A&E* (2011-, Channel 4), and *Educating Yorkshire* (2013-2014, Channel 4), or the iconic, international reality show *Big Brother* (1999-, Endemol). This technique has allowed the creators to gain a fly-on-the-wall, observational gaze on their subjects without the presence of camera operators. This shift away from human operators also allows the production to cover every corner of the filmed space by using dozens of robotic cameras. Although the abandoned camera technique used in this research also aims to make subjects less aware of being filmed, it differs in the sense that it aims to show a specific, chosen gaze, which has a particular meaning rather than covering as much space as possible, like

CCTV cameras. Unlike in such reality shows, the director in this research is not in a distant control room, but rather a main element of the encounter. The aim of the abandoned camera technique (and the other elements of this method) is to try and balance the control over the encounter of filmmaker/subjects, whereas in fixed rig productions (in particular *Big Brother*), the idea is often to gain even greater control of subjects.

### **The Ethnographic Approach: Documenting Communities**

*'Ever-newer waters flow on those who step into the same rivers.'*

(Heraclitus of Ephesus)

Documentaries that depict societies could be viewed as representations of representations, in the sense that the films are affected by the filmmaker's view on the community and her sense of affiliation to it. The films therefore represent what the community seems to her from her position, many times that of an outsider. Attempting to overcome this outsider's lens, Cohen (1985) urges ethnographers to learn societies from the inside outwards. That is, to unfold the perspectives of those who belong to the researched community and explore their self and collective consciousness. Cohen believes that what makes a group of individuals a united entity is mainly their shared symbols and traditions, though underneath this symbolic construction individuals have different subjective meanings. Community members, he contends, are connected to each other owing to this notion of shared concepts and boundary marking processes. An in-depth study of a community therefore, should be conducted with close attention to these subjective and personal meanings. Cohen suggests that ethnographers use their own self-consciousness to 'stimulate their sensitivity to the self-consciousness of those they study' (Cohen 1994: 5).

### **Participant Observer**

The same rational – of trying to address the self and reveal subjective meanings through interacting with individuals in order to understand societies – lies behind the method of participant observation:

The methodology of participant observation seeks to uncover, make accessible, and reveal the meanings (realities) people use to make sense out of their daily lives. In placing the meaning of everyday life first, the methodology of participant observation differs from approaches that begin with concepts defined by way of existing theories and hypotheses. (Jorgensen 1989: 15)

With the aim of depicting communities through participant-observation with a close attention to the subjective meanings and to the self, this documentary research method places the filmmaker in the field, within a community to which she is an outsider. The position, as mentioned above, is advanced by holding a commercial role, which allows the filmmaker to establish a rapport which could lead to a filmed conversation. The commercial role further “upgrades” the position of the filmmaker in the community: from an observer to an active customer service provider, she has a function in the space that exceeds filming and allows her a special access. Such a role would be classified, according to Spradley, as moderate participant observation, ‘when the ethnographer seeks to maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participation and observation’ (Spradley 1980: 60). In addition, the filmmaker also has the support and framing that comes with her job position. Being ‘hired’ by the owners serves as a stamp of approval, making her a ‘legitimate’ guest in the community, which helps in terms of gaining clients’ trust in her and her motives. Her aim is to interact with as many individuals as possible and to learn about the community.

### **The Documents: The Films and Representation as Mosaic**

Despite this romantic ethnographic goal of being in the field and interacting with many individuals, the result of the ethnographic journey here is not an unlimited anthropological report. Rather, there is a clear artistic purpose behind these projects: to make compelling films. After the many filmed conversations of the filmmaker with individuals comes the point in post-production when footage of filmed subjects is being selected and edited. This is the stage that defines and determines the community representation, where the filmmaker’s experience and message are rendered into a complete filmic experience.



## **Set of Selves**

The structure of the three films used in this research is a mosaic of conversations with different subjects which combine to create a portrait of the community and express many subjective views. There is no linear narrative in which the characters are being spread throughout the film, in the sense that each conversation could stand alone and does not depend on or continue from the previous one. Such editing seeks to depict communities as non-monolithic, with blurred boundaries and no clear starting point. Rather than searching for the certain and the united, the films aim to present communities in a more rhizomatic manner, as a-centred and interrelated: 'more like a patchwork quilt than a piece of fabric' (Holland 2013: 15). There are returning themes in the film owing to the mutual otherness between the filmmaker and the community members and, indeed, this comprises the motivation of the interaction. As Holland contends:

the fact that such a quilt does not have to take the shape of a rectangle or a square, but can become totally lopsided and develop in any direction or many directions, doesn't mean that there can't be colours or textures that repeat here and there, creating patterns. (Holland 2013: 15)

## **The Filmmaker's Self**

Whether she quietly observes or actively participates, the filmmaker's self has a significant influence on the encounter with subjects and on the way people and societies are eventually being represented in her work. The recognition in this inevitable subjectivity in the process of representing others has been addressed by many scholars from both the anthropological field [Geertz (1988) Ruby (1980), Coffey (1999), Behar (1996), Cohen (1994)] and the documentary field [Renov (2004) Bruzzi (2000) Chapman (2009)]. These scholars encourage ethnographers and filmmakers to embrace this subjectivity and express it in their representation through reflexive means.

In the researched documentary method, the filmmaker's self is a crucial element. In her documentary encounter, the filmmaker is also a subject and her identity is also being explored; she expresses her thoughts and opinions, and, in

turn, her self triggers that of the subjects. This encounter of selves exposes the similarities and differences between them. By trying to integrate into a community and interact with its members, the filmmaker tries to get to know her subjects. She asks: who are you? Are we similar or different? In different circumstances, might I have been in your place?

There are several channels through which the subjectivity of the filmmaker is being reflected in this practice-based research. Firstly, in the filmmaking process and in the films, the filmmaker reveals her stance towards the community she documents. She does so when she approaches a potential community and location, and later when she converses with individuals. This transparency in her agenda is also present in the edited film and appears, for instance, in the inclusion of her statements and questions which led to a certain reaction of the subject - such leading questions by the filmmaker are many times cut out from films. In addition to her character, the film is stylistically personal, with the use of point of view shots and voice-over emphasising the active gaze and the active voice of the filmmaker.

Further to the subjective and reflexive elements in the filmmaking, this thesis gives significant weight to the personal aspects within the practice, in that both the methodology and the discussion provide personal accounts in the analysis of the filmmaking process. In this sense, practice-based research allows the filmmaker a space beyond that available in the artistic production (the films, in this case) for in-depth reflection on her own work.

## **Practice as Research**

The growing recognition of artistic research as form of knowledge production has allowed academia to open its gates to practitioners that will explore their own practice through a practice-based research, that is: 'an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice' (Candy 2006: 3). This first hand reflection on the practice offers two things: First, it reveals the personal dimensions of the research 'since creative arts research is often motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns, it operates not only on the basis

of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit knowledge' (Barrett 2014: 4). In addition to this aspect, first hand reflection involves a personal account that could only be provided by the creators of the artistic work and not by scholars. As such, it allows thorough exploration of the entire creative process and not just the final product (the artwork). By exposing the process and the personal aspects of the artistic practice, many hidden layers can be revealed in the artwork, allowing an opportunity for deeper ethical and artistic scrutiny of the practice.

Such an understanding of the importance of the personal dimensions and of exploring the process not merely the product, is even more significant when considering the ethical aspects of documentary filmmaking. If the production of any piece of art involves an attempted representation of the real, in documentary the artistic practice involves social actors. That is, not only the representation of actual societies, but the involvement of individuals in the film. Representing existing people, as I will go on to discuss, makes documentary filmmaking profoundly challenging in ethical terms.

### **The Need for Practice as Research in Documentary**

Nash argues that when discussing ethics, scholars address documentary films in general:

pointing to principles that might govern documentary making in whatever form it might take. Yet there is clearly something different about autobiographical family-focused documentary as compared to investigative, journalistic documentary ... Because each mode differs in terms of narrative, truth claims, audience expectations, and filmmaking technique, the ethical questions raised by each mode differ. (2011: 227)

Sanders contends that too often scholars and filmmakers tend to discuss ethics in relation to finished films or scenes, when the filmmaking is actually a process, suggesting, therefore, that scholars should:

include empirical data about documentary filmmakers' experiences and opinions in our research to understand what moral issues filmmakers really encounter in their work, what decisions or choices

filmmakers make to deal with them, what contexts are relevant in the process, and how filmmakers think about ethics ... What happens in filmmakers' everyday practice can serve as a starting point for reflection on documentary filmmaking on a level beyond singular scenes and singular "good" or "bad" actions ... The film, the final product, is a result of a production process. In this production process moral questions may arise, and filmmakers have to decide the right thing to do. This process may not end up in the final film. (2010: 529–530)

In light of the above, the purpose of this research has a value beyond the investigation of the proposed documentary method and the documentary filmmaking aspects, that is: to expose *ethical aspects* within the *process* of filmmaking (pre-filming, production and reception), *by the filmmaker*. It will offer the specificity that Nash (2011) believes lacks in the discussion, as the context of this research is first person ethnographic documentary filmmaking. Films that are highly subjective, yet deal with community representation, may raise different ethical issues to other documentary modes and approaches.

Another aspect which makes this case highly distinctive is that the researched filmmaking centres significantly on personal encounters and interactions with many subjects. When considering ethics in documentary literature, much scholarly attention has been paid to the filmmaker/subject relationship, yet usually in the light of protecting the subjects, with an emphasis on documenting sensitive cases, such as those involving war zones, refuges, victims of violence and subjects who cannot represent themselves. Additionally, there has been an emphasis on long-term relationships between the filmmaker and subjects. In contrast, in this researched filmmaking method, the subjects are not in a sensitive situation per se, and there is a short-term relationship.

Submitted together with the films, this thesis wishes to offer some insights, both general and very specific, into the documentary practice, which are summarised below.

## **Research Methodology**

Following the experimental documentary method developed throughout the filmmaking process of *My Kosher Shifts*, and with the aim of developing this

method via the making of two more documentary films, the following key elements were identified for this research:

- The filmmaker is in a customer service position.
- The location is a business that is located within the community.
- The abandoned camera technique: filming is carried out using an unmanned camera with no crew members.
- The filmed subjects are not being chosen prior to the shooting, but rather are individuals who happen to be in the location.
- Conversation is utilised rather than formalised interview.

### **Research Aims**

This research explores the potential of experimental documentary method for capturing the encounter between filmmaker and subjects. More specifically, it challenges traditional documentary interview dynamics by encouraging immediate intimacy with random subjects in communities where the filmmaker is an outsider. Substantively, it looks at how the documentary filmmaking technique works in the context of engagements with what are often considered 'closed' communities. It concerns how the filmmaker manages to embed herself into the community and be accepted by it; how she creates a dialogue with subjects, captures the dialogue, and then edits it into a documentary. Reflecting on encounters with an ultraorthodox Jewish hotel in London, a Christian-Arab hair salon in Haifa, and a Jewish settlement on the West Bank, the research inquires how the specific encounter of the filmmaker and subjects in each case affects the way in which the community is represented through a documentary film. It asks how the nature of the encounter, such as the characteristics of each community, the shooting location and the position of the filmmaker in that space, shape the way the film is structured and edited and its aesthetics. Moreover, through its practice the research explores issues about Jewish and Israeli identities, their implication in ideas of community and place, and the potential of documentary film for exploring these matters. The research also aims to contribute knowledge concerning how a documentary filmmaker deals with everyday situations in her practice, to expose the personal elements within

the filmmaking process, and to shed light on how ethical matters are handled by contemporary filmmakers.

## Research Questions

The two documentary films together with the previous work (*My Kosher Shifts*) will examine the proposed documentary method, exploring these questions:

- How does this documentary method work in different documentary conditions and with different communities?
- What are the strengths of this method and what are its limitations and weaknesses?
- What is the uniqueness of this documentary approach in relation to other ethnographic and documentary approaches?

The submission consists of three films and this written thesis:

## The Films

The creative component of this research contains three documentary films: the previous work, *My Kosher Shifts*, and the two documentaries that were produced specifically for this research, *Women in Sink* and *Café Tekoa*.

*My Kosher Shifts* – this short documentary is the previous work on which this research was based. The film was shot in an ultraorthodox hotel in North London, and captured the conversations of the filmmaker who worked there as the receptionist, and those of various guests.



Figure 1: *My Kosher Shifts* (2010)

*Women in Sink* – this mid-length documentary film was shot in a popular Christian Arab hair salon in Haifa, Israel, a city with a mixed population of Arabs and Jews. In order to shoot this film, following the documentary method, the filmmaker worked as a hair washer, and with a rigged camera above the washing basin, she documented her conversation with the salon clients: Arab and Jewish women.



Figure 2: *Women in Sink* (2015)

*Café Tekoa* – this feature length documentary was filmed in Tekoa, a West-Bank Jewish settlement, where the filmmaker rented a flat in order to live within the community of settlers. In this project, after giving up on the first location (a pizzeria) the filmmaker struggled to find a customer service position within the settlement which would offer the necessary traffic of locals. There were also difficulties with immersion into the community owing to the politically-charged relationship with settlers and their fear of media coverage. The filmmaker eventually settled in a coffee table outside the local bakery, shooting her conversations with many settlers, using unmanned equipment.



Figure 3: *Café Tekoa* (2017)

## Overview of Chapters

The written component of the dissertation serves as a reflection on the filmmaking process, providing a personal account and analysis of the practice. The thesis chapters, except for the Introduction and Conclusion, are written in the first person, with the motivating principle that ‘a general feature of practice-based research projects is that personal interest and experience, rather than objective “disinterestedness” motivates the research process’ (Barrett and Bolt 2007: 5). Therefore, in order to disclose these personal aspects, and owing to the films’ highly subjective nature, this thesis speaks in the voice of the filmmaker.

Chapters 1 and 2 of the thesis comprise the literature and practice review. Chapter 1 provides a contextual and historical overview, locating the documentary approach of this research. As both the thesis and the three films deal with ethnographic representation, the chapter opens with an introduction of the complex history of the two fields: ethnography and documentary, and the growing acceptance that the former developed to the latter. The chapter continues with a description of the emergence of first person documentary and the different approaches of first person films.

Chapter 2 offers a conceptual review of some key aspects that derive from the negotiation between the three elements that govern the documentary filmmaking process: filmmaker, subjects and viewers. The chapter presents a contemporary perspective on authorship, subjects and viewers. It describes how a more subjective form of filmmaking could actually suggest an alternative honesty to viewers. It continues by presenting documentary approaches that were born from the aim to overcome the subjectivity and superiority of the filmmaker, such as, more filmmaker/subjects balanced techniques, or, reflexivity as an ethical mean, by revealing more of the production process in order to expose more of the reality that was captured. It concludes, however, that such efforts cannot guarantee more ethical filmmaking.



Chapter 3 and 4 present the research method and methodology. Chapter 3 defines the documentary key elements of the method, and describes its ethnographic approach for documenting communities. Chapter 4 provides a detailed a description of each of the three projects' filmmaking process, and explores the different stages of the process – the pre-filming, the production and post-production – from the very personal experience of making these films. It will allow the reader of this thesis insights into many details that are useful for the subsequent reflective chapter.

Chapter 5 discusses the outcomes of the practice in the light of the research questions and the wider context of documentary filmmaking. Combined with Chapter 4, this chapter provides critical reflection on the ethical elements involved in the triangle at the heart of the filmmaking process, that of filmmaker, subject and viewer. The chapter ends with a summary of the results and conclusions.

# Chapter 1 | FIRST PERSON, COMMUNITY

## 1. The New Ethnographic Film

*'The effort of thinking cinematically about ethnography or thinking ethnographically through film results in a new and different understanding of each of these disciplines. Both film and ethnography involve particular ways of viewing the world. Ethnographic film should represent the best of both ethnography and film.'* (Heider 1976: 7)

For decades, media scholars have been trying to define the documentary film while anthropology thinkers have been debating whether and which films function as legitimate tools for ethnographic research. In contrast, outside of academia (and indeed, many times within) people have continued the process of making films, capturing the world around them, without worrying if their films fall neatly into these definitions and often producing films which question such categorisation.

This chapter opens by presenting the change in the nature of the ethnographic film and the shift in the relationship between ethnographic and documentary filmmaking. This discussion is initiated by my own documentary project, which itself infiltrates ethnographic filmmaking's territories by dealing with communities and their representation. As a student of media and documentary filmmaking, my project represents the kind of films that have, in the past, been considered by the ethnographic field to be invasive. Despite this however, the screening of my films, *My Kosher Shifts* and *Women in Sink* at dozens of ethnographic film festivals and in academic ethnographic programmes, demonstrate a shift in the acceptance of the wider genre of documentary by the field of anthropology. This thesis therefore also considers this change.

## **Ethnography and Documentary Filmmaking: A Complex Relationship**

For many years, the anthropological field has been trying to regulate filmmaking as a source of ethnography, setting guidelines within the field in order to protect

its scientific nature and to distinguish between any documentary and “proper” ethnographic film. Peter Loizos (1993) discusses the difficulties from the perspective of the ethnographic field, in defining what precisely makes certain documentaries ethnographic films. He compares the two most significant definitions of Ruby (1975) and Heider (1976), and concludes that both argue for the necessity of ‘a significant input of anthropological research in an ethnographic film’ (Loizos 1993: 7).

Despite an ambivalence regarding the medium of film within the field of ethnography, however, at present, many ethnographic researchers have been adding the visual aspect to their research when documenting a culture, as the visual has become perhaps the most dominant element in our culture. Technological changes have increased this trend and, as Paul Basu notes, ‘today, in the era of low-cost, palm-sized digital camcorders, more anthropologists than ever are recording moving images as a routine part of their fieldwork’ (2008: 96). This shift has prompted the ethnographic field to reconsider its boundaries with filmmaking and to welcome the practice, evident in the proliferation of filmmaking training programmes for students and the increasing numbers of academic ethnographic film festivals.

Marcus Banks explores the complexity of trying to define the ethnographic film by addressing the viewers’ reaction to the film – ‘an area with which anthropologists seem to have least concerned themselves’ (1992: 124). He argues that ‘ethnographicness’ could have different meanings to the academic field than to filmmakers and to audiences (Banks 1992: 127). Banks suggests criteria for a definition that takes into account the filmmakers – their intentions and their treatment of the events that they document – as well as the viewers and their reactions to the film. Yet his intention is still to set categories for the field, in order for people to recognise which films are true ethnographic films, in a climate of many documentaries that look and feel like ones.

Around the same time, Nichols also addressed the reaction of the viewers when discussing the ethnographic film. However, as a documentary scholar, who is not principally concerned with protecting the field of anthropology, he

appreciates the new ethnographic film, through which 'the voice of the traditional ethnographic filmmaker has become one voice among many'; the new ethnographic filmmaking, he says, 'no longer occupies a singular niche', but rather, blurs 'the boundaries and genres that represent distinctions between fiction and documentary, politics and culture, here and there' (1994: 64). Nichols emphasises the effect the new ethnographic film has upon its audience: 'for those situated in the larger, non-specialist audience, outside of anthropology per se, these other voices often seem more incisive, informative and engaging' (1994: 64). Nichols criticises the conventions of the anthropological institutional approach, of a separation of 'us' '(objective, professional, "disciplined")' from 'them', the ones being represented, asking: 'in what way does this representation matter to those it represents?' (1994: 65). Criticising the 'disavowal of aesthetic intent' in anthropological traditional filmmaking, he writes: 'if aesthetic considerations should happen to slip in, despite the rough and tumble effort to catch as catch can, safeguards must be taken' (1994: 72).

Weinberger (1996) takes this critique a few steps further. He opens his essay, 'The Camera People', with the words:

There is a tribe, known as the Ethnographic Filmmakers... who worship a terrifying deity known as Reality, whose eternal enemy is its evil twin, Art. They believe that to remain vigilant against this evil, one must devote oneself to a set of practices known as Science. (1996: 137-138).

Weinberger points out that the literal definition of ethnographic film is, 'a representation on film of a people' (1996: 133). He concedes that this is an unlimited definition that could accommodate many different films, but argues that the ethnographic field has narrowed it by a set of rules, in the name of realist representation, objectivity and science.

As Weinberger (1996) argues, this tension between art and science is a core element in the tension between the fields of documentary and anthropology. The difference in the approach to filmmaking between the two fields stems from the fundamental difference in the aim of filmmaking for the two: a film as a tool, for ethnography, rather than a film as a product, for documentary. When film is

a tool, serving as a visual experiment for an ethnographic enquiry, not only does it have to follow research codes, it also does not need to stand on its own as a product. For the documentary filmmakers, by contrast, the film *is* the product; it is the aim of its maker and the aspiration behind it is to engage audiences, entertain and make an impact – all following artistic and aesthetic values. A successful exploration of these differences is provided in the documentary film, *I, Filming* (2010), in which Chinese film and video student, Li Jun, follows ten postgraduate anthropology students on their filmmaking process as a part of their research into the community of Stone Forest in Yunnan, and compare their filmmaking process with her own.

It is interesting to consider that in the late 1960s, when observational documentary cinema emerged, there was less tension between ethnography and documentary filmmaking. Thanks to the new 16 mm technology of light equipment and synchronous sound, anthropologists started to use filmmaking in their research, and this new cinematic style proved quite similar to their working practice. The method was used to collect data, to show things as they were, from a distance and without interpretation (example filmmakers include: David McDougal, John Marshall, Herb Di Gioia and David Hancock). However, when the documentary field started to doubt the idea of realism and objectivity in representation – and therefore question the observational mode – this affected the relationship between ethnography and filmmaking.

Cultural, social and political changes in the late 1960s – feminism and post-structuralism in particular – have since changed the idea of representation, which is at the heart of documentary filmmaking as well as of ethnography. The personal has become political, the certain has become uncertain, representational facts have turned into subjective suggestions. The colonial idea of an exotic ‘other’ that needs to be represented by ‘the field’, has changed too, and has shed a critical light on the ethnographic gaze. This crisis was the ground for new modes of non-fictional films to be developed, ones that are more reflexive, subjective, experimental and performative. These modes have further challenged the relationship between ethnography and documentary filmmaking because of the former’s self-definition as scientific.

It was only when the ethnographic field started to abandon this idea of pure realism and objectivity that it became 'freed from its social science origins' and began to welcome new genres, according to Russell (1999: xii). Russell discusses the transformation of ethnographic cinema as a result of the cultural change of the idea of realism, stating that:

As a practice grounded in colonial culture, ethnographic film has exploited cinematic realism as a form of preservation, but that realism is now in decay. As archaic textual forms become legible as discourses of imperialism, as the gaze of power is dethroned, new histories can emerge. (Russell, 1999: xviii)

### **The New Ethnographic Film: Moving Beyond Definitions**

It is problematic to narrowly label the ethnographic film as a category within documentary filmmaking only according to academia parameters. We must ask if the field offers the sole authority on the matter. What if there were a film which was made more orthodoxly, following the anthropological codes, but the subjected community feels that it does not, at all, capture them properly? What if they feel that a first person documentary, which exposes the story of one small family, would make a better job in representing their reality as a culture? And viewers' perspectives must also be considered: what if they feel that they have learned much more about a society from a documentary than from an ethnographic film focusing on the same community?

The anthropological field, as well as other social sciences, has somehow awakened from the dream of objectiveness, with the understanding that any researcher who collects and documents data, whether they actively participate or passively observe, is a human being and therefore the writing of the research is naturally affected by the subjectivity of the author. Geertz has referred to this dilemma as the 'signature issue', arguing that the voice of the ethnographer inevitably penetrates into her writing, which is inherently subjective, and therefore she should inscribe the participatory dimension of the personal experience to her research (1988: 10). In this light, a more subjective ethnographic filmmaking approach can help to unmask this personal process,

so that adding the subjective aspect to an ethnographic film could make it more rounded, self-aware and complete.

The cultural world today seems less obsessed with definitions and with acting within a certain definition's terrain. A wide range of non-fictional filmmaking forms have been explored, and filmmakers, subjects and viewers alike are more aware of the process of filmmaking and of being filmed. The new documentary film and, as a sub-genre, the new ethnographic film, are more subjective and performative; they are less certain and more self-conscious. Bruzzi argues that performance has always been a part of documentary and that the main shift is the acceptance of the performative nature of documentary, both by filmmakers and by viewers, stating that: 'it is not that reality has changed but rather the ways in which documentary – mainstream as well as independent – has chosen to represent it' (2000: 252).

Considering the many academic ethnographic film festivals nowadays, it seems to be accepted by the academic field that it is impossible to hermetically seal the ethnographic film as a members-only territory within the wider genre of documentary filmmaking. In addition to films that have been made as a part of ethnographic research, festival programmes also feature many documentaries made by filmmakers that do not necessarily have much or any knowledge of anthropology. Some are more obvious – of a more ethnographic nature (anthropology oriented, observational or filmed in non-Western societies) – but among them there are different styles of artistic documentaries that expose the reality of a society, even if it is through one person's story and even if it is through the filmmaker's own story.

## **2. First Person Documentary**

In the 1990s, first person documentary films have been a major contributor to the return of documentaries to the big screen. Films with an 'I' or a 'me' in their titles in which the filmmakers personally address their subjects and audience, have proved that documentary can gain an international-wide popularity, even reaching blockbuster status as shown by *Roger and Me* (1989) by Michael

Moore (who is considered to be the father of this revolution) and Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me* (2004).

Predominantly made in North America until the 1990s, first person documentaries have since spread across the globe and become one of the most dominant and popular contemporary documentary sub-genre in diverse geographical regions. This popularity has resulted in a scholarly attention to first person documentaries in recent decades. Different scholars have been analysing the personal documentary from various angles: Rascaroli (2009) has focused on the essay film; Dovey (2000) on the confessional form; Moran (2002), as well as Ishizuka and Zimmerman (2007), explored the home movies; others have emphasised the performativity in the first person films (Bruzzi 2000; Nichols 2001); and a significant emphasis has been given by several authors to the analysis of the autobiographical, or authoethnographic documentary, such as Lane (2002), Renov (2004) and Russell (1999).

The term 'first person' is wide and can accommodate all of the above forms. Devoting her entire book to first person documentary, Lebow (2012) prefers this term rather than 'autobiographical documentary', as she believes that 'subjective as it may always be, the exploration of the film-maker's own biography is a much less centrally important pursuit in these films than one might expect'. Be it about a person, a community, phenomenon or an event, Lebow contends that 'first person' is an umbrella term for documentary of any form and style, which 'endeavours to articulate rather than occlude or suppress the position of the filmmaker'. She argues that it is 'foremost about a mode of address: these films "speak" from the articulated point of view of the filmmaker who readily acknowledges her subjective position' (2012: 1-2).

### **The Emergence of First Person Films**

The birth of this personal film practice has been a result of technological developments, as well as political, social and cultural changes. Self-portrait films have been made by filmmakers from the late 1960s, thanks to technological developments of lightweight camera, although only from the 1990s have they been considered as documentary films by the field. Hitherto,



first person films have been treated as experimental films and practised mainly in the realm of avant-garde filmmaking.

The American avant-garde film movement has pioneered the development of self-portrait films. In his exploration of the history of the American autobiographical film, Lane (2002) emphasises the avant-garde movement as the major cinematic factor in the birth of self-portrait films. This has offered an alternative approach to the Hollywood commercial film industry, by using small, independent productions and single persons or minimal crew shooting and editing. In terms of the content and narration, it has shifted the focus to authentic and domestic themes of everyday life.

Experimental directors such as Jonas Mekas and Stan Brakhage, captured everyday life experiences from their point of view. In the art world, around the 1970s, conceptual artists started to work with video, focusing on their physical bodies as central instrument (Renov 2008). However, this was too early for the documentary field – at the time terrified by the idea of subjective truth – to accept these personal approaches. As Lebow argues, ‘the artist’s vision could be foregrounded at a time when the documentarist’s had to be suppressed’ (Lebow 2012: 5).

The two other roots of first person filmmaking within film practice history, according to Lane, are the reaction of the American documentarists to the observational mode of direct cinema – at the time the dominant form of American documentary – and their attempts to challenge it by repositioning the filmmaker at the foreground of the film. The other root is the influence from European filmmakers who during the 1960s and 1970s had been experimenting in reflexive films, such as Jean Rouch and Jean-Luc Godard.

First person documentaries are a product of the video age, according to Kilborn and Izod (1997). The technical development of cheap camcorders made it possible for non-professionals to buy and use home cameras, and for families to document domestic events. Kilborn and Izod contend that first person documentaries share some of the home movie’s aesthetics, such as hand-held

camera and the different camera angles than those of the polished, professional filmmaking.

In a wider historical context, political and social revolutions – the feminist movement in particular – have influenced cinematic narration (Lane, Russell, Cannon, Renov). The rise of identity politics in the late 1960s in the US inspired tremendous changes to established ways of thinking and often placed the individual in the centre. Focus shifted to personal experience and revealed the complexity of individual identities. Identity politics also challenged the dominant white-heterosexual-middle-class-male gaze, and allowed self-representation for the overlooked, marginal and non-traditional voices of society. As Lane argues, 'Documentary became autobiographical when Americans who were involved in countercultural movements turned to autobiographical discourses as a form of politics. Personal themes, autobiographies, and self-representations informed much of US cultural life' (Lane 2002: 21).

Meyrowitz (1985) believes that television provided the basis for these social changes by changing the information flow between groups that had hitherto been physically isolated. He suggests that television allowed segregated groups, such as males and females, children and adults, superiors and subordinates, to learn about each other's behaviour and social knowledge. By breaking down the distinction between here and there, live and mediated, personal and public, this access, Meyrowitz believes, has changed the social reality; it has moved the dividing line between private and public behaviour towards the private, and has involved the public in issues that had been considered 'not our business'. He states, 'The president of the United States showed his operation scars to the nation as if all the people in the country were his intimate friends' (1985: 3).

Meyrowitz's analysis presents the role television has played in making the private and subjective an active interest of the public, which can be related to the rise of first person films. In a reciprocal fashion, first person mode has influenced television. From the 1990s, broadcasters have started to produce shows with a similar format to home movies or video diaries, and asked

'ordinary people' to record their lives, such as *Video Nation* (BBC, 1993-2001) in the UK, *The Ride* (ITVS, 1994) in the US, or *Palestinian Diaries* and *Settlers Diaries* (Ilan Ziv/Channel 4/IKON TV/NDR, 1990) in the Middle-East. Dovey (2000) investigates this popularity and the centrality of the confessional, subjective and autobiographical forms of 'first person media' on television from the 1990s, including video diaries, TV chat shows and reality TV. He emphasises the strong connection between documentary and television, which, he argues, is 'awash with burgeoning "documentary style" programmes' (2000: 2).

### **First Person, Cinematically Speaking**

In what they refer to as the 'licensing of subjectivity', Kilburn and Izod (1997) argue that first person films have a particular mandate in the documentary practice, to feature one individual's idiosyncratic observations of society:

We want to know how the filmmaker's view of the world differs from rather than confirms our own [therefore] imagination often supersedes observation in them, so that they have the potential to reverse one of the founding dictates of the documentary movement – that it should respect the objectivity of the outside world, if necessary, at the expense of subjectivity. (1997: 82-83)

Bruzzi (2000) addresses the subject of performativity as the organising principle of the new documentary. She emphasises the shift towards performative documentaries, which are self-consciously 'arty', expressive and reflexive, as they 'highlight the performative quality of documentary'. She claims that two categories could make a film performative: 'films that feature performative subjects and which visually are heavily styled and those that are inherently performative and feature the intrusive presence of the filmmaker' (2000: 155). Documentaries of the latter category are based around the performance of the filmmaker and of their subjects, so objected to in direct cinema. For instance, the active viewer can give meaning by the interaction between the filmmaker and subjects, and the interaction between performance and reality. According to Russell (1999) the search for identity and the blurriness between personal history and the public sphere are at the heart of this genre of auto-ethnography. Through personal journeys, such as traveling,

familial encounters or confessional diaries, filmmakers explore their identity, and the prominent themes are of displacement, immigration, exile and transnationality.

Russell (1999) discusses the following three features through which subjectivity is inscribed in the autobiographical documentary: by being a 'speaker' (the most common feature, the voice-over); by being a 'seer' – through the origin of the gaze; and by being 'seen' – the filmmaker as a participator in the film. She claims that through these three levels, as well as editing (through juxtaposition or the use of irony, for example) the filmmaker writes an identity (1999: 277).

The category 'seen' could apply to a wide range of participating filmmakers. The presence of the filmmaker in documentaries varies according to the reason for the inclusion of the author in the document. Some filmmakers appear in their documentary as a reflexive act which aims to unmask the production process, others are there to give a frame to their personally motivated journey, while others are not only narrators, but function as main characters. As a documentary maker who considers her performance crucial to the filmmaking process, I would like to stress the element of participation and suggest a fourth category which represents the very active role of some of the participating filmmakers. Keeping Russell's use of 's' words, I would suggest 'star' – the filmmaker as a (main) character, where her performance in the film and her performed persona affect the subjects' performance and which define the film. The performance of the star-filmmakers is one of the most influencing component of their films, if not the most. Take, for instance, Ross McElwee, with his uncertain, curious and non-judgmental documentary persona, compared to Michael Moore's provocative, reporter-on-a-mission, certain one.

### **First Person Singular / First Person Plural**

Many filmmakers use the camera to directly explore their own history, memory and identity, by focusing on themselves and their relationship with a familial other – a parent, a child, a sibling or a partner. *Sink or Swim* (1993) by Su Friedrich, *Tarnation* (2003) by Jonathan Caouette or Alan Berliner's *Nobody's*

*Business* (1996) are examples of this autobiographical form. Lebow terms this 'first person singular' – documentaries that 'directly attempt to represent an individual filmmaker's own subjectivity in relation to his or her larger collectives' (2012: 7).

Renov (2004) refers to these films as 'domestic-ethnography', as they couple, 'self-interrogation and ethnography's concern for the documentation of the lives of others'; usually a family member 'who serves less as a source of disinterested social scientific research than a mirror or foil for the self' (2004: 216). In the spirit of identity politics, the personal story serves as a hook to the political; it is the vehicle with which to infiltrate the public sphere. Russell (1999), who uses the term 'auto-ethnography', contends that 'identity is no longer a transcendental or essential self' but 'a representation of the self as a performance'. She adds that 'in the politicisation of the personal, identities are frequently played out among several cultural discourses, be they ethnic, national, sexual, racial, and/or class based' (1999: 276). The edginess of Alan Berliner's father in *Nobody's Business* (1996), when the younger is constantly pushing him to react to their family history, exposes us to the emotional affinity (or enmity) of a second generation Jew in America to his East-European origins, just as by spreading the family 8 mm footages and audio recordings in *I for India* (2005), Sandhya Suri gives us a unique glimpse into a family album, a piece of personal history of Indian immigrants in England. As Renov concludes his discussion about the mini-genre, the dynamic of family life is emphasised as the most fundamental (yet not universal) crucible of psychosexual identity. He states that if domestic ethnography tells us anything about cultures and societies, 'it does so only in miniature' (2004: 229).

However, some first person films directly address issues of a wider radius than the very personal and private. In these, filmmakers place themselves at the centre of a larger political or social exploration, though their voice is clearly heard through their treatment of it. These are termed by Lebow (2012) 'first person plural' documentaries. Their subject could be a community, in a form of a diary, like *Lost, Lost, Lost* (1976) the autobiographical diary of Jonas Mekas which tells the story of the Lithuanian immigrants in New York, or Perlov's

*Yoman* (1983), which concerns the turbulent reality of Israel through the eyes of an immigrant. Such documentaries often focus on a journey, such as Ross McElwee's romantic journey in *Sherman's March* (1986), which reveals an intimate portrait of the Southern US society, or Jennifer Fox's *Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman* (2006), which starts as a very private enquiry and becomes a transnational document, exposing the thoughts of women from almost every continent. 'First person plural' documentaries may also comprise an exploration of a phenomenon, such as *Gleaners and I* (2000), in which Varda travels in France to explore the act of gleaning, but throughout reflects on aspects of herself including her filmmaking, her body and her identity.

These films are often of a more essayistic nature and 'incorporate the "I" of the writer into a commentary on the world that makes no grand scientific or totalizing claims, but is uncertain, tentative and speculative' (Russell 1999: 277). However, some filmmakers do make a much clearer stand, speak in a polemical voice and use their film as an argumentative, critical intervention. Examples of the genre might focus on international phenomena, such as Renzo Marten's, *Enjoy Poverty* (2009), in which he bravely and provocatively addresses the question of 'who owns poverty'. They may also be about a public matter or public figure, such as Broomfield's obsessive hunt for Thatcher in *Tracking down Maggie* (1994), or Avi Mograbi's, *How I Learned to Overcome My Fear and Love Ariel Sharon* (1997).

From David Perlov to Yuli Cohen and Avi Mograbi, there have been many Israeli documentarists who have used their cameras to address political issues in Israel - indeed, there seems to be a preponderance of first person documentarists in Israel, argues Lebow (2012). Israeli filmmakers, according to Dittmar (2012), are torn between their 'belief in a Jewish birthright to the country ... and a recoil from the brutal consequences of that belief'. Dittmar claims that since first person form legitimates subjectivity by negotiating the relation between private and public, 'it creates space where Israeli filmmakers can examine their relation to their 'Israeliness' as a national, cultural and, indeed, familial template for their individual and collective identity' (2012: 160-161). Duvdevani (2010) also addresses this conflict of the Israeli identity and

suggests that Israeli filmmakers turn the camera on themselves as a therapeutic, confessional act. Through first person films, which he names 'i-Movies', Duvdevani argues that these filmmakers try to take action and responsibility in order to redeem themselves from the conscious guilt they carry owing to the legacy of their Zionist "fathers", by sharing it with their audience.

Rascaroli (2009), who regards first person films as belonging to the essayistic cinema field, views the essay as a mode of address. One of the key elements of the essay film, she contends, is 'the direct address to the receiver' (2009: 37). The essayist filmmaker 'does not pretend to discover truths to which he holds the key', but rather offers a personal, subjective meditation, and thought-provoking reflection, which 'allows the answers to emerge somewhere else, precisely in the position occupied by the embodied spectator' – this spectator, she argues, will either accept or reject this personal reflection (2009: 36).

In my first person documentaries, I aim to offer such a subjective meditation. Through my performance, subjectivity and reflexivity, I wish to explore different voices of the community and uncover layers of their identities; through the interaction between our selves and the mutual otherness. I do not aspire to present or prove an argument, per se, however, I freely express my opinions throughout my conversations with my filmed subjects and through my gaze and the editing of the films. As first person plural documentaries, my films: *My Kosher Shifts* and *Women in Sink* and *Café Tekoa*, are not autobiographical documentaries, focusing on me alone. Nevertheless, they are personal journeys, which speak in my voice and sometimes expose the complexity of my own identity.

## Chapter 2 | MAKING, PARTICIPATING, VIEWING

### Subjectivity and Ethics Between Filmmaker, Subjects and Viewers

In 1980, an article about reflexivity in ethnographic filmmaking, focusing on the producer, the process and the product, was published by Jay Ruby. In 1997, he commented on his own, 'rather embarrassing oversight', in the original paper: he had missed a concern with the audience (1997: 156). The audience is indeed a core component of the documentary filmmaking process, as this process, as well as the final product, is a result of the relationship between filmmaker, subjects and viewers.

With the rise of postmodern philosophy in the mid-20th century, the philosophical perception of the relations between author, text and reader changed, leading to new disciplines, such as reception theory and reader-response criticism. Post-structural thinking no longer regards the author, nor the text, as a source of certainty, stability and objective knowledge, but rather as a subjective, suggestive and potentially biased one. There has been a paradigmatic shift in the idea of truth, and the relationship between reality and representation – from a Western colonial perspective of truth towards cultural relativism. Similarly, in the human sciences, there has been a realisation that the writing of any research is inevitably subjective (Geertz 1988 and Ruby 1980).

### Authorship in Documentary Filmmaking

Such postmodern conceptions of authorship, reality and representation, have influenced filmmakers and inspired their cinematic productions. By challenging conventions of the real, and combining traditional documentary aesthetics with techniques more commonly associated with fiction, filmmakers have stressed the fluidity of reality and fiction; of illusion and manipulation. Examples of such works include *David Holzman's Diary* (1967), a fictional documentary-like diary, stressing the boundaries of fiction and documentary. Subverting conventional notions of authorship, John Smith's playful short *The Girl Chewing Gum* (1976)



presents East London street footage as film rushes with a director's voice-over. As Smith's piece progresses it becomes clear that the voice-over itself is fictional, responding to the events, and not vice-versa. From the 1980s, a new genre based upon the approaches taken in these works deemed 'mockumentary' has emerged, with popular examples including Rob Reiner's *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984) and contemporary manifestations in sitcoms like Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant's *The Office* (2001-2003).

As the flagship of reality representation in the world of cinema, and a field which often purports to investigate anthropological, social and political matters by translating them to cinema, this acknowledgment of the impossibility of capturing "truth" on camera – and the understanding that truth is relative and subjective – was initially perceived as a crisis for scholarly documentary:

In the first flush of postmodernist thought, sceptics and doubters were widely given to disparaging documentary on the grounds that its claims to authenticity rested on no more than an illusion of objectivity – and objectivity, it seemed, was no longer what it used to be, but rather another form of subjectivity. (Chanan 2008: 3)

However, this shift in thought also marked a turning point in documentary practice. It has led to two concurrent and intertwined shifts in perception: first, the documentarist is no longer considered a certain, objective authority, rather, she is a social actor, a participant in the reality she captures, a reality which is filtered according to her *self* – psychologically, culturally and politically. Second, the audience – receivers of information, a passive entity – can be perceived as *viewers*, that is, active interpreters, who more independently derive meanings, doubt and criticise. Viewing is also subjective from a hermeneutic perspective, as viewers differ from one another and therefore derive meanings differently, influenced by both cultural and individual contexts. Documentary filmmakers and viewers 'have, much more readily than theorists, accepted documentary's inability to give an undistorted, purely reflective picture of reality', according to Bruzzi (2000: 6). This acceptance cultivated more subjective, performative and reflexive documentary approaches, in the shape of films that allow the conscious viewer to derive their own meanings and messages. Audiences have

been offered a more active role by documentarists who expose hitherto hidden production process, stress the limitations of filmmaking and create work which is unapologetically personal. These are films that propose 'a complex documentary truth arising from an insurmountable compromise between subject and recording' (Bruzzi 2000: 6).

With this notion that the documentary filmmaking process exists in the space between the maker, the participants and the audience, this thesis aims to explore the documentary filmmaking method and practice as a *process*; one which involves this triangle – of filmmaker, filmed subjects and viewers – taking each of these aspects into account, while also considering the three as a whole. In order to better explore these three components in this practice-based research, the current chapter will focus on the contemporary filmmaker, subjects and viewers, through a discussion of authorship and power dynamics, the interaction between filmmaker and subjects, and the issues of subjectivity, reflexivity and ethics in documentary filmmaking.

### **Making, Participating, Viewing**

*'For every documentary there are at least three stories that intertwine: the filmmaker's, the film's and the audience's.'* (Nichols 2001: 61)

The filmmaker is at the top of this pyramid, being the one in control throughout the entire filmmaking process – pre-filming, filming, editing, marketing and distribution – each and every choice made by the filmmaker shapes the film and its character: 'he [sic] selects topics, people, vistas, angles, lens, juxtapositions, sounds, words', and each selection echoes his point of view, 'whether he is aware of it or not, whether he acknowledges it or not' (Barnouw 1993: 287). Although some filmmakers aim for balanced power dynamics or apply the principles of subject-generated documentary filmmaking, the control over the film (as well as the ethical obligations) nevertheless remain in their hands (as I will show later in this chapter). However, in order to thoroughly investigate a documentary practice, one must also consider the subjects and the viewers as fundamental layers in the process of filmmaking.

Filmed subjects have an enormous impact on the nature of the film, through their self, their performance and their dynamic with the filmmaker. Much has been written about the interaction between filmmaker and subjects being a central aspect of the documentary practice, and even in the most observational documentary approaches in which the filmmakers cut themselves out, traces of this interaction are still tangible. You can feel, for instance, the intimate and warm dynamic on the set of Heinzerling's *Cutie and the Boxer* (2013) reflected in the openness of the two protagonists, even though the filmmakers are absent in the film itself .

The viewers are at the very end of the process, but this end is the beginning of another process: the reading, which can give the film fresh life and new meanings of its own. Spectators receive texts differently and derive different meanings, depending on their social background and identities. Fiske (1987) argues, for example, that even if there has been an intended message by the maker of the media text, the audiences are also producers of meanings; the text itself is polysemic and, as such, is open to endless ideas, interpretations and meanings, even subversive ones.

### **Contemporary Perspectives**

Our understanding of the three entities that of the filmmaker, subject and viewer, has evolved throughout the history of documentary practice, owing to the evolution of media, both culturally and technologically. These changes are the result of three intervening factors. Firstly, the development and mass production of electronic personal cameras and devices has exposed and, to a large extent, actively involved the general public in the craft of filming. Secondly, people have become more documentary-literate, by being exposed to many different kinds of non-fictional genres on television, cinema and on the Internet. Thirdly, people's tendency to perform has increased. Through social media people create first person content and are, more than ever, experienced in performing and editing what they wish to project through such media. In terms of documentary filmmaking, these three factors have all created more trained

subjects and viewers; more knowledgeable about the product and its production, they have become more aware, critical and even manipulative.

## **1. Digital Technology**

Digital technology developments have empowered a huge proportion of the global filmgoing public, and not just professionals, to practice filming. This first-hand experience has had a great effect on the documentary process, according to Ellis, as it brings self-awareness to all those who are involved in the process. Both the filmmaker and the subjects have an 'imaginary audience' in their minds throughout their performance and the process of filmmaking, and on the consumer end, the eventual viewers, nowadays, often have sophisticated assumptions about how filmmakers and institutions function and collaborate, which determine how they interpret what they watch (2012: 2).

## **2. Exposure to Non-fiction**

The contemporary digital world is flooded with non-fiction content, whether professional or amateur, online, on TV or in the cinema, entertaining or informative. While watching and interpreting, viewers question and make assumptions about what they watch. They question the performance of the filmmaker and the subjects, the authenticity of the story, and the interests behind it. With films such as Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman's *Catfish* (2010), viewers may ask themselves if what they are watching really happened or whether a film which has the aesthetic appearance of having been edited in director's bedroom could actually be one with a massive production behind it?

This scepticism is part of a wider tendency to suspect things that have the stamp of the factual, an awareness of the possibility that we, as audiences, can and often are being manipulated. The word 'manipulate', it seems, has had a change of usage 'from a pejorative term to a useful neutral term for the textual process itself', as Ellis argues, after collecting data from his students' online forum, which he used in order to explore their practical ethical beliefs regarding documentary (2012: 134). When manipulation is a legitimate, inherent element in the process of making films, in the eyes of educated, contemporary viewers, it has implications on the ethical dimensions of documentary.

In 1993, the BBC featured *Can I Ask You a Personal Question?*, a TV film about the making of the documentary TV series, *Man Alive*. Made between 1965 and 1981, the series had focused on ordinary people, asking them about their personal, private worlds – about their feelings, love, obsessions, life and death. In the TV film, *Man Alive*'s directors, hosts and researchers reflect on the series, which was exceptional at the time. When asked about the manipulation of the interviewees by the production in the series, one researcher reports that she actually wanted to “warn people from themselves” as they were opening up to the host and the camera, so naturally and freely, when at the time they did not have knowledge of how it could be used and edited.

The case would be different today as contemporary subjects with better understanding of media proliferation have a heightened awareness of the possible uses of their appearances and image. In the last scene of *My Kid Could Paint That* (2007), Bar-Lev, the filmmaker who followed the family who comprise the focus of the piece, films a form of investigation/confession in their living room. His hope is to get the parents to confess that they have not been entirely honest about the art supposedly made by their five-year-old daughter. At one point the mother starts to cry and Bar-Lev says “I’m sorry that I have brought this into your house”, to which she replies, right before bursting out of the set, “it’s documentary gold”.

If in the past viewers have suspected the filmmaker, and scholars have been concerned with the risk of subjects being abused by a manipulative filmmaker, today the subjects are being questioned as well. Viewers keep in mind the chance that subjects are over-performing to the camera, using the situation for personal promotion or fame, or even manipulating the viewers as well as the filmmaker; As Brian Winston contends, ‘sometimes it is the participants who seek out, and even exploit, the filmmaker’ (2005: 190). A notable example for such a case is Broinowski’s *Forbidden Lie\$* (2007), in which the protagonist, a con-woman named Norma Khouri, manages to confuse and mislead not only the viewers, but also the filmmaker herself, leading to a crisis of trust between the two and some considerable conflict over authorial power in the film.

### **3. Performance and Imaginary Viewers in the Selfie Age**

The idea of audience has become constitutive of contemporary life (or at least, life in countries and communities with easy access to modern digital technology), even without the presence of an operating camera. According to Abercrombie and Longhurst, this is a result of the high consumption of mass media in contemporary society, so that 'everyone becomes an audience all the time' (1998: 68). These critics' work suggests a paradigmatic shift in audience research, necessary due to the emergence of the 'diffused audience' in capitalist, Western societies, which have become performative societies (1998: 68). In 1998 Abercrombie and Longhurst specified four levels at which the processes that create the diffused audiences operate:

1. High consumption of mass media in the home and in public.
2. Media and everyday life are almost inseparable.
3. People see themselves as performers.
4. There is an interaction of two processes: construction of the world as spectacle, and construction of individuals as narcissistic. (1998: 39-76)

Scrutinising today's social media through the lens of Abercrombie and Longhurst's model shows how successfully their prophecy has been fulfilled. The contemporary, media-saturated society has people spending a lot of time, at home and in public, on their computers, smartphones and tablets. Communication occurs virtually, mediated through different devices and platforms, and less in real-life, face-to-face interactions. This has become so prevalent that it is growing more difficult to maintain strict boundaries between the virtual and the real. As Sherry Turkle argues, 'the new technologies allow us to "dial down" human contact, to titrate its nature and extent', with Turkle adding that as society becomes 'overwhelmed by the volume and velocity of our lives, we turn to technology to help us find time', and summarising that eventually: 'we come to see our online life as life itself' (2011: xlv-xlix).

People maintain a social-media persona through which they project a constructed, filtered and often idealised version of themselves for a virtual audience – an audience which has the ability to bestow ‘likes’ and shares. The family photo album is no longer on the shelf but online, inviting the views of total strangers. There is an urge to update virtual followers with the places we have visited (or checked-in to), to announce new jobs or relationship statuses, all documented with self-produced images and videos. More than ever, people today are used to experiencing the world through images and videos, through the personal experiences of others, and are welcoming personal exposure at the cost of privacy. When people are so accustomed to mediatizing themselves and the world around them – which involves personal exposure, performance, documentation and an imaginary audience – this intrinsically impacts on documentary filmmaking and how it is viewed, which itself involves these elements.

If in the 1970s identity politics allowed increased visibility of the personal (as described in the first chapter), personal experience has become, today, perhaps the most dominant element in contemporary media. Indeed, it is used as a central method to engage audiences. This is the reason many advertisers use testimonies and confessions of real people in their adverts, that sometimes disturbingly resemble journalistic items or documentaries. The longing for personal exposure and virtual fame is so central that in 2014 a social media campaign to raise public awareness of the incurable disease, ALS, asked people to film themselves completing the ‘ice bucket challenge’, which involved having a bucket of ice water poured on their heads. It became extremely popular, mostly since at the core of this campaign lies the understanding that people are interested, more than anything else, in performance, recognition and spreading personal content.

### **The Subjective Documentary**

Being a ‘mass cult autobiographical vehicle’, the Internet has had a tremendous influence on the popularity of subjective documentaries – this is the contention of Michael Renov, who is a prominent proponent of the personal documentary, believing that the genre ‘has infused the documentary tradition with a much-

needed vitality and expanded its vernacular' (2004: xvii). His students, whom he exposed to 'countless personal films and tapes' over the years, 'have responded from their guts with anger and with empathy, but only rarely with indifference' (2004: xv).

In addition to engaging viewers, the performative, subjective documentary could provide viewers more means with which to analyse the film as it exposes more clearly and profoundly than observational documentaries the point of view of the creator. 'Curiously, the method of cutting out the author/filmmaker rather than inscribing him or her into the text, has produced the greatest deception in the history of documentary film' argues Piotrowska (2014: 84). Allowing an openness about the mechanics of documentary filmmaking process, she believes 'might have an ethical dimension: through the revealing of some possible cracks in the monolithic surface of the film, it might be possible to begin to allow for the process of questioning to take place amongst the audience' (2014: 85).

Rascaroli also acknowledges the active role of the viewer, and points out that first-person documentaries' subjectivity could stimulate that of the viewers, arguing:

The subjective enunciators of first-person films often address spectators directly, sometimes by looking into the camera lens, or else by speaking to them, or simply by presenting their discourse as a confession, as a shared reflection, or as a persuasive argument. My claim is that the (real) spectators of these films are called upon in an unremitting effect of interpellation ... Hence, spectators of first-person films may feel closer to the text and to its author – and may themselves have a more personal, subjective spectatorial experience than with other types of cinema. (Rascaroli 2008: 14)

Bruzzi (2000) also advocates revealing more to the audience, and emphasising the inevitable performative elements in documentary, which will always be the heart of documentary film. She believes that by acknowledging and embracing the performance, with 'the enactment of the documentary specifically for the cameras', films can suggest to the audience an 'alternative "honesty"' (Bruzzi 2000: 155). Chapman (2009) considers the audience an active entity as well,



which gives legitimacy to subjective documentary filmmaking. She argues that audiences nowadays are so conversant with different documentary styles, 'that the idea of documentary as an inevitably subjective interaction with the world must surely be acceptable' (2009: 71). She contends that 'audiences have developed different sorts of viewing strategies, and degrees of tolerance, for different types of factual genre' (2009: 124). This is true, according to Hill (2008), who analysed viewers' responses to factual TV in Britain and Sweden. Her study has found that 'not only do audiences respond to various documentary modes in different ways, but they respond to the mix of styles within one documentary in multiple ways' (2008: 217).

There are endless versions of reality to be expressed and each and every documentarist depicts reality differently. The way a filmmaker presents a documentary story – her gaze, her artistic and aesthetic choices, her role in the film – gives the viewers a different experience. Subjectivity, performativity and reflexivity could actually make a film more objective, in the sense that by knowing more about the process, about the filmmaker's state of mind and by raising awareness of the performance, viewers have more information with which they can judge and analyse the depicted reality. 'It is possible to be both subjective and objective in the same film', according to Chapman (2009: 71), but it is dependent on the filmmaker's perspective, the way she develops an argument, or the way she differentiates opinions from facts.

Mograbi, for instance, has taken the inevitable performativity of the filmmaker a few steps further. Unlike many first person filmmakers, such as Broomfield or McElwee who remain performers within the filmic space and only address their viewers through voice over, Mograbi addresses his viewers directly, thus challenging the familiar boundaries of filmmaker/viewers. In some of his first person, political documentaries, such as, *How I Learned to Overcome My Fear and Love Arik Sharon* (1997), or *Happy Birthday, Mr. Mograbi* (1999), and *Z32* (2008) he has created a fictional-realistic persona of Mograbi, the filmmaker, being in a fictional-real situation, which is the starting point of the films. He talks to the camera, to the viewers, in a confessional manner, but this Mograbi is a role that he scripted in order to create an ironical dimension, one encouraging

viewers to consider the reality beyond that which he has captured and constructed. This is an example of an alternative path to orthodox documentary filmmaking – an embracing of subjectivity – and it is these performative elements that make his documentaries so powerful and politically thought-provoking.

Creating such an alternative honesty in order to bring objectivity to the subjective documentary, as Chapman suggests, is a choice, amongst many others, made by the filmmaker and dependent on her. However, not all subjective documentarists choose this path, and therefore it could lead to vagueness or even manipulation, in the sense that the subjective is presented as objective. Rascaroli uses Michael Moore's documentary methods to demonstrate this problem:

Moore occupies the image constantly, as voice, bodily presence, or commentary; hence we can easily agree that he is a strong enunciator and that his film is very personal. However, there are two clear differences with the essay film. The first is that Moore does not problematize his authorship, which is not subjected to self-searching scrutiny; his subjectivity is accepted as a plain fact, and his self as a perfectly knowable entity. The second is that he does not present his subject matter as a subjective reflection on a problem, but as an objective investigation of factual events. (Rascaroli 2008: 42)

By allowing the active viewer to know more about the author of the film, her agenda, motivation and relation to the subject matter, the subjective documentary could offer a more substantial view on the reality captured in the film. Nevertheless, subjectivity in documentary films is also subjective, selective and dependent on the filmmaker and her intentions, whether it is to present an alternative honesty or to satisfy her own artistic and aesthetic aspirations. The subjective documentary might have overcome or challenged some of the obstacles of observational documentary – that shadowed the author and production, but just like any other mode of documentary, it is still another attempt to represent a reality, with the inherent limitations of such attempts – of being suggestive, culturally relative and subjective.

## **Ethical Dimensions**

The discourse on ethics in documentary filmmaking has tended to focus on three conflicting sets of responsibilities of filmmakers: to their subjects, to their viewers, and to their project. The latter of these may encompass the filmmaker's individual artistic vision, but also production constraints, obligations to producers and other external responsibilities including those generated by broadcasters, organizations, sponsors, and so forth. Sanders (2010) argues that the filmmaker/subjects relationship has been the central concern of the discourse, with many scholars such as Pryluck (1976), Rosenthal (1988), Nichols (1991) and Winston (2000) focusing on the filmmaker's responsibilities to her subjects.

According to Buchar (2006) and Sanders (2010), the ethical discourse on documentary focuses on morality instead of on ethics. Sanders contends that the debate centres around questions of good versus bad, and what filmmakers should or shouldn't do, and usually on specifically finished films or finished scenes. What is missing, in his opinion, is ethics in the form of principles, for documentary filmmakers 'that govern moral decision'; in order to achieve this, he suggests, it is necessary, first and foremost, to distinguish ethics from morals 'because they are two different things'; to include empirical data about the experience of the filmmakers, that would focus on filmmaking as a process, not the films as final products, and from these results to build ethical, practical theories (2010: 529).

Such empirical data was collected by Aufderheide, Jaszi and Chandra (2009), after conducting long-form interviews with forty-five American documentarists on recent ethical challenges that surfaced in their work. The study demonstrated that, generally speaking, filmmakers are acutely aware of moral dimension in their practice. However, it also highlighted the frustration of filmmakers with the lack of practical, ethical standards that exist within documentary filmmaking and a public and continuous conversation about ethical dilemmas in the practice of documentary. The filmmakers' answers have centred on the three conflicting sets of responsibilities mentioned above, which they reported as being solved on an ad-hoc basis. The filmmakers felt a tension

between ethical responsibilities and practical considerations when there is 'unprecedented financial pressure to lower costs and increase productivity' (2009: 1). In relation to viewers, filmmakers commonly shared the principle of honouring the viewer's trust, though, 'they often justified manipulation of individual facts, sequences and meanings of images, if it meant telling a story more effectively and helped viewers grasp the main, and overall truthful, themes of story' (2009: 1).

Due to these ethical responsibilities and challenges, through the history of documentary filmmaking there have been various attempts by filmmakers to deal with the ethical dimensions of their work, concerning both responsibility to their subjects (by practicing more balanced filmmaker/subject filmmaking methods) and responsibility to their viewers (through reflexivity in their films). As my own practice involves these two elements, I will now discuss them in greater depth.

## **Filmmaker and Subjects**

'Truth is sought not in the photographic but in the interpersonal, in the exchange between filmer and filmed.' (Ellis 2012: 152)

The encounter of filmmaker and subjects is a formative element in all the different modes and styles of documentary. As Chapman argues:

Filmmakers and the subjects they depict are always in relations to one another, and never in isolation. Thus, representation is also about this relationship and its outcome in the finished product – how far the relationship is a negotiated one, involving a sharing of power. (Chapman 2009: 46)

This encounter has inequality at its core, which is suggested by the term 'subjects', indicating there is some sort of subjection in the power dynamics. Piotrowska (2014) contends that there is a similarity in the mechanics of the interaction in psychotherapy, psychoanalysis and documentary filmmaking: 'one person tells his or her personal story, gives an account of her/himself, and the other listens and is in some position of power and knowledge' (2014: 88). Piotrowska states it might lead to some 'complicated unconscious mechanism

being triggered' and therefore to a problematic relationship between the two sides; even when the subjects are happy with their performance, she argues, they are worried about their 'doubles', the ones recreated in the editing room, and the eventual activity of watching their 'fictional self' is one that provokes anxiety (2014: 88).

Renov also touches on the psychoanalytic space between 'experience (the moment of filming) and secondary revision (the moment of editing)', which creates 'an ineradicably split diaristic subject' (2007: 114). Rothwell addresses the space between filming and finished film from the filmmaker/subject relationship perspective, contending that 'as a documentary maker you try to get underneath your subject's performance, which may include putting the material in a context different from that originally intended by the subject', or interpreting it differently than they have wished (2008: 156). Therefore, Rothwell notes:

an important ingredient of the relationship between maker and subject is an acknowledgement of that aspect of the journey – that in the end it may take the subject to places they would not have gone to on their own, and perhaps that they are uncomfortable with (2008: 156).

This process is not only psychologically stressful for the subjects, it is also ethically challenging for the filmmaker as the composer of the representation of her subjects in her film. Obtaining her subjects' formal permission to be filmed by the signing of a consent or release form, far from releases the filmmaker of this ethical burden. There is the conflict between the artistic vision, the storytelling of the film, and the need to protect the subjects. The filmmaker usually takes only pieces or fragments from the materials the subjects agreed to be included in, and uses them as parts of a puzzle, one which, through the process of editing, might stress certain things in their personality (without changing the meaning or the original spirit of things, which would be ethically wrong).

## **Balanced Filmmaking Methods**

The understanding that the relationship between filmmaker and subjects is unbalanced has cultivated more ethically-aware documentary methods that endeavour to reduce the power differential between the two parties. Filmmakers have practised more balanced filming techniques or have involved, to varying degrees, the subjects in the practice. This approach arose, according to Feldman, from the perception that 'the degree of truth (or, at least, integrity) to be found in any one work is directly proportional to the amount of subject participation in its creation' (1977: 23). Feldman (1977) examined this ethical agenda in historical perspective, through the Bantu Kinema Educational Experiment, which in 1935 wished to create a native African cinema, 'produced by and for the peoples of East Africa' (2007: 23). Feldman believes that even when applying subject-generated methods, it is impossible to eliminate power dynamics, and that 'the path to more honest filmmaking is not to deny the inevitability of these power structures but rather to work on strategies that will expose them to all concerned' (2007: 36).

Barbash & Taylor (1997) also argue that the difference in the position between filmmaker and subjects cannot be made to disappear through a collaborative practice. After presenting a number of examples of collaborative ethnographic filmmaking, they conclude that 'the danger is that the filmmaker may remain the real author, with the participants simply being brought in to legitimate a collaborative rubber stamp' (1997: 89). Ruby also investigates the possibility of sharing authorship with subjects in documentary filmmaking, and concludes that 'the notion of sharing authority remains more of a politically correct fantasy than a field-tested actuality' (1991: 56). Furthermore, Ruby contends that 'documentaries always speak about and never speak for a subject and that films never allow us to see the world through the eyes of the native, unless the native is behind the camera' (1991: 62).

## **In First Person Documentary**

In some documentary films, the filmmakers appear on camera, functioning as subjects in their own film (such as Ross McElwee, Michael Moore or Agnès Varda) and sometimes even the *subject* of their film, like auto-ethnographic

filmmakers, such as Su Friedrich in *Sink or Swim* (1990), Alan Berliner in *Wide Awake* (2006) or Carol Morley in *The Alcohol Years* (2000). Such filmmakers are therefore being gazed by themselves, an aspect which also impacts on positions of power: '[T]o gaze implies more than to look at – it signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze' (Schroeder 1998: 208). This dual position of filmmaker-character, invites a different view on the power dynamic of filmmaker/subjects. It could be viewed as a more balanced dynamic, as, unlike the traditional position of power of being behind the camera, the filmmaker also exposes herself, with the risk and vulnerability that come with such an exposure.

Being a participant-filmmaker myself, it is tempting to consider the filmmaker/subjects dynamic, in such participatory practices, a more balanced one. However, as stated above in regard to collaborative filmmaking methods, the filmmaker's power position is beyond the role of the filmmaker in a given filmmaking method. As Nichols contends regarding the shift in the role of the filmmaker through the evolution of documentary: 'the filmmaker steps out from behind the cloak of voice-over commentary, steps away from poetic meditation, steps down from a fly-on-the-wall perch, and becomes a social actor (almost) like any other,' though he also notes, crucially, that it is 'almost like any other because, the filmmaker retains the camera, and with it, a certain degree of potential power and control over events' (2001: 116).

Different creative strategies have been practised by various documentarists who aim to challenge the traditional role of the filmmaker, and thereby challenge the traditional power dynamics associated with this role. In my own filming method, I try to balance the dynamic by not being behind the lens, leaving an abandoned camera (as outlined earlier) and being on the other side, next to my subjects. Filmmaker Jennifer Fox has developed a method she terms, *Passing the Camera*. In *Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman* (2006), Fox has aimed to get a more authentic, balanced dynamic, by passing the camera between herself and her subjects – "in a way that mimicked the way women's conversations usually occur," and to erode the differences between filmmaker

and subjects (Fox, 2006). Angelica Fenner (2012) finds this claim rather utopian, stating that:

If the filmed subject in her true persona is to “show up” and hereby generate “presence,” the role of the indifferent witness—a position the documentary filmmaker or camera operator has historically occupied—must be eliminated. Only then can the consequences of a dialogical approach to communication be rendered visible and audible to the audience. (2012: 129)

Fenner also points out that cultural differences play a significant part in the method, since the camera represents something different to her subjects from Western industrial societies than it does to women she captured from East Asian societies, who ‘do not immediately grasp it as a tool for either self-display or confessionality’ (2012: 135). She concludes that ‘as technologies and signifying practices travel across borders, they do not necessarily and inevitably submit to a self-evident teleological progression towards ever greater transparency and enlightenment’ (2012: 136).

Balanced documentary practices with the ethical motivation of sharing authorship by allowing the subjects to be less passive and more involved in the process cannot eliminate the difference in the control and position of power in the creation of the film. Nonetheless, approaching this issue from a less reductionist perspective, embracing these power differences and exposing them to aware viewers, could potentially create new documentary methods. As suggested by Feldman, ‘complexities of subject/filmmaker interaction are not to be regretted. Rather, by acknowledging them, the filmmaker could consciously play with them before an audience that is aware of what is being done’ (1977: 36).

### **Filmmaker, Audience and Reflexivity**

Reflexivity in documentary films has been addressed by scholars as yielding some advantages from an ethical point of view. Weiner (1978), Ruby (1980), Nichols (1991), Winston (1995) and Butchart (2006) argue that as reflexivity reveals more about how a film was made, it gives the viewers more means to analyse the intended truth of the film and formulate their own opinion



on the subject matter. Chapman (2009) contends that reflexive films make the audience question both their political beliefs about the world as they know it, and their beliefs about the nature of the genre of documentary. Reflexivity, she argues, 'bring[s] the documentary back to the question of its own status and that of the genre more generally, by revealing how the text is constructed' (2009: 123).

As documentary deals with reality (by depicting worlds that really do exist and that, in principle, can be approached by the viewers), reflexivity (as an act of a filmmaker stressing the limitations of documentary as well as her own limited position) returns us to the philosophical understanding that the author and the text are far from being 'right' or certain. Reflexivity in the documentary medium can thus serve as a reminder to viewers that what they watch is subjective and suggestive. Ra'anana Alexandrowitz beautifully opens his documentary about the law system operated by the Israel Defence Forces in the West Bank, *The Law in These Parts* (2011), with a reflection about documentary – about this film in particular, and the form in general. By showing the preparations of the studio for the talking-heads interviews (building the table where the interviewees will sit or setting the green screen, for example) Alexandrowitz prepares us for what we are going to watch. He is indicating that it is a subjectively mediated production and that it is important to reflect on the term 'documentary film': "the common understanding is that documentary depict reality, unlike a narrative film which tells a fictional story". He is saying that, "this definition may be true, but it's not precise enough" and this adds a crucial reflexive aspect to the film. As this film aims to depict a truth of a court systems, it deals with many dry facts, using testimonials of judges combined with archival documents. Yet, the director asks us, at the very opening of the film, to be cautious about documentary truth, even if it is presented via factual, informative aesthetics.

Showing us the studio preparations, the way it looked before being polished for the film, Alexandrowitz signals to us that things are not how they seem; that the documentary is a result of a selective and subjective process. Mirroring this with the court system at the centre of the film, he reminds us that law, despite all of

its ostensible formality and certainty, is subjective and crafted by individuals, such as the judges he interviews in the film.

On his recorded drive back home from the family he documents for *My Kid Could Paint That* (2007), Bar-Lev confesses his own confusion regarding the truth. Originally intending to make a small film about a phenomenal child, Bar-Lev says that there was a shift in the story, and although the scandal may be best for the film itself, it leaves him very sad and confused. If until that moment, we questioned the story in the centre of the film, due to the different interviewed experts doubting its genuineness, the loss of trust in the family, from the side of the supportive filmmaker, is another layer that affects our own perspective on the story's credibility. In addition, it functions as a reflection on films, filmmaker and the process of documentary filmmaking, this one and in general.

Since reflexivity is perceived as a more honest, revealing documentary method, some filmmakers have used reflexive elements to encourage a certain response from their viewers (and advertisers have done so to make their commercials look more convincing). For directors, such as Moore in *Roger and Me* (1989), Broomfield in *Tracking Down Maggie* (1994), and Chris Waite in *A Complete History of My Sexual Failures* (2008), reflexivity seems to be more than an ethical or aesthetic tool, but rather as a narrative, a 'comedy of errors', or, as suggested by Chapman, the 'aesthetic of failure' (2009: 128).

Ruby (1980), who considers reflexivity as ethically essential for documentary and ethnography, makes a distinction between reflexivity and other forms, such as autobiography, self-reference, and self-consciousness. He argues that a filmmaker can be self-conscious and reflective without being reflexive. Being reflexive, according to him, is being:

Sufficiently self-conscious to know what aspects of self it is necessary to reveal to an audience so that they are able to understand the process employed, as well as the resultant product, and to know that the revelation itself is purposive, intentional, and not merely narcissistic or accidentally revealing. (Ruby 1980: 156)

Nichols (1991) also addresses the selective aspect of reflexivity. He points out that even when filmmakers do include in their work the process of negotiation that has led to the film they aimed to create there are still negotiations that have happened in the editing room, which we are not exposed to. What has been included in the film is still the result of a selection process. According to Sanders (2010), 'the scenes included to create reflexivity share all the moral questions of any other scene: Why this selection? Why this framing? How are participants represented? What has been explained to them?' (2010: 524).

While these scholars and many others have focused their concerns regarding reflexivity on the filmmakers and on their responsibility, Govaert (2011) has focused hers on the viewers, asking how viewers read reflexive elements in documentary films, and whether such elements do manage to raise the viewers' awareness of the problematic relationship between the film and the reality it represents. To answer these questions, she has conducted a reception study, for which she produced a documentary film that was edited in four different versions – each deployed various forms and levels of reflexivity, and each was screened and discussed in focus groups. Her findings support the argument at the heart of this thesis, that viewing is an active, subjective act:

The findings demonstrate that reflexive elements in documentary film do not automatically raise consciousness in viewers of the problematic relationship between the historical world and its representation in documentary film. A wide variety in response was found, ranging from definite susceptibility to categorical rejection of the reflexive elements. The evidence underlines that reception is a complex and hyper-individual process that is determined by a myriad of variables, which include structural competence, personality, (media) experience and the viewing situation. These factors subsequently interact with specifics of the particular strategy that is employed as well as its intensity. (Govaert 2011: 4)

Similarly to the definition 'documentary', the definition 'reflexivity in documentary' is a wide and varied one, and is too complex to accommodate and encompass all the forms practised by filmmakers. In this practice-based research, and in addition to the reflexive elements in the films, this thesis acts a reflexive enquiry about my filmmaking – a space through which I can explore

my practice, elaborate and reflect upon it in the wider context of subjective documentary filmmaking. Similarly, I consider film festivals and screenings as reflexive and ethical means, as I discuss with viewers different elements of the process and expose them to many details, such as the reason for choosing a certain community or my preconceptions about that community. In return, they often raise questions and respond to the film and to my account in ways which I had not considered on my own. Having said that, I do still see the value in presenting the work on its own, that is: telling the story I wanted to tell, in the form of my edited film and freeing my viewers to derive their own meanings without the context which I bring.

Neither filmmaker/subjects balanced filmmaking methods nor reflexivity can guarantee more authentic or ethical documentary filmmaking. These tools are sometimes practised to fulfil the fantasies of filmmakers, to signal political correctness or to act as a fig leaf making the filmmaking appear more ethical and balanced. In the next chapters I will examine my own methodology for challenging the traditional roles embodied by subject and filmmaker, keeping in mind the limitations and the undeniable power differences between my subjects and myself, as well as the freedom of my active viewers to derive different meanings and messages other than (and even in contrast to) my desired ones. This thesis serves as a reflection on the ethical aspects of my documentary method, aiming to bring to my project the kind of reflexivity that is vital for ethnographic writing, one which will focus on the process of the documentation, and which will take into account my self, the interaction with my subjects, and the viewers' responses (again, from the limitations of my own perspective on these elements, and the subjectivity in the writing). In this way, I aim to further explore the triangle of filmmaker/subjects/viewers that this chapter has focused upon.

## Chapter 3 | METHOD AND APPROACHES

### Aims and Outline of the Process

When discussing reflective artistic practice, Estelle Barrett states that as creators:

we constantly question the underlying assumptions and meanings related to the materials and methods that we use. This is not just about making meaning with what we have at hand, but of making new ways of making meaning through practical invention. (2007: 191)

The artistic practice which comprises the heart of this practice-based research contains three documentary projects. Two of the films, *Women in Sink* (2015) and *Café Tekoa* (2017), were produced during and for the research, while the third, *My Kosher Shifts* (2010), is a previous work through which the methodology currently under discussion was initiated.

The three documentaries, and, more importantly, the process of making them, serve as a practical investigation, of the method itself and of its potential to produce intimate, casual interactions between filmmaker and subjects, which in turn generate a multi-vocal representation of the community. At the same time, the practice-based enquiry serves as a production of knowledge, tackling ethical issues, ethnographic representation, as well as the interrelation of theory and practice.

This chapter will detail the methods of this research. I will open with a short description of the previous work through which this research was inspired: *My Kosher Shifts* (this piece will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter). I will continue by introducing the documentary technique through its key elements, which will be demonstrated and scrutinised in the next chapter. I will then discuss the ethnographic approach that has influenced the practice, and finally, I will present the practice plan and the discussion and analysis plan.

### **Previous Work: *My Kosher Shifts* (20 min) UK, 2010**

This documentary project was made for my Master's studies in Documentary Practice at Brunel University, London in 2010. The twenty minute film was shot during my work in an ultraorthodox Jewish hotel in North London, where I worked as a receptionist prior to the filming process. Taking place at the front desk, the film shows my conversations with several ultraorthodox Jewish guests, from different religious sects and backgrounds, in which they are expressing different outlooks on religion and life.

The interview and filming technique that I will now present was developed spontaneously and organically before and during the filming of *My Kosher Shifts*. Some of the filming elements, such as the location and my employment at the hotel, were in place prior to making the film, while others, such as not bringing any crew members and setting a fixed camera, were choices I made throughout the process of filmmaking in order to keep the interaction with the subjects as intimate as possible.

### **The Documentary Techniques: Key Elements**

#### **The Filmmaker's Position: A Customer service Role within the Community**

The filmmaker is in a customer service position that is independent to making the film. This gives her a special status, of an insider/outsider. She is an insider in the sense that she temporarily belongs to the space, becoming a functional part with which customers/clients must interact, though she also remains an outsider to the community as a visitor who arrives with the intention of making a film, who has a limited outsider's perception of the community and a lack of inside knowledge.

There is also a defined exchange which gives a framework to the filmed encounter and this imposes limits that are understood by the filmmaker, the clients, and the viewers. The filmmaker, as the provider of a service, is in a defined position in relation to the clients, yet she is also in a position which

requires (but does not particularly define or ritualise) a level of personal interaction and which creates a free space where it is possible to strike up a temporary rapport.

### **The Location: A Business within the Community**

The space is a business that is located within the community, which has a traffic of clientele – locals, regulars and new. The motivation for this element is to create a more balanced filming space in terms of power, position and control. The space is not the subjects' own territory, such as their own homes in which they are in charge, yet, at the same time, it is not a studio or a space set by the production, where subjects might be brought to. In this configuration, neither side has absolute "ownership" of the space, yet both know the space; it is within the community and it is not a random or entirely public one.

Ellis addressed the influence of space's authorship in regards to documentary interview, saying that 'to interview a subject in their home invokes all the framing of the host/guest relationship' (2012: 54). Ellis describes the home as a comfort zone, a safer ground in which subjects may open up, and writes that 'the more intimate the interview or filming, the more likely it is to take place on the subject's "home ground" rather than in a space controlled by the filmmaker, or in a more neutral space such as a workplace' (Ellis, 2012: 54). The space described above is not totally controlled or owned by either of the sides, nor is it a random, neutral, detached space. The sense of familiarity for both filmmaker and subjects with the space creates a certain dynamic, which, together with the framing of customer service, creates a defined territory for conversation.

### **The Filming Technique: The Abandoned Camera**

This technique involves the filmmaker leaving an unmanned camera and no crew members (such as sound engineer or lighting technician) being present in the location. Once setting the devices to record a willing subject, the filmmaker returns to her customer service position and to the communication initiated through it. The motivation behind the abandoned camera technique is to reduce the awareness of the subjects, and hopefully of the filmmaker, of being filmed.

This allows the filmmaker to stay in the position of serving the subjects in order to keep the conversations as natural as possible under the circumstances. While a camera operator can function as a constant reminder of the camera's presence and the process of being documented, an abandoned camera can be less obvious and imposing. With the same rationale in mind, no wireless microphone is attached to subject – an act which Ellis rightly observes as invasive and likely to increase self-consciousness:

The technician responsible for sound ... will have to invade the body space of the interviewee to fit the microphone ... this can be an unsettling moment and so will be accompanied by exaggerated courtesy. Formal instructions will also be given by the interviewer, which further emphasize the artificiality of the interview exchange. (2012: 55)

### **The Subjects: Random Subjects, not Planned Interviewees**

Filmed subjects are not selected prior to the shooting, but rather are individuals who happen to be in the location, and, following an explanation about the film, agree to participate. The aim of utilising *random* community members is to gather more authentic and varied voices. Many documentary films have the subjects chosen through a preproduction research, with the attempt to find strong and charismatic characters, ones that would fit the intended concept or support the agenda of the film. In many documentary films, a researcher or the filmmaker herself meets with the chosen characters prior to the shooting in order to get to know them better, sometimes talking through the planned questions for the interview in order to know what to expect when shooting.

Even when such pre-production encounters are not carried out, it is important to remember that the eventual film is still a product of a selection process made in post-production. This means that during the final stages of the filmmaking process, the aspects of imaginary viewers and of the filmmaker's vision do play a significant role in choosing the characters, and this selective process has a tremendous effect on the representation of the community in the film. This thesis aims to discuss the process of filmmaking, accounting individuals who did not end up in the final film, as well as ones who refused to be filmed.



## **Conversation Versus Interview**

A conversation has distinct dynamics compared to a formal interview. An interview implies a structure of role playing, with two defined sides, where performativity is inevitable and in which the recording serves as the main purpose and product of the conversation. This is an element that this method wishes to lessen. It aims at advancing the more traditional or typical interview dynamic in a given situation where the filmmaker and subjects are stranger to one another. When filmmakers spend a substantial period of time with their subjects – by following a subject or by making films about their family or friends, for example – the interview is likely to be less formal. In this method, however, the filmmaker is interacting with random subjects, which makes it harder to create sudden intimacy. Therefore, in order to create a more organic and authentic exchange of opinions, the filmmaker tries to establish a more conversational exchange, and open up to her subjects, inviting them to ‘ask back’.

## **The Community and Ethnographic Approaches**

### **Boundaries and Blurriness**

‘A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding.’ (Heidegger, 1951: 332)

Blurring boundaries is also a key aspect of this research. Firstly, in terms of the practice, the technical elements described above aim at enhancing blurriness in the boundaries between filmmaker and subject during the interview. This is achieved through the choice of location, the respective position of the two parties (of filmmaker/service provider and subjects/clients) and through the purposefully conversational nature of the encounter. Additionally, the ethnographic and community approach of this documentary method views community as an entity of no clear and certain boundaries; the points at which a community begins and ends could be subjective and vary from one person to another, both within and outside of the community.

Similarly to the term 'documentary', the term 'community' is one with an uncertain or blurred definition. Since noticing the fluidity of the term 'community', which cuts across different fields and disciplines, Hillery (1955) sought a consensual definition, and therefore located and examined ninety-four different definitions of the term found in the academic literature. While the only overall consensus that he could extract is that 'all definitions deal with people', Hillery nevertheless managed to identify three common components: social interaction, common ties and geographic area (1955: 117). The inevitable relativity of the term 'community' is also very relevant to this practice-based research. Documentaries that depict communities often feature a representation of representation, that is, the film echoes the filmmaker's perception of the documented community, her opinions, thoughts and emotional connection to the community, so that the film functions as a representation of what the community represents to the filmmaker rather than a more detached or objective depiction. Therefore, in this chapter I will present the general community approach that drives this research, while in the next chapters, I will reflect on the more subjective elements in my encounter with each of the three communities that were depicted in the three documentaries, providing a wider context accounting for the self and its influence on the encounter and on the ethnographic writing.

### **The Community Approach**

The approach of this documentary practice is that a community should not be explored by attempting to seek homogeneity or finality. In addition, it considers a community as a territory with fluid and dynamic boundaries: a non-monolithic entity. This research approach takes influence from Deleuzian Rhizomatic thought, which offers an alternative model of thinking to that of conventional Western thought – the latter of which is goal-directed and linear, and to use an organic comparison of a tree, moves from bottom to top, from roots to leaves. In contrast to this, in their book *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari suggested a more multiplicitous way of thinking, one which they illustrate using the rhizome root (grass, for instance) – which is like a borderless

network of roots, in which every point is connected to one other, ever changing and able to spread in different directions. As Lusky summarises:

In contrast to thought that tends to generalise, observing reality from above, from some sort of meta-perspective, deconstructing, segmentising and scrutinising using logical-rational analysis, the rhizome invites a different metaphor for thought activity in which every string, layer or pathway is constantly connected with every other organ... The lack of essence and a blurring of identity at the broad surface of being, can be seen in the light of the rhizomatic concept as a tool that does not establish a process of looking down from above, but rather of looking at, looking-with, a viewing that is established from the surface itself, from the grass level of things.  
(2001: 12)

The current era of global mobility and global connectivity (through social media, which has created virtual borderless communities) has called for new identity politics. As Kathy-Ann Tan writes: 'In efforts to rethink existing definitions of identity in globalized present, critics have gradually moved away from the notion of 'single root identity... putting forth instead that of "rhizome identity".' She explains that the rhizome identity 'does not compromise one single root of culture inherited from the individual's past, but posits identity as a process of multiplicity informed by multiple nodes and roots of different cultural encounters that the present still interlaces together' (Tan 2010: 113).

If one person's identity is viewed as rhizome, then a community, which is an entity made up of multiple identities, should be looked at with the same prism and represented accordingly. The ethnographic approach of this research wishes to use the rhizomatic model, to encourage a nonlinear conception of communities; to present to the viewers communities as entities with no uniform and stable identity, with no definite beginning and end. It wishes to display a net made of existing individual voices, where each could function as a source of knowledge of its own, and the collection functions as a choral voice of the community. The idea is both to present communities as rhizomes, and by that to encourage a rhizomatic reading of the representation.

Having said that, individuals do identify themselves, or are identified by external physical or cultural factors – such as, governments, religion, politics or

geographic areas and borders – into communities. The process of identification creates an imaginary whole or a perception of belonging to a wider entity, which can in turn create boundaries, which, whether physical or perceptual, can function in more or less concrete ways.

In my documentaries, I am trying to place myself in a community in which I am considered an outsider, using the encounter with subjects as a vehicle to explore our mutual otherness. The aim is to expose diverse, sometimes highly contrasting, voices of selves from the entity which is defined as a community. Instead of pointing out to the viewers the stability and the glue that connects individuals together, to generalise, the aim is to stress the cracks; to call attention to the differences and to self; to highlight the self-consciousness of the subjects as well as their social consciousness. The intention is to ask how these subjects, in their individuality and multiplicity, negotiate their way around (or come to terms with) the problems of the concrete, frozen imaginary definitions of community.

### **The Ethnographic Approach**

In his book, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985) Cohen suggests that those who wish to study a community should make a shift in mindset regarding the concept. Cohen advises against making the researcher's outsiderhood the prism through which knowledge about the community is gathered. Instead, he places strong emphasis on the subjective experience, on the perception of the individuals belonging to a community. He argues that the common threads in a certain community are mostly symbolic and that under the surface there are deep differences in the way individuals give meaning to the shared symbols. Therefore, he believes, community researchers should engage with individuals and try to explore the complexities beneath the symbolic construction. In the following closing sections to this chapter, I will present Cohen's core theoretical aspects in relation to my own documentary approach.

## **Community Exists in the Minds of its Members**

‘To understand community by seeking to capture members’ experience of it. Instead of asking “what does it appear to us?” We ask “what does it appear to mean to its members?” to look outwards from its core.’ (Cohen 1985: 20)

Following Cohen, in my documentary practice, I aim to depict a community through my engagement with individuals – from our conversations and the exchange of thoughts and opinions – in an attempt to learn from *them* how *they* define themselves and the community/ies to which they belong.

## **Sharing Symbols, Not Meanings**

Cohen argues that community members share symbols and forms, but they attach different meanings to them. It is the symbolic construction that holds them together as a society, but once you break a group which is considered a community into individuals, and explore their interpretations to the shared community symbols, you find differentiation.

By exploring the subjects’ different personal interpretations and understandings of common symbols, I gain exposure to the subjective experience from which I can create a more heterogeneous portrait of a community. My conversations in *My Kosher Shifts* showed, as Cohen suggests, that orthodox Jews share symbols, but ascribe different meanings to them, meanings that are influenced by their different backgrounds and personalities. Upon learning that I was over thirty and single, for example, almost all raised an eyebrow, pointing up that raising children is essential, and yet each of them held different reasons for this: some expressed their concern due to religious obligations or God’s apparent wishes which I am failing to fulfil, some declared that it is a woman’s biological calling, while others thought having children was crucial to my future happiness.

In different contexts, the camera itself can become notably charged with a diversity of symbolic associations, something clear from the way different subjects react to being filmed and their relationship with the camera. In *My Kosher Shifts* I was exposed to varied reactions to the camera and shooting the encounter. While some individuals were concerned about being exposed,

others seemed to be rather naïve about documentary and filmmaking in general, which I assume is related to their illiteracy in or unfamiliarity with entertainment media (TV and cinema). In contrast, while filming in the settlement, I experienced strong reactions to the documenting camera, which became a profound symbol of invasion and otherness – an instrument of an opposing and potentially threatening political agenda. Some settlers were strongly against the presence of an outsider's camera in their community, while others agreed to be filmed despite expressing their genuine fears at doing so. Others actually wanted to use the camera as a vehicle to express their own opinions and through which improve the negative reputation of settlers.

### **Defining Boundaries**

'Since people become most sensitive to their culture when they encounter others', the right place to explore their attitudes to their culture (or meaning to their community) is at its boundaries.' (Cohen 1985: 70)

Cohen argues that community, just like individuals, defines itself by reference to a 'significant other' and that individuals define themselves as belonging to a community by distinguishing themselves from others. Throughout my conversations during the filming of the three documentaries, I used my otherness to the subjects as a tool; I emphasised the boundaries between them and myself by expressing my opinions, in order to invite (encourage?) their self-exploration in regards to that of my own. In *My Kosher Shifts*, for example, when I was telling a religious woman that I'm flattered when men are attracted to me, it marked the boundaries between us. It provoked a strong reaction from her, and very emotionally and assertively she explained to me how forbidden it is for a woman to feel that. In *Women in Sink*, despite the apparent sense of togetherness existing between women in the salon, when I shared my political views with Dalia, for instance, it made her declare her own agenda about Jews and Arabs in Israel, which not only marked our differences (or otherness) but further highlighted the cracks beneath the outwardly harmonious salon.

Cohen's methods provide an ethnographic theoretical model for this research for studying and representing communities. I wish to follow Cohen's perspective

that community should be self-defined by its members – my subjects, and not via my limited position of an outsider. While it is indeed true that many people see themselves as belonging to a community due to the shared symbols and by what they see as a boundary, as otherness, I wish to get deeper than this monolithic symbolic surface and learn the different meanings of members to the symbols that unite them. Furthermore, I want to use my otherness to my subjects, the boundaries between us, to reveal more about them.

The next chapter will provide in details how the method worked in each of the three films, emphasising the production, artistic, personal and ethical elements.

## Chapter 4 | METHODOLOGY

### ***My Kosher Shifts: How I Abandoned the Camera for the First Time***

*My Kosher Shifts* is a 20 minutes documentary film showing conversations I had with several guests while I was working as the receptionist at an ultraorthodox Jewish hotel in London, through the frame of the reception window. The documentary method of *My Kosher Shifts* came about organically, as a result of the circumstances surrounding the filming, rather than a predetermined vision. It was only through showing the film that I discovered this method needed further elaboration, including the confronting of both ethical and theoretical issues raised in the process. By contrast, in my next two films that I produced for this research, filmmaking choices were thoroughly thought through, with far more awareness of the effect that every filmmaking and stylistic choice had on the level of subjectivity present, the power relations between filmmaker and subjects, and the representation of communities.

### **Background**

In the summer of 2009 I moved to London to study documentary filmmaking – a practice-based Master's course which introduced me, for the first time, to the field of documentary filmmaking, as well as the crafts of filming and editing. Intensively searching for a part-time job, I found myself settling on a front desk position at a Jewish hotel in Golders Green, North London. I remember that when a friend of mine told me at the time about this job vacancy, mentioning it's a Charedi (ultraorthodox) hotel, I was very excited, since, as a secular Jew from Israel, I have always been curious about religious Jews and never had the opportunity to actually interact with them.

Out of respect to the religious Jewish rules, and, in order to better fit to the hotel's environment, I made sure I always dressed in a modest way: I wore only knee-length skirts and long sleeves that covered my elbows. I never showed my



toes, cleavage, and definitely not my finger-tattoo, which I covered with a ring while at work. This attire felt, at first, like a form of dressing up; to the guests, however, I seemed like a nice Charedi girl, which made my communication with people very easy and casual. In short, I looked like one of the community.

When starting a conversation of a more personal nature however (something that occurred right from the beginning and continued frequently) I always revealed my Jewish secularity, explaining that I was new to this Jewish orthodox environment and that my lifestyle was very different to the ones they seemed to have. I felt that the curiosity I had for them was mutual, and whenever I started a conversation with a guest, we both kept exploring each other's background and exchanged religious, political and general views. I asked why, for instance, they are not allowed to make tea using a tea-bag on Shabbat, or what is behind the idea of facing East when they are saying their evening prayer at the reception. In turn, they asked me why I was 31 years old yet single, and quite often, tried to convince me that I should change my lifestyle and start practicing.

After several months of working at Croft Court hotel, the place started to feel more and more like home to me. The fact that I moved to a new country; the instability of moving from one temporary living solution to another in a short period of time; the Jewishness of the place; speaking Hebrew with the guests; sharing cultural traditions and codes; the boss who became a close friend – all these elements made the little religious hotel perhaps the most welcoming and familiar place for me in London. I believe that the confidence I had in this Kosher territory was felt by the guests, who usually stopped by at the front desk for a chat, sometimes keeping me company for hours.

This unmediated communication I suddenly had with individuals from a wide community – from different countries, religious sects and socio-economic classes – who I had previously known only from a distance through media, had a great effect on me. I realised that my supposed knowledge was mainly based on stereotypes; this community symbolised to me something archaic and provincial, perhaps exotic at best. Through our one-on-one conversations

however, I learnt that some ultraorthodox Jews are more similar to me than I thought, that they are, naturally, more varied and complicated than my limited outside perspective could have anticipated. From holding somehow critical and even negative views towards this group, due to political tension in Israel and my own secularity, I started to have positive, warm feelings towards this community. In a more active sense, I wanted to convey this sense, that communities, people, are not as they seem from a distance, through film.

## **1. Pre-filming/ Initial Conceptualisation**

I remember that the job was something I talked about a lot at the time, and that every time I spoke to other people about this exciting ‘open channel’ I had with ultraorthodox Jews, they seemed very intrigued and always wanted to hear more. Studying documentary filmmaking, it seemed quite natural to turn this full-of-documentary-potential anthropological encounter into a film. I decided to make the film as my Master’s final project.

At that point, I had the intention but no clear concept, nor any idea if the hotel’s manager and (even more challenging) the guests, would agree to my filming at the hotel. The first potential barrier to making this documentary was my boss. I remember harbouring a contrary hope that she would oppose the idea as making this film was a daunting task; in addition to the hard work, it meant trying to persuade religious Jews, many of whom view films and television as negative and therefore forbidden, and who had travelled to London for a holiday, to let me film them for my project. By comparison, my initial idea for a final project – a film about my struggle with monogamy in the context of my parents’ non-conformist love life – seemed a much easier project to make. To my surprise, my boss approved of my slightly unusual plan and seemed deeply excited about the whole idea of me shooting there. Once I had the green light from her, I knew that I had to make the film and began to refine my initial concept.

## **Developing the Concept**

Although I was hesitant about the concept and the narrative of this Jewish hotel film, I knew that it was the unique encounter between a secular woman and

ultraorthodox individuals, that I wanted to capture above all. Rather than focusing on the guests only, I wanted to include myself and my interaction with the subjects – indeed, this interaction would comprise the central subject of the film. I also didn't want to change the natural, causal dynamic of our chats; therefore, I didn't set up interviews, which would increase the formality and create a more staged atmosphere. For the same reason, I did not want to move away from the original scene of our conversation: the reception area.

At this point, I was considering how to film the conversations. One common documentary filmmaking method for such an intimate encounter is being behind the camera. However, I decided that this would change the informal or less mediated nature of our conversation by changing my function from receptionist into filmmaker and interviewer. Another common method for capturing such an encounter would be asking one of my peers to come and operate the camera and sound, as many of the other students had done. The price of this choice, I thought, would be intimacy. Having a third person in the room would decrease the privacy of our interaction, the core of the dynamic, and as a result, would increase both my and the subject's level of performativity. Knowing how sensitive to privacy the orthodox Jewish guests that came to the hotel were, meant that bringing in a third person was out of the question.

Eliminating these two filming methods freed me from handling the camera and avoided adding an outsider to the scene. I decided to document the interaction as it was, by fixing the camera on a tripod – where to place the camera was the next decision I had to make.

### **Choosing the Frame**

The layout of the reception area was key in coming up with the visual plan for filming. Unlike the usual front desk that you would find in typical hotels and businesses, we, at the Croft Court, welcomed our guests through a window in the front wall of our reception office. When sitting in the office, working, and a guest came to the reception, we communicated through this window. Even before knowing the visual content I wished to include in this documentary, I

knew that I had to shoot the interaction using this frame – a frame within a frame – with the audience viewing the guests through the window, from my side and my gaze. The plan was to place the tripod at the back of the office, facing the reception-window, at about two meters distance. I decided to shot the film in 4:3 aspect ratio, which felt like a natural choice considering the window-frame fitted this frame perfectly. I decided to start shooting from this angle, and later considered what else I would need to shoot in order to make the film, such as atmospheric or establishing shots of the hotel. Only towards the end of the filming process did I decide that the documentary would use the sole frame alone

## **2. The Filming Period**

I was, in principle, ready to shoot the film, yet I stalled for a while, postponing the moment I would have to confront the fear of asking people to be filmed. I remembered having interesting conversations with guests and staring at the dark-blue camera bag, regretting the loss of such great content for my film. In retrospect, I believe that I needed the time to allow myself to feel fully comfortable and perhaps to reach the point when I would have to force myself to start filming or risk not having a film to submit.

I finally started to take the camera out of its bag and prepare it when I arrived to my shifts. I started slowly and gently: when there was a nice, chatty guest at the desk, I told them about my project for my school. Some of them asked to learn a bit more about it, some turned me down, though, to my surprise, quite a lot of guests did not mind having the camera recording our conversations. When a guest agreed to be filmed, I went to the back of the office to set the camera and turn it on. I then went back to my front desk position, with the aim of taking the conversation from where it was before the camera was running, trying to be the receptionist and not to worry too much about the film.

I was rather surprised by how natural and relaxed people were while being filmed. With some the recording process became more self-consciously performative or felt slightly embarrassing, but I recall that almost all the

conversations, at least from my own perspective, quickly became free of stress and very casual. Quite a few people with whom I had longer conversations, told me that they actually forgot about the camera, which even happened to me a few times. The more I filmed, the better I became at preparing for the shoot and at convincing people to be filmed. After a short time, and especially once I collected some strong material, I started to enjoy the filmmaking and it added extra pleasure to my already enjoyable job.

### **3. Post-production/Editing**

I filmed my reception chats over 6 weeks, recording about 10 hours of material. I wanted the reception window to serve as a symbolic window, one that would offer a glimpse into the ultraorthodox Jewish world. In addition, I wanted to create a feeling that the entire film comprises one long shift at the reception desk, which the viewer is experiencing in tandem with me.

After having learnt the materials well, I started to choose the subjects I wanted to include in the documentary. I knew that working at the hotel had affected my views on ultraorthodox Judaism and, through the film, I aimed to bring about a similar experience in the viewer. I therefore picked characters that would show a variety similar to the one I had been exposed to in the hotel: people from different religious sects, socio-economic classes, countries, and ages, expressing varied opinions. The result was a mosaic that consisted of: a professor staying in London for a conference, a modern orthodox from Israel, an upper class Italian couple, a local housewife, and a young American who grew up as an ultraorthodox and later stopped practicing, due to his critique of the community and its values.

In terms of the content editing, I started with the more religious, Jewish themes – such as going to a Jewish barber and the reason for it – or the concept of building fences in order to avoid breaking the religious rules, and finished with the more philosophical, personal ones, such as love and marriage. I wanted the film to have a light and entertaining feel, achieved via fast-paced, playful music.

I chose the song, Goy Shel Shabbat (A Shabbos Goy) in the transmissions in the film, because of its playfulness, humorous quality and the use of Yiddish.<sup>1</sup>

#### **4. Reception/ Viewers**

The very first screening of the film took place at the university, with my tutors and peers. It was the first time I screened it to an audience, and the moment I understood how crucial and exciting it is to free a film from the editing room into the world. Although when I was watching the film in my room, while editing it, I laughed at times, I was surprised when people laughed out loud or audibly reacted in the screening. Even though I already completed the documentary, it was a moment that felt like a beginning, like the birth of the film.

My next public screening was at Open-City, a documentary film festival in London, which was followed by a screening in Gottingen, Germany, at an academic, ethnographical conference. The difference between the reception of the film at these two events was significant, and has demonstrated the tension between the two communicating fields, of documentary and ethnographic filmmaking. At the documentary festival when the lights were turned on I saw smiling faces, and was asked mostly about the stylistic and editing choices with viewers complimenting me about the humorous aspects of the film; in Gottingen it was exactly these aspects that I was 'investigated' about during the Q&A session that followed the screening. One after the other, anthropology students grilled me about my choices – the lively music, the pace, the humour – raising questions about the film's representation of the community and the seriousness such a representation requires. Their questions also concerned the subjects' reaction to being filmed and to their representation in the documentary. Later on, I was interviewed by a group of students who asked me a few questions about my filmmaking, as well as the question of whether I think film is a

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<sup>1</sup> The song is a parody based on 'Johnny Is The Boy For Me'. In this version, the famous line featuring the 'Boy' is replaced by 'Goy' – a non-Jew. Dan Almagor, the lyricist, humorously presents the idea that the original concept of 'Shabbos Goy', in which Jews who keeps Shabbat are assisted by a non-Jew to perform different kinds of work for them, has made the former lazy and overly appreciative of someone else doing their work for them.

legitimate anthropological tool. Coming from a relatively brief and documentary-focused background, I was quite surprised.

To me, these two first screenings emphasised long-lasting conflicts, of product versus vehicle, aesthetics versus ethics, art versus 'science'. I remember that at this point I became more aware of the representational aspects of my film. I viewed my depiction of the guests and through them, the community, as being one with a compassionate, warm gaze, though I have wondered whether viewers would get the same effect from watching the documentary.

The film has since been screened at around 30 festivals and academic conferences, some ethnographic, some more documentary oriented, and at some Jewish themed ones. Judging by the feedback I received from people, it seemed that many viewers have sensed this warm gaze; some viewers said that they have never watched ultraorthodox Jews this way or felt affection for them like they did upon viewing *My Kosher Shifts*, and many expressed interest and surprise at my level of access, wondering how I managed to film there and convince guests to be filmed.

## **5. Reflection: Self and Ethics**

As I come from a family of believers with a secular lifestyle and have grandparents who went to the synagogue on Jewish holidays and celebrated holidays, I have always had respect, if not intellectual or philosophical then emotional, for religious Jews. When I decided to work at the hotel, I felt that I would like to get close to people from the community, learn about them, as well as get accepted by them. I had no intention or need to provoke them; on the contrary, I respected the house rules and took it upon myself to make sure all their religious aspirations and requirements – ridiculous as they may seem to an outsider – were fulfilled on my shifts. I served the guests with care and affection. The reason I raise these points is that this has not been the case in my next projects, and I believe that the feelings I have towards a certain community have a great effect on the way I communicate with them and represent them. Where criticism exists, it is reflected in the filmmaking process.

The dynamic of the encounter with the ultraorthodox guests was very interesting in the way that each side functioned as an authority where the other lacked experience: in some aspects, of Judaism and living according to its values, they were much more experienced than me; in other matters, ones that related to my life experience in the 'world out there' – of formal education, of self-exploration, of love and sex – I was many steps ahead of them. At points, the dynamic of the interaction shifted from one of a curious, even ignorant, secular-Jewish young person, conversing with religious, grown-up people, to one of a cheeky woman chatting with shy men. I sometimes felt like a naïve child, being taught about why I should respect the rules, and sometimes I felt like the grown-up, explaining to a naïve person about dating or even female sexuality.

It is also important to note the setting of the interaction – a hotel, where people, usually men, usually on their own, come for a short period for business purposes. I was in charge of the space owing to my work position, yet they were the ones with the understanding of what stands behind the premises design and codes. For instance, I had to hand them the Shabbat special key, yet they had the knowledge of the rationale behind it. I separated the twin beds into two singles when a couple arrived, yet didn't know the period during which they were not permitted to sleep next to each other.

Due to this ambivalence on both parties, the power dynamics and the idea of control in this encounter was fluid and erratic. Although we had big gaps in our agendas, lifestyle and beliefs, we had common ground to communicate on, that is, our mutual Jewishness. We both shared this Jewish, protective and provisional pocket in London, where we were both minority, both tourists.

### **The Second Film: *Women in Sink*, 36 min, 2015**

*Women in Sink* tells the story of a little hair salon in the heart of the Christian Arab community in Haifa, where I worked as a shampoo girl. Placing my camera above the washing-basin, where the clients enjoy a head massage, I



conversed with Arab and Jewish women from different generations and backgrounds on varied topics, from politics and war to love.

## **Background**

*Women in Sink* is the first film that I made for this research with the express aim of exploring how the interviewing approach developed in *My Kosher Shifts* might work in different documentary conditions and with a different community. From the moment I decided to research the documentary approach, I knew that the first community I would like to depict was the Arab community in Haifa, my hometown. Similarly to the ultraorthodox Jewish community, the Arab community has always been present in my surroundings, yet, as a Jew, who had been educated in the Jewish educational system, and had lived in a Jewish neighbourhood, I have never had any interaction with individuals from that community. However, having a father who was born in Egypt and speaks Arabic, I have always been attracted to Arab culture and feel connected to it. Therefore, this community, which is based in an area that is only a 10-minute drive from my home, became of great documentary interest to me. Feeling deep discontent with the state of Arabs living in Israel, I approach this project with a political agenda and wished to hear from Arab women about how it feels to live as a minority in Israel, expecting to hear about the frustration of the community members and then bring about this message through my film.

## **1. Pre-filming/Initial Conceptualisation**

Once I decided that I wanted to depict an encounter with the Arab community, I had to find a new, customer-based occupation that would allow me to interact with new subjects as I had in the orthodox hotel but in a fresh context. For a couple of months I attempted to find an idea for a business in which I could work and film, but all the ones that came to mind were too similar to my reception position – they all included customer service over a counter. I aspired to find an original situation which would challenge both my dynamic with the customers and also the exploration of the filmmaking approach. One night the idea of washing hair in a beauty salon occurred to me.

I thought about the realisation of this concept and its implications. Most obviously it would mean women only, something which interested me very much as a focus for this second project for two reasons: firstly, my previous project mainly focused on men and was set in a location largely frequented by men; second, I was curious about exploring and documenting a similar female perspective to my own (as a woman living in Israel) but which was different in terms of ethnicity, religion and perceived social status.

Working in a salon also meant that there would be a physical connection, a part-of-the-job intimacy, which could break the ice with my subjects; on the other hand, I feared that this instant physical connection could feel socially embarrassing or forced. Another aspect that concerned me was the fact that when conversing with the subjects there will be no eye contact, as I believed that it had been a key aspect of my communication with the guests in my previous film, and was a feature that a filmmaker behind the camera does not have and my abandoned camera technique enables. I also considered the short duration of a hair wash and whether I would be able to set my equipment up in this short time, and, even more challenging, get to the deeper conversations I aimed to feature in the project. With all those potential difficulties in mind, I nevertheless believed that filming conversations with women while washing their hair would be a refreshing and engaging form of interaction for a documentary project.

### **Finding the Location**

I went to Haifa for a 10-day location scouting visit, with the mission of finding a hair salon that would agree to let me work and film. On my first day in Haifa, I went to scout Wadi Nisnas, an Arab neighbourhood downtown, and was rather amazed to find about ten different salons in this tiny neighbourhood. Very shy, I entered a few of them, asking whether it would be possible to shoot a film in there. Only one salon owner said he would consider it, but as he told me that his clients were Jewish, it did not suit my purposes. I wasn't very optimistic that night. My mother, who tried to help me with my mission, decided to ask her neighbour, an Arab hairdresser herself, for an advice, and she told her about

Fifi's hair salon in Wadi Nisnas, saying that this is the best place, as it is the most established one in the neighbourhood and has lovely owners.

The following morning, I went to Fifi's, a small, hectic and characterful beauty salon, located, of all places, on Zionism Blvd.<sup>2</sup> The sense of familiarity between the women in the place and the homely atmosphere, reminded me of the hotel, and I knew instantly that this was where I wanted to work and film. Fifi, the owner and chief hairdresser, was warm and welcoming, and when I proposed my plan to her she said yes, without enquiring about it or asking for further details. It felt too good to be true, so I tried to break it down to Fifi, explaining the purpose of the filming and what it would entail: I would be there for a whole month, there would be a camera in the space and I would require a washing-basin position. Still Fifi did not seem concerned about my plan; she kept smiling and said that it all seemed fine to her. Fifi proudly mentioned that they had Jewish customers at the salon, which I ignored, knowing that my focus would be Arab women.

### **Setting Up Equipment/Shooting Difficulties**

Four months later, ready for the very last pre-production steps, I returned to Fifi's with the equipment, in order to find the angle from which I would shoot the conversations. I decided that similarly to the hotel film, this film would also have a key frame, this time a close-up of the women in the basin, with my hands in the frame. I wanted the focus to be on the women – their faces and expressions in particular – in order to increase the intimacy between subjects and viewers. I set the tripod in the right position and distance, and was in principle ready to start washing and shooting, though something did not feel right. This space, the salon, was one that I had suddenly invaded for the purpose of making this film, unlike the hotel, where it happened organically, and this made me much more aware of my presence and interference.

I realised that placing the tripod in the position that I had chosen, would mean it would be in the middle of the salon, and so not only would it disturb the natural

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<sup>2</sup> Shderot Ha'Tzionut, in Hebrew.

flow of the customers and the hairdressers, it would also be unsafe, as people could trip on it and the camera could fall down. I therefore decided that fixing the camera from above and keeping the paths clear, would be the right way to do this. Coming up with a solution for hanging the camera delayed my shooting for two whole weeks. Eventually I built a frame to which I rigged the camera and sound. I was then ready to shoot.

## **2. The Filming Period**

As with the equipment, my presence and function in the little salon felt awkward at first. My self-awareness was particularly strong – I felt that I was not very good at washing hair, that my camera and very noticeable equipment bothered people. Each time the hairdressers, who communicated in Arabic, their mother tongue, were laughing, I thought that they were joking about me.

Another aspect in this shooting space, that was very different from the hotel and appeared as an obstacle, was the lack of privacy with my subjects. Owing to the small space, both hairdressers and clients were around my shooting area constantly and were within listening distance. However with time, I gradually learnt to ignore and overcome this, as did the salon staff and clients, who got used to my presence in the space.

Despite the fact that I was not interested in Jewish women for the film, there were many more of them, apparently, and, a greater proportion of them agreed to be filmed, so I decided to shoot their washes, thinking that I would not use this material eventually, but practice filming while working. After a short while, I noticed that my dynamic with Jewish women was different: when bringing up racial or political topics at the sink with the Arab women, I was more gentle and attentive; when there was a Jewish client in the sink however, I was much more assertive, provocative and critical, freely expressing my political critique on racism in Israel. The result was strong "Jewish material" that eventually have made their way into the film.

I also noticed that, even though from the outset I shared my intention with the owners to talk about the situation of Arabs in Israel with the women I filmed,

every time I discussed Israeli politics with a subject, the owners seemed alert. Only later in my washing period did I learn that politics do not usually enter the door of the salon, and that the women mainly engage in small-talk, sharing family-related updates, such as a son who got married, planned holiday destinations, health problems or new diets.

### **Washing and Shooting**

I may have started shy, highly self-aware and slow at washing hair, though after a few days, I began to feel more like a part of the crew. We got to know each other and they started to trust me more and delegate further tasks and responsibilities. This also affected my filmmaking. I became more confident, better at washing hair, more able to persuade women to be filmed and to provoke interesting conversations in the very short duration of a hair wash. Moreover, the owners themselves started to like me more, so much, that they actually became involved by helping me with potential subjects. For example, when a woman entered the salon they told her that she should be filmed in order to help this “sweet girl” to make her doctorate film, or when a “good subject” arrived to the salon, they told me about her, whispering tips to me before she got to my stand.

At some point, I decided to use the free moments I had between one wash to another, to turn the fixed camera 180 degrees and film the internal of the salon; I wanted to try and capture the lively and hectic atmosphere of the place. I also filmed some funny ‘sink moments’, as I realised that the staff use the basin to wash not only women’s hair, but also food and dishes.

I had been shooting at the salon for one month, but my transition from shy outsider and unprofessional washer into a team member had been quick. My film project became the talk of the salon. The owners and regular clients all appreciated my dedication to my project and cared about my success. When I completed the filming period, I left the salon in tears. I felt so grateful for the owners’ kindness, for the way that they had opened their hearts as well as their business to me. I felt washed by this feminine outpouring of warmth, acceptance and respect, and so I left on a hopeful and optimistic note.

### **3. Post-production/Editing**

This hopeful note was unfortunately disrupted by reality. Shortly after I returned to London with my filmed material, the 2014 war in Gaza started, and racist messages such as 'death to Arabs', had spread all over Israeli Facebook pages and groups. Considering that my filming intention was far from being one which praises coexistence of Arabs and Jews in Israel (making a film that would not even include Jewish women) combined with the tense and aggressive atmosphere that the summer-war had brought, for about a month I could not even watch the materials. I was very concerned about managing to edit the film, worrying that it would be one that was neither here nor there in terms of its political orientation and impact. In this respect, editing the film was a much more complicated and thought-through process than editing the previous film. In addition, due to the exposure of the previous film, this time I had a higher awareness of the representation that the film would carry, and of its overall message.

#### **Content Editing**

I ended up filming many women, Arabs and Jews, collected hours of conversations – some about political issues, some about life. I realised that I did not get the content that I wished for, one that would offer a critical gaze on the state of Arabs in Israel as most of the Arab women I conversed with seemed to be quite supportive of Israel or indifferent to the political aspects I discussed with them. Furthermore, the Jewish women I spoke with tended to agree with my point of view, as they mostly held pro-peace beliefs and critical perspectives on the reality in Israel.

That being said, I did feel that I gained some strong content of authentic moments with inspiring women. I was exposed, through my washing chats but although from simply being present in the salon over an intense period of time, to its uniqueness; of the salon being a space which features simple and politically-unloaded relationship between Arab and Jewish women, within a very tense and politically-loaded environment. The little business has served loyal

clients for over 3 decades and thus some had a special bond and even went to each other's celebrations, while others simply enjoyed coming to this welcoming feminine environment. I decided that this would comprise the story of the film. Without fulfilling or fully abandoning my initial aspirations, the film would show the salon as a peaceful yet perhaps fragile bubble existing in a complex political landscape, an example of how things might be if people could connect in real life.

In order to create a film that would still echo my political agenda and values, I decided to include more of myself than I had initially planned to, as I realised that my character most fully expressed criticism of the Israeli society and policies. I also decided to include and even saturate my attempts to get what I aimed at from the Arab women, without success.

When selecting the characters, I decided that I would choose the strongest subjects, with whom there was an interesting conversation that I would be able to edit as a 'whole wash', so even though I had some interesting moments and thought-provoking anecdotes with certain subjects, I did not select them if the rest of the conversation did not stand out. I decided to focus on Arab-Jewish relationships and personal matters. I did not want to highlight the Christianity of the Arab women in the content of the film (will be discussed in the Ethics and Reflections section) I did, however, include some visual Christian elements in the film – both the salon's décor (a Jesus calendar, for example) and in the opening shots of the film (a church) – to point out that the film has been made in a Christian environment.

I ended up with ten characters – five Arabs and five Jews. I put them in an order which showed my own journey in the salon, starting with my position of expressing my lack of knowledge of the Arab community, my agenda and intention, followed by different aspects of the Arab-Jewish relationship in Israel, from both Arabs and Jews. I closed the film with more personal conversations, about life, love and choices that a woman makes in her life, with

Nawal, one of the owners, that had become a friend and was the first to appear in the sink.

### **Aesthetics and Cinematic Choices**

I decided that the film would have pace and a hectic quality that are in line with the nature of the salon, and I achieved this by editing transitional montages between one hair wash to another, with upbeat music. A few montages were created from different women's heads in the sink and others from the internal footages of the salon, creating a visual portrait that reflects the uniqueness of the place, where women are chatting, bringing and eating food. I also edited two transition montages that are slower paced, showing an alternate side to the salon's atmosphere with the use of slower, more emotional music. These montages were placed after conversations that I found to be more emotionally charged or significant, and therefore wanted to call attention to the content and to allow the viewers these slow-down 'breaks'.

In terms of the film's music, I decided to use songs by my grandmother, Souad Zaki. My grandmother was a famous singer and actress in Egypt in the 1940s, and her music suited the film for two reasons: firstly, because they are sung in Arabic, but also because of the family connection, which makes it more personal for me and marks the subjective and identity exploration of me as the filmmaker.

### **My Character**

While my own character in the film is mostly presented through my hands and voice, I also decided to include my character in the montages of the salon, doing tasks or communicating with clients. Since I viewed my role and consistent presence in the salon as the key to becoming close with the women, allowing themselves to be filmed and to open up on camera, I wanted to express these elements and my familiarity with the salon by showing me washing the floors, helping the crew, and generally being present all the time.

I ended the film with myself in the washing basin, being washed by my boss. I wanted to put myself in the same position of my subjects, under the rigged



camera's lens, shot from the same intimate angle. I also wanted it to symbolise the mental wash that I have experienced in the salon, of entering the place with pessimistic approach, and leaving it more hopeful. I closed the film with the following voice-over:

I went to my hometown, so I could meet Arab women, so I could hear from them about the difficulties of living as a minority in Israel. Within a complex reality, I found a story of a friendship, acceptance and respect between women. And I left not only with a film, but also, with hope. (2015, Iris Zaki)

Adding this commentary at the end was important for me, as I wanted to state my conclusion, even if it is an obvious one, in order to make sure that it is clear that this place is an island. The idea that some viewers would finish watching with the impression that this represents more than this space, more than a hope for something that could have existed, has bothered me more than the use of voiceover as an artistic element.

The last shot of the film shows the dismantling of the rig, taking different parts off, one by one. This reflexive shot exposes the way the film has been shot, with the minimalism of a guerilla setting and by a one-woman-band.

#### **4. Reception/ Viewers**

The film's world premiere was in Nyon, Switzerland, where I first showed it on a big screen. Unlike the lightness I felt when showing my first film, this time the screening was a more stressful experience; I feared that people would find watching 36 minutes of mostly close-ups too monotonous or boring, and that the film would come across as too naïve politically, that the complexity I wanted it to convey might be missed. I was both intrigued and intimidated to re-watch my own creation through the feedback I received from viewers.

The film has since screened at over hundred festivals and conferences, exposing it to audiences of different countries, ages, religions, and orientation; from cinemagoers, to academics, filmmakers and ethnographers. The discussions I have had with viewers have been an essential element of the

filmmaking process and I used the opportunity of meeting my viewers to bring some reflexive additions to the film, as such elaborating on some of the important issues that the film tackles (which I will discuss in the next section).

At the same time, I have been exposed to some very interesting reactions of viewers to the film. Judging by the responses I have received from people that I have conversed with – including audiences, interviewers and festival curators – it seems that viewers did grasp the political and ethnic complexity. Furthermore, although I considered the film to be politically mild, to my surprise it has actually elicited some strong reactions from viewers, especially from Jewish and Israeli ones, from both the right and left-wings of the political spectrum. The Israeli embassy in the US, for instance, has refused to assist with the film's promotion, as they usually do with Israeli films, since it includes my comments on racism in Israel, the occupation and the current government. At two different events in Israel, viewers have used the Q&A session to suggest I live in another country if I am not happy with the way things are politically. On the other hand, a few people thought that I was being irresponsible by showing a positive angle of what they consider as a troubled reality of Arabs in Israel. One woman criticised me for speaking with the Arab women in Hebrew, the language of occupation, and commented that I was putting them in a position which reminded her of a torture chair.

### **Audience Questions**

The most frequent questions I have been asked have concerned the film's subjects: their cooperation and willingness to be filmed; whether or not they have been aware of the camera; how many women I filmed and whether I selected these women out of many that were filmed; how the subjects have reacted to the film. Other common questions addressed the status of Arabs in Israel and in Haifa. I realised that many people seek to leave the cinema feeling that they have expanded their knowledge by watching the documentary; seem to look for logic, to organise the new information they have learnt and to come to some conclusions. I have been asked a lot of questions about the reality of Arabs in Haifa – their lives, beliefs and attitudes. I always try to make it clear that my film is not a study about Arabs in Israel, nor about Christian Arabs in

Haifa. The film, I maintain, is about my experience in this little salon, limited to the time I have been there, the people I have met and to my limited and specific ability as an outsider who is an other to the community she has depicted.

### **Some Words about Words**

I had a few comments from Hebrew speakers about the translation choices, in particular, that the subtitles of the film sometimes are not precisely what the person said but rather more of a tendentious interpretation. This called my attention to the inherent subjectivity of the act of translation. Since I am the person who translated the film (due to budget restrictions), when translating scenes, I have used my first-hand experience of chatting with the subjects to bring the context of some of the things that were said by me and by them, since sometimes pieces were edited into the film without the wider context of the conversation or a broader indication of its spirit and tone. For instance, I asked a young Arab woman if when growing up she felt like an outsider, yet I translated it as 'inferior', since this is what I meant to ask and what we went on to discuss through the remainder of the wash (which was not shown in full as part of the edited film). Additionally, I had some comments about the political impact of the choice of words – for instance, when I said that the Arabs 'ran away', rather than 'being expelled'.

## **5. Reflection: Self and Ethics**

The night before I actually started shooting, I had a vivid and unpleasant dream: I dreamt that every woman that sat in my washing chair died.

The process of making this documentary turned out to be one which required a negotiation between artistic decisions and ethical choices. I will now discuss some of the main issues which the process of my decision making involved, in order to demonstrate this negotiation.

### **The Chosen Community: Christian Arabs**

In addition to the desire to film in my hometown, choosing Haifa was a political choice, as the city symbolises a deep coexistence between religions and

ethnicities. My aim was to interact with the Arab minority and experience their everyday life in a peaceful location. When choosing to film in an Arab business in Haifa, though, I did not consider the crucial religious aspect of the salon being owned by Christian Arabs and the majority Christian Arab clientele.

While not spelling out that the Arab women in the film are Christians, I have included some visual elements in the film that indicate that the area and the salon are identified with Christianity. The rationale behind the decision not to present the film as one that is specifically on Christian Arabs in Israel, has two roots. The first is related to the subjects: I do not feel that as an Israeli Jew I should confine or limit the ethnic self-definition of the Arab subjects in the film; it is not for me to suggest that their Arabness is specific or that it is different or detached from another Arabness; such a distinction either derives from a subjective sense of identity or self-definition of the Christian Arabs community members themselves. Therefore, freeing the idea of Arabness from specific references felt like the right choice. The second reason is related to my objective to avoid presenting the documentary as a study about or defining the Christian Arab community. Framing the documentary as one focused on Christian-Arabs in Israel would strengthen its apparent function as an attempted representation of a certain ethnic and religious group. Instead, I intended to focus on the feminine bond, a bond that traverses religion and ethnicity, as opposed to highlighting divisions between ethnic and religious groups.

With the same objective in mind, I chose to exclude content that touches the Christian-Muslim issue, although this issue came up in a few conversations and despite there being some very strong statements that could have given the film a controversial edge. I felt that it would be irresponsible to open this very complex and international topic without treating it with the seriousness it deserves, that this aspect should be covered and discussed deeply, not through a partial or superficial representation. I also thought that it would be unfair to the Arab subjects, who probably have a lot more to say about these issues and would probably wish to elaborate if they were interviewed about the subject specifically. Given these two concerns – responsibility for the *viewers* (as including such statements would mean delivering a limited representation of a

complex issue), and responsibility for the integrity of the film's *subjects* – I believe I made the ethical choice, rather than courting controversy.

### **Arabs and Jews, in the Sink and Beyond**

While not having Arab women expressing criticism about Israel in the film, it is important to point out, as I do in after-screening discussions or interviews, several elements that cannot be understood through the film in isolation. Some elements are related to my own choices, which therefore require further discussion and some concern wider contextual points and assumptions.

Firstly, the social status of Arabs and Jews in Israel is different. Arabs are often viewed by the Jewish society as lower class or marginal minority, in terms of their ethnicity, religion, language and culture. Radai, Elran, Makladeh, and Kornberg analysed several opinion polls between the years 2007 and 2014, which focused on the attitudes of Arab citizens in Israel, and concluded that all the studies highlighted feelings of discrimination, racism and of being treated as second-class citizens (Radai, Elran, Makladeh, and Kornberg, 2015).

Sammy Smootha argues that Israel is based on 'Jewish and Zionist hegemony and on structural subordination of the Arab minority' (497), and identifies the state as what he considers to be an 'ethnic democracy', on which he writes:

Ethnic democracy is propelled by an ideology or a movement of ethnic nationalism that declares a certain population as an ethnic nation sharing a common descent (blood ties), a common language and a common culture. This ethnic nation claims ownership of a certain territory that it considers its exclusive homeland. It also appropriates a state in which it exercises its full right to self-determination. The ethnic nation, not the citizenry, shapes the symbols, laws and policies of the state for the benefit of the majority. This ideology makes a crucial distinction between members and non-members of the ethnic nation. Members of the ethnic nation may be divided into persons living in the homeland and persons living in the diaspora. Both are preferred to non-members who are 'others', outsiders, less desirable persons, who cannot be full members of the society and state. Citizenship is separate from nationality, neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for membership in the ethnic nation, unlike the situation in the West where the idea of a civic nation is prevalent. (2002: 477)

Given this complex, inferior position of the Arab citizens in Israel, I can assume that it was more complicated for the Arab women to open up to me, than it was for the Jewish women. I might have been viewed as an outsider, not only because of the religious and ethnic aspects of my Jewishness, but because of the differing levels of freedom afforded to us as majority and minority respectively; that is, I was in a privileged position of feeling able to freely criticise the government, while the Arab women may have felt pressured into a less critical and more politically neutral position because of their minority status. Generally speaking, the Arab women I interacted with at the salon and the ones I have filmed did not seem to be outwardly politically driven. It could be that they did not wish or feel comfortable enough to express their political views among Jews; this may also be a form of social protection or survival method due to their position in the Israeli society, unlike the Jewish women who do not feel the need to justify their presence in this land. Or, conversely, it may be the case that many were either genuinely indifferent or have become too fatigued by political matters to focus on them; one subject, Nawal, for instance, whose family had fled to Lebanon shared with me her desire to focus on living her life and running her business rather than on the historical and political situation.

Another element worth noting in the context of the positive portrait of the Arab-Jewish relationship through my film, is the fact that Jewish women who visit the salon and the neighbourhood's other businesses, are individuals who are, in the first place, more positive towards the Arab community or even wish to support the Arab businesses in town.

### **Don't Get in My Way, I'm Trying to Represent You...**

In retrospect, the process of creating this film has been a lesson for me in being a documentarist, in not getting the content I aimed for originally, and in working out how to make an effective film despite this. This filming process was an embodiment of the concept described in Chapter 2, of the tension that exists within the triangle of filmmaker/subjects/viewers. I had to consider how to stay loyal, both to my subjects and to my self and my own political views, and to combine these potentially clashing interests in a way that made sure I was also loyal to my viewers. Politically, my lesson involved a heightened awareness of

my own prejudgements and my assumptions that I know what the group I consider as inferior think and feel. Although in theory I view communities as non-monolithic, I came to this project hoping and expecting to hear Arab women's frustration, yet this has not been the case.

By making this film I not only represent a community by exploring them ethnographically, I also depict a very complex situation in Israel, namely the relationship between Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel, and, above all, I wanted to ensure that I was not whitewashing the complex reality of this situation. I had to decide how to combine what I filmed with what I believe. I felt that first and foremost, I had to be loyal to the authentic experience of the place, to the genuine, if specifically located, coexistence of Arabs and Jews. I felt that I had to make sure that I showed the reality of the salon, while stressing the reality surrounding it.

### **Subjects' reception**

The women that appear in the documentary watched it together on the big screen in Haifa. To my surprise, their close-ups and edited characters did not bother them as much as the overall message of the film. From the personal responses I received from the different subjects, it seems that they were relieved when they saw that I showed the positivity that exists in the salon and did not force my agenda in a way that suggested a tension in the Arab-Jewish relationship.

### **The 'Three Dalias' Case**

#### **1. Filming Dalia**

One of the strongest characters in *Women in Sink* is Dalia – a Jewish woman who is a regular client at Fifi's, who visits every week and is welcomed as family. Despite being an Ashkenazi Jew (who originated in Central and Eastern Europe), Dalia speaks fluent Arabic owing to the fact that her parents had lived in Haifa from the early 1940s. Speaking Arabic, growing up surrounded by her parents' Arab friends, and being a part of the salon's 'familia', I was rather surprised when Dalia started expressing opinions that could be identified as

right wing (although they are in line with the Israeli consensus, judging by the politics in Israel).

Dalia confidently states that the Arabs who fled Haifa in 1948<sup>3</sup> were not forced to leave Israel, but rather chose to. She adds that the Arabs have enough countries to go to, except Israel, that there is no racism in Israel and some further statements in the same spirit. While hearing these statements, as I was shampooing Dalia's hair and filming, I knew instantly that this conversation would make good material for my film; she was the only character that I was debating with, and therefore made much more interesting content, compared with the rest of the women I was chatting with on more neutral topics. At the time, I was pleased to have Dalia in my occupied washing basin and finally bring some edge to the film.

## **2. Editing Dalia**

This sense of satisfaction quickly changed when I watched back the conversation with Dalia. My discomfort with her filmed character or self is a struggle that has been ongoing throughout the process of making the film, screening and distributing it, and beyond. At the heart of this discomfort, is the tension between what benefits the film and as a result me - the filmmaker, and my responsibility towards my subjects.

My struggle with 'filmed Dalia' has two aspects. First, her physical appearance in the film: being taller than most of the women, I had a hard time setting the fixed frame of Dalia's close-up in the sink. After a few unsuccessful attempts to improve the camera's position, and with a queue of women waiting to get their hair washed, I had to compromise on the frame. The result was an unflattering angle to her neck and face. As I was concerned about Dalia's trust in me to make her look good, as well as the film's aesthetics, I eventually planted a fake towel in After-Effects to cover her exposed neck, which was very expensive and challenging.

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<sup>3</sup> The Palestinian Arab Exodus from Haifa during the 1948 Palestine war (Nakba).



The second, and more significant element of my struggle with filmed-Dalia was the content of the interview - her own words. Dalia's statements may be common in the Israeli political climate, though I could easily imagine how negatively they would be received by non-Jewish and non-Israeli viewers. Therefore, when editing her character, it was important to me to show a 'rounded' Dalia: to point out that she grew up with Arabs and has Arab friends, yet still has these opinions about the evacuation and about the political situation. I tried to show that these opinions could come from someone who is not a right-wing racist. This complication, I believe, is essential for my film and I see Dalia's role in the film as one of the most important.

The part of Dalia in the film ends with her colonialist statement that 'the Arabs should be grateful that we have made the desert bloom', which continues to a slow montage of the Arab women in the salon, with the sound of a sad Arabic song. The slow music and the montage of women (which is different in nature than the rest of the upbeat, more humorous clips between one character to the next) emphasise the dramatic impact of her statement. Every time I watch this part, I have an emotional reaction – both because of what she is saying about the Arabs and the sad reality in Israel, but also because of what I 'did' to Dalia, a subject in my film. In a way, I feel partly responsible for her own words, even though she did say them and with great confidence.

Whenever I share this struggle with people, they ask me whether Dalia signed a release form. When I confirm she did, they say 'well, you're covered'. My discomfort, however, does not stem from legal or administrative reasons: it comes from my need as a filmmaker to protect my subject, who trusted me and allowed me to document her in a rather intimate and vulnerable situation. It is the responsibility of exposing her to the world in a specific way, edited and filtered by me. My sense of uneasiness in watching her character increases in certain moments: for example, when she is expressing stronger statements about Arabs during the hair wash, and looking at the salon to see if the Arab hairdressers can hear her. Watching it is heart-breaking for me, since while she is worried about the hairdressers hearing her, I am actually shooting the conversation, which means that not only they would eventually be exposed to

what she said, additionally, many other people would. So the success of my filmmaking method, which made Dalia open up and forget about being filmed (she mentioned this when we finished the wash), on a different level makes me feel culpable, as if I had purposefully set a trap.

Before showing the film to Dalia herself, my entire dialogue had not been with Dalia herself, but rather, with what I thought Dalia would feel if she saw her part in the film. As a filmmaker, then, I dealt with three “Dalias”: the subject/ filmed Dalia, my imagined Dalia (who would hate her part in the film) and, the eventual Dalia, who will make up her own mind about the film and her part. By being a character who triggered several controversies in the filmmaking process, Dalia functions as a good demonstration of the practice of ethics in documentary filmmaking, which I touched upon in Chapter 2. With no formal professional etiquette and while dealing with human beings and their representation, a documentarist has to negotiate between conflicting questions, and in many cases, such as my own, it is done in the editing room in a ‘vacuum’, without discussion with those documented.

I approached Dalia in order for her to sign the consent after I already edited her character (as I did with the rest of the subjects in this film). Signing a subject once knowing their part in the film perhaps makes it even harder for a filmmaker than signing subjects prior to filming: I was already invested in editing the character and knew her value to the film, so if she refused to sign at this stage, it would adversely affect the film. I also did not have “the innocence” that I had before filming her - as I knew her role and edited character - and this position of knowledge over her increased the tension in this interaction.

Dalia was not interested in the details or in asking any questions. If anything, she was the most enthusiastic person to sign the form and faxed it to me soon after receiving it.

### **3. Big Screen Dalia**

As I predicted, people indeed reacted to Dalia, and I have received many responses to her character and statements. After showing the film at different

international festivals for half a year, it has finally arrived in Haifa, where it screened at the International Film Festival in a 500-seats hall. I invited all the subjects and the women from the salon to watch the film for the very first time. Before the screening began, I saw Dalia, and faced my fear and anxiety. I felt that I need to prepare her, as I was worried that she will be offended. I felt bad about my own 'power' – of editing selves, of emphasizing certain elements – both opinions that suited my film, but also visual elements, such as facial parts, such as necks, teeth, emphasising flaws, both physical and nonphysical.

After the screening, Dalia thanked me for making the film and not only expressed the satisfaction she had gained from it, but urged me to show it to the world, so that people would know the truth.

### **The Third Film: *Café Tekoa*, 66 min, 2017**

From the free-spirited and lefty Tel-Aviv, I decided to settle in the midst of Israel most controversial, right wing and religious enterprise: the settlements. I moved to Tekoa, a trendy settlement, and occupied a corner, outside the local bakery, where I set up a pop-up-café/ film studio with the aim of filming casual chats with the locals. After being ignored for quite a while, I began to strike up conversations with the suspicious settlers of Tekoa, who usually avoid the media due to their fear of further increasing their bad reputation. The film brings this dialogue: between Tel Aviv and the settlements, between left and right, religious and secular and between two clashing perspectives of what Israel should look like.

### **From Participant Observer to Invader**

In order to keep exploring different elements of the Israeli society, which nevertheless also form parts of my own identity, I have chosen to focus on settlers, a community with which I have a deep political conflict. It seemed an appropriate method for this research to position myself in my own society, yet within perhaps the community's most dissonant subgroup. Moreover, settlers have attracted many filmmakers and journalists, have been documented many

times, and, due to their negative reputation and image, have very problematic relationship with cameras and outsiders coming to depict them. All these aspects made this a very challenging, yet interesting, group for my project, both in terms of testing my filmmaking technique with a community which is often camera-phobic, and also, in trying to follow my community approach, and not create a stereotypical portrait.

This time I decided, due to production-related reasons, and, more importantly, in order to better explore the community, to move to a settlement myself. Production-wise, it seemed more practical to stay in the settlement in which I was filming, for the production duration, than to drive back and forth, not to forget that it could be dangerous for an Israeli to move around in the West Bank. In terms of the ethnographic and documentary aspiration, I believed that when it came to settlers – who live on the other side of the Israeli Green Line, where the conflict is a tangible and prominent element in their everyday lives, and whose choice to live in this very space is a political one – capturing the community would be far more comprehensive if I experienced living there day to day.

## **1. Pre-filming/ Initial Conceptualisation**

If in the previous film I did not conduct a formal research and had the locations and stories ‘find’ me, this time I had to invest time, energy and money in finding a community and a location for my film. It is worth mentioning that throughout this filmmaking process – from my very first research steps to the end of my shooting period – I have been open with people about my political views, of being against the occupation and the settlements. Except for having a desired community for this film, I began with no preconceived concept or aim for the project overall.

### **The 'Grey Palette' Approach**

The reception of *Women in Sink* has taught me, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, that sometimes the 'greyer' voices, the ones that usually do not attract filmmakers and broadcasters, can be rather controversial. Such voices do not fall into black and white categories of perception, the good vs. bad, and instead encourage rethinking and emphasise the complexity that exists between definitions and conceptual borders.

For this reason, I knew that I wanted to document my encounter in a 'grey' settlement, and avoid choosing a settlement that is considered more extreme, such as the Jewish community in Hebron, which has been featured many times on the media. Instead, I looked for a more moderate settlement, in which I would hopefully be able to find common ground with people. This would allow us to explore our similarities as well as differences, and the contrasts between themselves, as individuals in a wider community.

### **My Helpmates**

With this in mind, I had to find people from 'my side' that would connect me with the other side of Israel, as I had no connection whatsoever to the Jewish settlements. Through an introduction by common friends, I met three different journalists who covered the West Bank for the Israeli media, all seemed to be very knowledgeable about the settlements, all the three are religious or came from religious backgrounds. After mapping the settlements over a cup of coffee in Tel-Aviv, where they all shared their interesting and unique theories about the different type of settlers and settlements (which ones are more bourgeois or more ideological, for example), two of the journalists took me for visits in the West Bank. All three told me that Tekoa would be the best choice for my aim. They view it as the most interesting and colourful settlement, as it has a nice mixture of lifestyles – religious and seculars, hippies and bourgeois – as well as a wide spectrum of political views within the Zionist right-wing spectrum. All of these journalists expressed their concerns regarding the challenge of gaining the settlers' trust and cooperation, in being filmed and in opening up.

## **My Inside Person**

One of the journalists offered to introduce me to Matanya, a high school friend of his, who lives in Tekoa. I called Matanya and told him about my project and goals. I emphasised my passion to get to know communities, my aim to bring about a different gaze and a complicated portrait, as well as my own lack of knowledge of the settlements, being a leftist from Tel-Aviv. He seemed intrigued and started to think out loud about possible jobs for me in the settlement that would suit my documentary method.

Shortly after our phone conversation, I went to visit Tekoa, for the second time, this time to meet Matanya, who turned out to be a very interesting and sharp person. He showed me the settlement and I learnt that he was born in there. He took me to several spots he thought could work for my film – a catering company, a pizzeria, a second-hand store. I visited Tekoa several more times, to meet the owners of these businesses. Unlike in my previous films, I felt I had to pass a test with the settlers-owners; I had to explain much more about where I was coming from and how I intended to represent the community. They also wanted to watch my previous films. I was nervous and stressed during that approval period. Nevertheless, in each visit I was captivated by the kindness of the people that I met, by the view of the mountains, and by the warmth of this small community.

## **About Tekoa – The Chosen Settlement**

Founded in 1976, on the ruins of the biblical village of Tekoa, along the borders of the Palestinian town of Tuqu', the settlement of Tekoa is one of the West Bank's oldest. Tekoa is considered to be one of the West Bank's most colourful and youthful settlements owing to the fact that since its establishment, it has always been a mixed settlement (with both religious and secular Israelis) and to its sizable artists' community of musicians, painters, sculptors and filmmakers. The settlement's reputation is largely tied to that of Rabbi Menachem Froman, who served the community until his death in 2013 and believed in religious peace and co-existence and the rights of both Israelis and Palestinians to their shared historical homeland.

Today, in the wake of Tekoa's rapid growth (from 200 to 900 families in the last decade alone), Rabbi Froman's memory lives on in spirit more than in practice as few residents remain who share his outlook. The settlement is now known more for its organic produce, which creates a genuine challenge for the leftists of Tel Aviv who are forced to either buy or boycott, choosing between their diet or their political consciousness.

### **The (First) Location**

After considering my work options, I chose the pizzeria. I had a great connection with the owner, a fascinating woman, who expressed her concerns not only about letting me film in her business, but also about losing customers due to her cooperation with me. However, after meeting me a few times, watching my previous films and considering it for a while, she decided to let me work and film in the pizzeria. I respected the fact that she had shared her fears with me in a direct and honest way. I assured her that I did not have a hidden agenda of showing settlers as evil criminals, though I do have my own politics and assumptions, which I bring with me on this journey.

### **Moving and Settling: Not a Soft Landing**

Although I initially planned to stay during the filming period with a local family that agreed to have me after Matanya introduced us, after a political debate in their garden on one of my visits, they shared their worries with me, and I decided that it would be better, in all aspects, to rent a flat in Tekoa on my own. In order to install the equipment – this time three rigged cameras and more complex sound – I had a professional crew come to the pizzeria to set the equipment.

## **2. The Filming Period**

### **No Pizza for Me**

Installing the equipment on my own on every shift in the pizzeria was physically challenging for me and I found learning the pizza job tough as well. In addition, I generally felt insecure and out of my comfort zone, and therefore I was quite embarrassed to ask people to be filmed. After two shifts I followed an advice

from a nice customer who wanted to help, and I had him sent an email to the Tekoa group email (which most of the residents receive), where I wrote about myself, my project and intentions, inviting residents to come to the pizzeria for a filmed chat. I surely did not expect to get the responses I did: a few people shared their concerns after searching for me online and watching some of my materials and interviews. They advised people not to cooperate with me, as I'm against the occupation, and would probably portray the settlement in a negative light.

Around the same time, I was added to my street's WhatsApp group, where neighbours ask each other for things they need, such as carpools to Jerusalem or painkillers for their ill children. Another unpleasant incident happened when two neighbours who did not know me, saw me filming the street view, and started accusing me of being a spy for one of the human rights NGOs which cover the West Bank. They shouted at me and tried to prevent me from driving away by holding my car's door open. It did not take more than ten minutes to have a live report on 'Happiness street' group about the woman who seemed very nervous and tried to run away, with the suggestion of calling the local security van to come and investigate me. After having no success in trying to explain myself to the group, they informed me that I am being removed from it.

These incidents did not help my initial feelings of alienation in Tekoa. I had felt tense and stressed both in my neighbourhood and in the pizzeria. I had lost my confidence, in my project and, perhaps worse, I felt uncomfortable to walk around Tekoa, feeling I had become the talk of the village.

As my first few shifts in the pizzeria passed, I realised that I did not have the freedom needed in order to chat and film as I have done in the previous projects. The space was small, I was surrounded by too many teen-employees who were not too comfortable with my invasion of their space. I came to the conclusion that the pizzeria did not suit my needs, and when I met the owner to let her know about my decision to leave, she said that it also did not work for her and that my decision was for the best.



### **My Pop-up Café**

I continued to look for options and new ideas for my project. The very few options of working in customer service in Tekoa were problematic, due to technical reasons such as lack of traffic, of having customers that are non-settlers, or not being big enough to have me film in the space. I started to feel more and more hopeless. I realised that I was losing energy, time and money, and that all I really needed at this stage was a spot where I could sit and talk with locals. In the days that followed the email exchange, I received a few emails from people who said they would be interested in being filmed, as well as a message from a woman named Sima, who was born in Tekoa and offered to assist me in finding a location. I met Sima, who took me to her work, an elderly centre, which was interesting yet not exactly what I needed. She then walked me to the centre of Tekoa, where there is a grocery, an organic store, the post office and a surgery, and suggested filming outside of the organic store, as the spot was central and the owner agreeable. There was a coffee table and two chairs and I figured that it could function as a meeting point for my conversations. I went in and introduced myself to the owner, who had met me a few times before when I bought organic products. After I explained my goal, saying that I am a leftist who never met settlers, but really wants to get to know them, he agreed.

### **Choosing the frames**

I decided to film the conversation from three angles: one frame focusing on the subject, one on me, and a third one showing a two-shot, a more open frame which captures not only the coffee table with the two of us, but also the entrance to the organic store. The entrance to the store seemed like a very interesting spot – since almost everyone visits the business, this angle has observational value, by visually revealing Tekoa's rich human fabric and the local habits such as the high percentages of children and infants, the presence of soldiers, the way teens "throw" their bikes and enter the store, the way people dress and interact.

## **Starting Over**

By the time I occupied the coffee table, a few locals had agreed to sit for a filmed conversation. As opposed to the previous projects, this project involved and required searching for subjects in addition to ‘catching’ random pass-byers. However, even though I had invited some people to come and have coffee with me, I did not have a pre-filming research preparation talk with them, and the filmed coffee conversations were, in most cases, the first time I had a proper conversation with the subjects.

Although it was initially difficult to gain the locals’ cooperation, leaving me sat in my pop-up café/studio alone at first, I ended up conversing with around thirty subjects over the six weeks I spent in the location. Some were random locals whom I approached in person when they passed by my coffee table, several of them spontaneously sat down and some were interested and came back for a scheduled chat. Other subjects I contacted through my friend Matanya, who recommended them as interesting characters. I had some very political conversations and some personal ones. I filmed people who were born in Tekoa and some who just moved to the community. I had elderly and teenagers, men and women, religious and seculars, Americans and Sabra (born in Israel).

## **3. Post-production/Editing**

### **Don’t Make Us Look Bad/ Don’t Make Them Look Good**

In many ways, the process of editing this project has also been much more challenging and intense than the previous projects of this research: it has been done over a much longer period of time, it is a feature length film (thus requiring greater storytelling and content), and, in comparison to the communities of the previous two projects, it has been more difficult for me to portray the settlers I met and my experience during the filming. A significant pressure during this filmmaking process was the “make them look good/ make them look bad” dilemma. Ever since I started this project, the settlers of Tekoa (including, but not limited to the ones I filmed) were very concerned about how their community was going to be represented. They were suspicious about my intentions, asked to watch my previous films and were worried that my political agenda meant that I would automatically depict them in a negative light. Simultaneously, there

were many concerns from the opposing side of the political spectrum, with many people around me voicing worries which I shared or had considered: that it could be irresponsible to turn an empathic gaze on settlers, that the film did not show the Palestinian side, or that softening the image of settlers could be counterproductive overall.

With these struggles, I went to the editing room and began a long journey, one which revived many of the emotions I had already felt in the field. Due to the filming experience being so personal and affective, this time, I decided to make my character more prominent in the documentary, and to make the experience of making the film and living in the settlement, the frame of the film.

Acknowledging that the emotional experience had a massive effect on the representation, highlighting this very experience (through the storytelling and a high level of reflexivity) seemed like the right choice here. I also felt that, above all, I was not aiming to show one side as right and the other as wrong. Rather, the aim was both to show the complexity I experienced after chatting with many settlers and to take my viewers on a journey similar to my own, one that would not necessarily make things clearer or arrive at a satisfying conclusion, but would make one rethink. More specifically, this means rethinking, not only about settlers and a potential solution to the conflict from the Israeli side, but rethinking about how different sides construct different narratives with their own perceived reality and legitimacy. It means reconsidering stereotypes and how we categorise things, people and societies. During this filmmaking process, for instance, I realised that I already had quite a specific image of settlers in my head, yet many of those I met reminded me of my friends from Tel Aviv in the way they spoke or dressed. It also turned out that the settler who appeared the most open-minded and liberal at first glance, expressed the most right-wing and religious opinions (Moriya), and conversely, that the woman who seemed the most religious held the most open-minded anti-occupation agenda (Michal). I tried to bring this to the screen and allow my viewers to experience the same shift, eventually, questioning their prejudice.

Similarly to my previous projects, this film's heart is my encounters with individuals and the prime location is where these encounters took place, yet this time the narrative included my journey in the settlement. Owing to this, I haven't used only transmissions in-between the conversations (like I did in the previous films), but rather scenes, to achieve a continuous and progressing journey, of the leftist filmmaker who moved to Tekoa to sit and talk with settlers.

### **Aesthetics and Cinematic Choices**

Not shooting my affairs in the settlements as they occurred was an artistic and ethnographic choice I made prior to the shooting; I did not want to have a cameraperson moving to the settlement with me and documenting my journey there, because I believed that moving there on my own would make it easier to gain the community's trust. Alternatively, being behind the camera and shooting my everyday experiences myself in a more confessional manner, was not the language I wanted the film to have. Therefore, in order to translate the two months experience in Tekoa into a film, I decided to use strong images of the settlement, images showing the nuances of everyday life from my point of view as an outsider, that together with edited sounds would tell the story and state the personal nature of the film.

My concept for the scenes between conversations, which I went to film having already left the settlement, was to echo something that was very dominant in my experience there: the strong dissonance between the pastoral lifestyle and the political context of living in the occupied territories. This contrast was also emphasised through the use of sound that I recorded in Tekoa, such as the wind chime, the military presence (helicopters, etc.) and the Muezzin Calling from the next door Palestinian village. Before one conversation, for instance, I showed shots of 'Tekoa's Love Festival' and people practicing yoga, followed by shots of a soldier in a guard tower. I also used additional audio elements: radio breaking news, a real phone conversation I recorded, and a recorded conversation between Matanya and a local settler (which appears in the first scene of the film).

## **Characters**

From the many filmed conversations, I chose seven characters with which I had the most meaningful dialogues. I also wanted to include a selection which shows a variety of opinions. Although I shot people of different ages and from different backgrounds, eventually the characters who were selected to the film are all in their 20s-30s, with most of them being second-generation settlers.

Unlike the previous projects, in this documentary there is a returning character, Matanya, who is without a doubt a main character in the film. My journey in Tekoa was also Matanya's journey, both because he has taken the position of protecting me and helping me with the project, and, because chatting with me many times also made him rethink his opinions, just as I reconsidered my own. Owing to our longer term, progressive relationship, the interaction between Matanya and I has become more intimate and emotional, it moved from the more political to the personal, and therefore stood out from the rest. I view my continued encounter with Matanya as the main encounter of the film, the one which represents the encounter of the Israeli left and right, of two different narratives brought together. This more personal natured dynamic also assisted me in presenting my emotional journey in the film.

## **My Character**

Out of the three documentaries, this film is the one in which my filmic character is the roundest, most developed and dominant. It is no longer the frame of the enquiry, the motivation, where the filmmaker's curiosity serves as a vehicle to stimulate interesting conversation and explore the subjects and the community. I felt that such a personal journey, of moving to a place, of immersing oneself into a community, with all the tension that existed in this very journey, required a character. Thus, in *Café Tekoa* my character is the main character; my presence is prominent - this time I appear on screen in the same nature my subjects do, and in the same volume. I am exposed not only to the same extent that my subjects are, but perhaps further. My temper, my humour, my vulnerability, my provocation and my agenda, are all exposed in the film.

#### **4. Reception/ Viewers**

As the film remains in post-production at this stage of the thesis's writing, the film's reception cannot be explored as part of this submission.

#### **5. Reflection: Self and Ethics**

This third project has, without doubt, been the most challenging in all aspects: my relationship with the community I have visited; gaining access and finding a location; living within the community; finding willing subjects and, finally applying the method – all have involved difficulties.

By going for the first time to a truly closed community – both geographically and ideologically (they actually have an Acceptance Committee) – on all possible fronts I had to make adjustments and compromises in order to be able to achieve the very goal of documenting conversations with community members. If in the first film there was an existing encounter that I decided to capture and therefore came up with the method, and in the second film I used the method in order to create and capture an encounter, in this third film I had to compromise on some of the method's elements in order to have a filmed encounter.

I had to conduct research that would allow me not only to find a community, but to create the essential connections in order to be accepted by it. I adjusted the key element of working in a business, which was significant as it tends to generate unmediated communication. I had to look for random subjects, instead of meeting them through serving them and establishing an organic interaction. As this element of filming while working had changed to filming while conversing for the film's sake, it meant that both parties had a higher awareness of the camera and of being filmed; moreover, the awareness increased as I used more complicated equipment which meant that setting it up for each subject took longer time, and several time during the filming, I had to get up and make sure that all the devices work properly.

#### **The Political Conflict: My Feeling Towards Settlers**

Settlers are perhaps the Israeli section with which I have the strongest political conflict and therefore the strongest hostility towards. The settlements have

always been on my mind; they seemed like a burden, an obstacle to peace. They annoyed me when I read the news and embarrassed me when I travelled and introduced myself as an Israeli. A settler, however, I had never met in person.

While Jewish settlers in the West Bank have usually been captured as political extremists, Palestinians haters, Messianics and outlaws, I wanted to get a taste of the community by living in a settlement, interacting with residents (and not only when the cameras were recording) in order to find out if beneath the extreme images and the loud voices, there are people whose voice is uncertain. I wanted to explore the personal conflicts that only someone who lives in this controversial area faces, and to hear from settlers how their set of values and beliefs coexist with the consequences of their existence in this territory.

It has turned out to be acutely challenging for me to have an ethnographic ear and to maintain full control over the volatile feelings that arose when discussing politics with subjects in this project. In response to external feedback and self-reflection about my talkative – sometimes pushy – character in *Women in Sink*, I attempted to sit and listen, and to avoid getting drawn into political debates, yet in every conversation conflicting perspectives were present. On the other hand, hearing so many people expressing points of view which were new to me, as well as living in this territory and sometimes in a state of fear, inevitably affected me. I now view the situation as more complicated than I did prior to the project.

The nature and the intensity of this project also had a significant personal impact on me – it challenged and shook me in many aspects: physically, mentally, socially and ideologically. The disharmony between the community and myself was present at many levels beyond the obvious, political ones: there was the small and insular community lifestyle versus my urbanity and individualism; there was being a single, 38-year-old woman from a liberal and queer mentality versus a society of married, family-focused, straight people; there was an ever-present religiosity and Zionism versus my secular and cosmopolitical point of view. In short, nearly every aspect of living in Tekoa involved a measure of personal division or difference. There was the social

element, the struggle of being accepted, and the ideological difficulty of living in a territory that is against my credo. It is different to discuss the occupation as a more abstract concept, than driving in the occupied territories, seeing Palestinian villages and individuals, going through checkpoints as Jewish-Israeli and living on an occupied hill. I felt the contrast between the sense of normality which one feels after living there for a few weeks – of buying organic products in the grocery, having beer at someone's balcony in the evening, being surrounded by beautiful landscape and children, the everyday mundane existence, and the political act of being there and its implication on a reality which I consider disturbed and humanely wrong.

Another element which has been present in the journey of making this project is the pressure I have felt from the leftist milieu from which I come. Throughout the process of making this documentary, I have received some very negative and concerned comments from friends about going to document settlers, expressing how problematic it could be to explore, voice and humanise the settlers' ideological perspectives.

## **The Film that Wasn't Made**

Once I completed *Women in Sink* and looked for a third community to depict, I decided to shoot in London again, this time to explore a community which I do not have particular common ties with: Muslim Arabs. My desire was to interact with people who, like myself, come from the Middle-East and live as foreigners in London; I wanted to explore the concept of 'home', away from home and away from our geographical origins which divide us and define us as enemies. In order to find a business that would allow me to apply my documentary method by hiring me to work in customer service, I visited the Edgware Road neighbourhood in central London, which is the area most often identified with the city's Arab community and which would offer plenty of authentic restaurants and shops suitable for my purposes. After a few silent visits, of wandering around the long road, back and forth, observing the area while searching for a potential spot, I targeted a few groceries. I thought that such stores would serve



the concept I had in mind well, as convenience stores that are located within ethnic communities and offer popular products from abroad, both serve and embody migrants' longing for home, for remembered flavours and feelings.

Throughout my several visits, over a period of a few months, I noticed two things that I suspected as crucial obstacles to my project: first, people only speak Arabic between them, second, I did not see any female employees. When I entered shops, I felt as a shy intruder. I was embarrassed and over-aware of my disharmony in the spaces, both through my foreignness and my sexuality. The task of approaching owners itself felt like an impossible mission.

At some point, I asked a Palestinian friend to join me, with the hope that an Arabic-speaking, male intermediary would be my key in. This mediation was indeed useful in the sense that it broke my silence and a communication with some business owners was established. However, my request to work and film was nicely rejected, with the reasoning that it would either disturb customers or slow down the business.

One place that did agree to take me was a fish stall in the local market. The lovely owner was open to the idea and even allowed me to come again with my equipment for a test, which I did. Nevertheless, I decided not to go ahead with this location, for two reasons: first, due to the clientele, which according to the owner are either Arabic speaking tourists and migrants, with little or no English, or, non-Arabs who come to the market from surrounding neighbourhoods, which were not of interest to me as subjects for this particular project. The second reason was my own sense of detachment that was present during the whole of the location scouting process. I felt that I would not be able to 'own' my space and my position, even if I do get an agreement from a suitable business owner. After several months of having attempted to come up with a location in this Arab neighbourhood, I decided to let go of this project and find another community.

This brought an understanding that my lack of affiliation in this neighbourhood had prevented me from practicing my documentary method; it highlighted the magnitude of my connection to the depicted community to the filmmaking

process, as well as of my mental and physical sense of comfort in the space. These were deeply significant aspects in *Women in Sink*, due to the nature of the hairdressers and the salon, and in *My Kosher Shifts*, due to my few months' work in the business.

I eventually decided to go with the settlers concept, which came up at the beginning of my PhD as a potential community for my documentary-approach research. In a sense, the failed attempts with the London Arab community prepared me for engaging with a less cooperative and more dissonant community than I experienced with the first two communities I depicted in *My Kosher Shifts* and in *Women in Sink*. That said, the relative ease with which I still managed to get an 'inside person' in the settlements in a short time, and to gradually, even only partially, integrate into this little community, show that even though the settlers and I are strongly divided politically and beyond, having the common ground that is our belongingness to the Israeli society had played a very important role. Our shared religion, language, country, history and so forth, had a huge effect on the trust building process, and these shared elements were lacking with the Arab community in London, a lack which turned out to be a barrier between myself and the desired community for my project.

This indicates that the match between the filmmaker and the characteristics of subjected community is crucial to carrying out this documentary method. The community's attitudes towards privacy and being filmed, the norms of gender roles, as well as their status in the country, of being immigrants (I can assume that in an Arab country it could have been different, as the fact that they are in a foreign society could add more tension) – all these aspects have an impact on the process.

One could suggest that the tension between an Israeli and an Arab community created an obstacle to executing a documentary project with this community. However, I had not even introduced my Israeliness to most of the business

owners, and therefore I believe that the obstacle here was the fact that I am a female and that I don't speak Arabic. I assume that an Arab male would have had greater success in finding a willing location, yet I do not think that a French female filmmaker, for instance, would have had a more successful experience than my own.

As this documentary method requires an integration of the filmmaker into the community by hiring her and interacting with her, the personal relationship and trust between the community's contact people (business owners, for instance) and the filmmaker, are key to documenting the community members and gaining their eventual trust.

## **Chapter 5 | EXEGESIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE PRACTICE RESEARCH PROCESS**

In this chapter, I will discuss the process and the outcomes of the practice in light of the research questions and aims, literature review, and conceptual framework.

Research Question 1:

### **Efficacy of the Documentary Method in Different Conditions and in Different Communities**

In order to substantially analyse and compare the execution of the documentary method in each of the three situations and consider its wider application, it is important to account for the interaction of filmmaker and subjects in relation to: the type of the community, the attitude of the filmmaker towards the community, and the nature of the encounter between the filmmaker and the given community. I will begin with a presentation of these three factors in regards to each of the communities featured in the three documentary projects. I will continue by examining the three documentary projects in relation to this thesis's researched documentary method: I will scrutinise each of the method's key elements in the context of each documentary project, in order to contribute to the understanding of how all these factors affected the filmmaking process and its outcomes.

### **On the Encounter with each Community**

As Coffey contends in her book about the ethnographic self, since 'we are a part of what we study, affected by the cultural context and shaped by our fieldwork experience' (1999: 37). Therefore, scrutinising the filmmaking process and the success of the documentary method in each of the three cases of this research has to account the positionality of my self in the context of each community and fieldwork. When looking at the three communities that were depicted through a documentary film in this research, it seems that each reflects

different socio-ethnical and socio-political elements and conflicts of Israeli society:

between religion and secularity, Arabs and Jews, left and right. Being part of this society, each community triggered different aspects of my own identity, and therefore in my engagement with each community, the professional mixed with the personal. These engagements and overlaps affected the representation as well as the introspective, personal nature of the documentaries.

Beyond the engagement with each community as a whole, as an entity which provokes certain things in me, the encounter with each community-member was also an encounter of selves, and these selves are not certain and defined entities as communities may seem to outsiders, but rather fluid and unstable. As Coffey notes:

Selves and identities are fragmented and connected; open to shifts and negotiations. They are ambiguous, the outcome of culturally available and defined interactions, actions, meanings and values. The self is not so much complete and rounded, as partial and multiple. This has consequences for the self in the field and the ways in which the self interconnects with others in the field. (1999: 36)

There was a mutual influence in the meeting of selves – mine and the subjects – in each community. Different elements of my identity, those beyond the obvious conflict with each group (secularity, ethnicity, political views) – such as my gender, my sexual status, my upbringing, my personality, and so forth – affected and were affected by the complex identity that I interacted with.

## ***My Kosher Shifts***

### **1. The Filmed Community**

The ultraorthodox community that this project has centred on is defined first and foremost by the shared religious values. To return to Hillery's factors discussed in Chapter 3, this community does not involve a geographical area, but rather what Hillery defines as common ties. They share a similar lifestyle of norms and values, they identify with the Jewish orthodox community worldwide, they use the same institutions – including physical ones, such as synagogues, Kosher

businesses or cemeteries – but also spiritual ones such as, Jewish marriage, etc. They generally view the Jewish people as one big community, yet this definition is relative and dependant on the situation. For instance, the hotel's guests come from different religious sub-communities and sects, and in their own habitats they would not mix: a 'modern-orthodox' would not go to a Hassidic synagogue, and a Gur Hassid would not even dream of marrying a Chabad Hasidic woman <sup>4</sup>. Yet in a larger non-Jewish environment, like the Kosher hotel's position in London, they are united by their common Jewish religiousness.

## **2. My Attitude towards the Community**

There is no real friction between the orthodox Jews and me, especially in this context as we are, in broad terms, both foreigners in London (and far from the Israeli climate with the political, social and cultural conflicts that divide us). My family, despite being secular, have always respected orthodox Jews as well as the Jewish religion. I came to the hotel with curiosity and the motivation to get to know this mysterious community. This very positive experience made me rethink and reject stereotypes and opinions I had previously left unexamined. My intention for the film was similar: to present this dialogue between different (Jewish) worlds and through this to challenge stereotypical views of this community, and, to convey the wider contexts or themes of religion vs. liberalism, and of similarity and difference.

## **3. The Community and I**

It was Judaism, our shared religious and cultural roots, that tied the hotel's guests and me. While they practice Judaism, I live my secular life; I may be ignorant enough, in their eyes, not to see the truth and live by the Jewish rules, yet I am still one of them, as I was explained many times when I asked different guests about the way that they view me. The fact that we are somehow connected, yet so different, created an eagerness to learn about each other, and this eagerness led our conversations.

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<sup>4</sup> Ger is a Hassidic dynasty established in 1859 in Góra Kalwaria (Ger, in Yiddish), a small town in Poland; Chabad (also know as Lubavitch) is the largest Hassidic movement, which is

'distinguished from other Hassidic schools by its emphasis on the importance of intellectual effort in religious striving' (Oxford University Press, 2011).

My Jewishness was my key to this community: it was the reason that I was hired, and proof of my being a legitimate person to communicate with. My *secular* Jewishness also worked in my favour owing to the strong motivation of the religious Jew to educate the secular Jew, hopefully bringing them closer to religiosity. I was surely a target for that, judging by the many 'missionary' natured attempts I experienced at the hotel, including attempts to persuade me to keep Shabbat or, on a more personal level, convincing me to find a husband and have children, before it is too late.

Another element that should be addressed in the context of this encounter (as well as in the following two projects) is my sexual status, and the encounter between a young, single woman and subjects who were usually orthodox men, generated mutual curiosity. I heard many times from the men I conversed with that this had been the first time in their lives that they had communicated with a woman outside of family or work contexts – certainly with a young, single, secular woman. Coffey argues that the sexual self of the ethnographer – her celibacy, reproductive choices, sexual relations and so on – serve 'as important aspect of the analysis of a cultural setting', as well as forming 'sites for passing judgement, asking questions, interference and curiosity'; she therefore suggests that 'there is ethnographic value in addressing these issues' (1999: 82). My personal, sexual self was for the guests an enigma, just as much as their religious selves were for me. My position, of being in 'their' Kosher and safe territory, dressed according to their codes and in this random and relaxed situation – on their holiday, where they would probably never see me again – made me an attractive and unintimidating person to speak with. I was aware of this sexual 'power' I had in the situation and of the effect of my sexual status, and this aspect has helped me a lot in getting people to be filmed – many were eager to keep talking with me, whether there was a camera or not. Some of them wanted to help me with the film project, some wanted to prove to me that even a religious man can be 'cool' enough to agree to being filmed for a documentary. The sexual element of this encounter of selves was certainly a

key to the stimulating conversations, to the cooperation of the subjects, and therefore, to the success of the filmmaking method.

## ***Women in Sink***

### **1. The Filmed Community**

In this case it is more difficult to define the subject community and interesting to wonder whether the subjects even view themselves as one community, as there are few different criteria that segment the group in different ways. Above all, there is the ethnic and religious elements of Arabs and Jews, a division that is reflected in different beliefs, values, cultural codes, language and sometimes lifestyle, and this division is saturated in Israel's everyday life, within a political context that stimulates conflict, fear and tension between these different groups. Yet there are factors that tie the subjects into one community, including: the geographical, the city in which they were born or live; the social, the Israeli society in which they exist, with its local and unique mentality, with shared norms and institutions; and the ties of gender, that is, the feminine solidarity, which was the most prominent aspect of the subjects togetherness in the film, as well as the shared ritual of going to the salon. Overall however, this group of women did not form a closed community per-se.

### **2. My Attitude towards the Community**

As I had never communicated with the Arab residents of Haifa, I had a desire to get close to the community and explore it. My political agenda was the main prism through which I viewed the Arab community in Haifa; I considered this community as belonging to an oppressed minority in a Jewish state and, therefore, I had feelings of guilt, empathy and a sense of mission when starting to make the documentary. In addition, I had a personal link or longing to be accepted by the community, which stems from my family's unexplored Arabness.

### **3. The Community and I**

If, in spite of their cultural and religious diversity, we can refer to the group of women in the salon as a community, then I believe I can also be considered, to some extent, as a part of this group. I was born and raised in Haifa, I am a part



of Israeli society, we have similar, secular, lifestyles as well as the sexual, feminine bond. Therefore, in this project as opposed to the other two, I felt far more at home in my own community, and this connection was translated to the intimacy of our conversations and to the instant trust and acceptance from the salon women. In short, I am a woman, I am from Haifa, I am therefore one of them.

However, despite this female solidarity bonding this group of women and me, the fact that I raised politics in a space that maintains an unspoken policy of no-politics, marked me as different. My clear and even declared intentions to explore the women's views for my own curiosity and for the sake of my film, had flagged my outsidership to the microcosmos of the hair salon. With the Jewish clients, there was more affiliation, owing to our shared Jewishness, which functioned here in broader terms than our religion and historical heritage, but also in culture and values: the Hebrew language as first language; the institutional systems that are separated between Arabs and Jews in Israel, such as schools and cemeteries; and the political conflict in Israel which centres on Jews vs. Arabs and during days where the government is seeking to determine the nature of the state of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people.

## ***Café Tekoa***

### **1. The Community**

The community depicted in this project is the most closed and defined of the three. There is the geographical area in which they live, which, in this case, is much more than an area, but rather an ideology and a political act. This community shares political values and have similar, normative family values: getting married and having children are essential, for example. Many of the community members are religious from different sects, who practice Judaism, and the remaining seculars are ones who share the religious values and therefore want to live within a religious community. They are united by their perception that it is their right to live on this land, be it for religious, political or opportunistic reasons. In addition, the community exists within defined physical

borders as there is a security fence surrounding Tekoa, with a checkpoint at the gate and armed guards patrolling the village.

## **2. My Attitude towards the Community**

From the point of becoming politically aware and engaged, I have always viewed Jewish settlers in the West Bank negatively, considering them not only as a society embodying radical right-wing values, in contrast to my own political viewpoint, but moreover, as one that influences my life as an Israeli citizen. With this research's ethnographic agenda of exploring communities from the bottom upwards – deriving the community from the self of the individuals it is made of, and not vice versa – I decided to challenge both this theoretical credo and the experimental documentary approach, and position myself in a settlement.

## **3. The Community and I**

Even as an abstract idea rather than a lived experience, my encounter with the settlers was a loaded and tense one, as my political views basically negate their right for existence in the territory which they consider their home. Jewish settlers in the West Bank and I are different in many aspects, and although I eventually became immersed (however partially) in Tekoa's community and established friendships, there remained many gaps between us which became apparent throughout the filmmaking process. Owing to the fact that this project involved living within the community, which meant that the personal engagement went far beyond the filmed conversation and the job position, the gaps between us were much more prominent and significant in this case. In addition to the more obvious ideological differences of me being a pro-Palestine leftist and a Jewish atheist, other elements of my self contrasted with that of the local community: I am an academic driven by professional aspirations, I am urban in my fashion-style and my habits, and, addressing once again the crucial sexual status in relation to the field, I am a single woman with no children and no intention to get married and have children, living in a community of heterosexual families with a high number of children. All this is to say that the mismatch between the settlers and I was profound and noticeable to both sides, and created mutual tension, anger and recoil. However, to my surprise there were some elements that united us, perhaps even more than in the previous

communities I depicted. There were, for example, many people from my generation who spoke the same Hebrew slang, shared collective Israeli cultural memories (such as childhood events or TV shows), and consumed the same content on Facebook.

## **Analysis of the Three Films via the Method's Key Elements**

In the following section I will critically discuss the three films via the method's key elements, including: location, the filmmaker's positions, the abandoned camera technique, the random subjects and the conversation.

### **1. Location**

#### ***My Kosher Shifts: The Ultraorthodox Hotel***

The location of the film in this case formed the ground for the film's motivation and concept, as I had worked there prior to planning and shooting the documentary. As a hotel, in which a client not only purchases goods or dines, but sleeps, it functions as a temporary home. In this regard, given the non-Jewish surroundings in which it is based, the religious aspect of the institution adds a familiarity and a feeling of belonging beyond the usual hotel experience. Yet, in addition to being a place to stay, a hotel is also a place of transience and motion. People come and then go, and the atmosphere is one of a holiday, away from home, with the sense of freedom that this temporality allows – that what we do there will be left there. All these factors were central to the dynamic between me and the guests, and to the subjects' cooperation and openness. By being a *Heimishe* (a homey Jewish place, in Yiddish) place, a Jewish island in the midst of a vast and hectic city, the little hotel had a sense of friendliness and warmth.

#### ***Women in Sink: Fifi's Hair Salon***

The salon was a female-only environment and, in addition, there is an inherent intimacy in being cosmetically treated, with the physical and mental exposure, the surrender and vulnerability it requires. A hair salon also symbolises

relaxation, trust and, crucially, transformation: you leave the place different than you entered it and you can also leave things behind.

Fifi's hair salon was established in the 1980s and has many loyal customers who have become familiar to each other by visiting it for years. Since the three hairdressers have no partners – one is a widow, one is divorced and one is single – the hair salon is more than a workplace for them. Rather, it functions as an alternative family club where they spend hours, working, eating and talking. Its openness has made this little business a meeting point for the owners' family and friends, and this has affected the nature of the business, which offers much more than a haircut to its female clients. By being a feminine, intimate territory, the salon creates an atmosphere of belonging and togetherness that goes beyond religion and politics. This feminine, welcoming and warm environment, turned the experience of being filmed in the basin into an unthreatening one, which was crucial to the success of the filmmaking.

### ***Café Tekoa: A Pop-up Studio/Café in the settlement***

The shooting location of this film was literally a public space in the outdoors, a location outside of a location, with no clearly discernible boundaries. It served as a solution more than an intentional choice, an improvised setting for the creation of common ground for conversations – an impromptu studio on turbulent land.

Filming in a central, public spot had several, sometimes contrasting, influences on the on-set atmosphere: on one hand, sitting outside creates a feeling of unboundedness, a sense of detachment and freedom mixed with a consequent lack of formality or permanency; on the other, this set is nevertheless artificial in outward appearance and does not have the everyday, unmediated quality of customer service business' locations, such as the hotel or the salon. Unlike an already established and functioning business location, it is clear that this location has been constructed for the purpose of the film. This "staged" aspect and the unmissable presence of three cameras increases awareness of being filmed, without the distraction of a service like a hair wash or a front desk

exchange. There is also the element of publicness and exposure, which decreases the privacy of the interaction and increases performance.

Additionally, unlike the previous projects, in this open shooting location I set the boundaries in which the interaction occurs: by erecting three cameras, setting sound devices, placing a table and two chairs and, finally, inviting people to sit and talk. This provisional “studio” – with the conflicting elements of a relaxing coffee table and three onlooking cameras conspicuously mounted on tripods – established the boundaries for the filmmaker and subjects’ encounter. In contrast to the interactions created in the previous projects, in which customer service role-playing pushed the filming process into the background, in this project the apparatus set the territory and created the essence of the encounter.

## **2. The Filmmaker’s Positions: Customer Service and Temporary Resident**

### ***My Kosher Shifts: Who is the Guest?***

In this first film, things happened organically, as I had been the receptionist for a whole year before I became the filmmaker. I knew the place very well, with sensitivity to the maintenance of its Kosher status. I had professional confidence, an established routine of managing the reception, my own territory in which I ate and studied, and lastly, a wonderful relationship with an owner who trusted me.

In terms of my physical position within this space, it suited the interaction perfectly as it was safe and private, yet not embarrassingly intimate. The owner was not present during my shifts, so sometimes guests and I were alone in the space, yet there was also a wall between us and a window through which we communicated. This setup, a public space that people could enter at any time, therefore suited the ‘Yichud’, the male and female restrictions of the orthodox Jewish set of rules, which forbid staying alone in one closed space.

In terms of positions of power and ownership of these interactions, there was fluidity owing to a number of factors: on one hand, I was in charge, literally

holding the keys of the premises, and yet I was also in a position of service where the guests' requests must be listened to and followed. I had the inside knowledge of the hotel with its unique religious features and knew where everything was kept, but they had the religious knowledge and understood the reasons behind these codes. For instance, I explained how to operate the hotel's Shabbat lamp, yet they knew why a person should actually use one. In terms of knowledge, while they had a vast and detailed understanding of Judaism, I brought my secular life experience and wider cultural knowledge to the encounter.

### ***Women in Sink: Jumping into the Water***

This time my position in the location began almost immediately. I fulfilled the role of hair washer in order to make the film, and therefore lacked the basic knowledge of washing hair and running the place. Despite this I quickly integrated into the team and as a result was accepted by the clients – my potential subjects. Owing to the instantaneous and temporary nature of my presence in the salon, I was also considered a visitor for a limited period with a specific aim, that of making a film. The busy nature of the salon and my novice status, meant that I was never there on my own, and other staff were always present during filming. I had an interaction both with the owners, who were in charge of the space and tried to help me to achieve my goal, and with the clients, whose hair I washed.

The position of washing hair created an immediate physical connection; whether women wanted to be filmed or not, I was in charge of the washing basin and for preparing them for their haircut. I was touching and massaging their heads, we were conversing during the wash, and there was an intimacy in this act. Also, unlike the sense of freedom of walking away from the reception desk, for instance, during the washing the subjects are not only captured by the camera, but also physically, by my hands.

### ***Café Tekoa: Out of Business***

In this project, I failed to find a customer service position for the purpose of making the film, owing to the limited time I had and the very limited customer service roles with a steady traffic of locals operating in the community. Due to these circumstances, my position in this documentary project changed, from a filmmaker simultaneously holding a customer service role (with the unmediated interaction that the professional post generates) to being 'just' the filmmaker. I was no longer in a subservient position to my subjects, no longer a part of a system, on duty, a provider of services. These subjects did not need my service and I had nothing to offer them and no reason to start a conversation. Another aspect of my position that was different in the process of documenting in this community was that fact that I had been a temporary resident in a deeper sense than in the previous cases, as I lived within the community and socialised with its members. I managed to create substantial relationships with individuals and experience their lifestyle beyond the point of our set encounter.

By occupying a public territory without a professional position, I had no grip, I was adrift. In this case, I used three cameras with three heavy tripods, and sound equipment to suit the public space. In addition, not only the equipment but the coffee table and chairs had to be cleared at the end of every day, and therefore, installing the set became a dominant task, which was time-consuming and physically and technically challenging. The lack of a work role, together with the long daily setup process (which contrasted to the often brief and sometimes non-existent filmed encounters) placed further pressure on the filmmaking process. Unlike my previous projects, there was a high awareness of the cameras and of being filmed, which necessitated more time to relax and open up.

By comparing the very few pizzeria conversations I had with locals, I can see clear differences: how the focus was not the filming, how quickly the conversation felt like an informal chat and how relaxed the subjects seemed to be, compared with the coffee table interaction. The different position of the filmmaker – of not holding the server function – did 'slow down' the process of

achieving openness and intimacy in the talks. However, other elements of the method, especially the abandoned camera technique and the conversational manner of the interaction between filmmaker and subjects, nevertheless helped cultivate intimate and casual conversations with many subjects.

### **3. The Abandoned Camera Technique**

#### ***My Kosher Shifts: Front Desk Framing***

With the understanding that bringing an additional camera operator or being behind the camera myself would have a strong influence on the intimacy of the front desk interaction, I devised the abandoned camera filming technique that would free the filmed from its dependency on an operator. The fixed unmanned camera functions similarly to a 'fly-on-the-wall' camera, yet unlike this observational technique, the filmmaking here is a first person documentation, where the filmmaker is present, and her presence provokes the subjects and the situation.

The equipment in this project was light and minimal. The camera was fixed on a tripod directly pointed at the subjects, about a meter and a half behind me, capturing my point of view and a shotgun microphone was fixed to the reception's window. Apart from a very short set-up of the focus and white-balance when a willing subject was in the window, the camera ran with no-operator. This resulted in quick acclimatisation to the act of being filmed, for both the subjects and myself, to the extent that several subjects stated that they forgot that the interaction was being documented.

#### ***Women in Sink: Suspended Camera***

In this project, the fixed camera was hung from above and was much closer to the subject than the camera in the hotel. This time there was also a shotgun mic pointed at the subject. Due to the nature of the DSLR camera, together with the proximity of the camera to the subjects, setting the focus was more complicated and therefore I had to involve the subjects by asking them to move, thus, from



the very start, framing our encounter as a documented one and my role as a filmmaker.

However, despite this and the short duration of the conversations, there was once again a very quick process of habituation to the filming element process. Women ignored the presence of the camera and were engaged in the conversation. They did not look at the camera, talk about it or express embarrassment about being filmed. Once again, some of them told me that they forgot that they were being filmed.

### ***Café Tekoa: Tripods in the Open***

In this project, three cameras on large tripods surrounded the coffee table, two of which were pointed at the subjects from about a two-metre distance. The sound equipment included a table microphone, a shotgun mic hung right above the subjects' head, and sometimes a wireless microphone clipped to the subjects' body. Rather than the light, guerrilla documentary shooting of the previous projects, this setup was therefore closer to that of TV studio.

Although the cameras were running with no operator during the conversations, the abandoned aspect was partial; having three cameras required much more attention, both to setting them up before filming and then checking their smooth operation several times during shooting. In this sense, not only the visibility of the gear but my actions as an operator heightened awareness of the recording process. Despite these factors, the fact the equipment was left unmanned helped the encounters feel more private.

## **4. The Subjects: Random Subjects**

### ***My Kosher Shifts: Kosher Vacationers***

The ultraorthodox Jewish hotel attracts specific travellers by offering them a certified Kosher stay. Most of the guests are either men who travel on their own for religious or business purposes, or families who come for a holiday. As people who travel alone tend to get lonelier and have more free time, and since

their religiousness prohibits them from certain secular holiday activities (bars, restaurants the movies, etc.) many of the hotel guests spent a lot of time in the hotel and came to the reception for company. With shifts that began at midday and ended at midnight, I quickly became a familiar face to the guests who came in and out on their way to the Kosher deli or the synagogue. Apart from their Jewishness, the subjects were random, from different countries, religious background and socio-economic classes, and communication was established quickly, with mutual curiosity leading to interesting organic and unplanned conversations. All the on-camera conversations were either with guests I had just met, or with guests who had stayed before and considered me a friendly face in this space.

### ***Women in Sink: The Shampoo Sorority***

Fifi's hair salon attracts women residents of Haifa from all walks of life, who visit spontaneously, without making an appointment. During my time filming, there were many random women who were regular customers. Some I washed more than once, yet I met all of the customers for the first time in the salon while filming, and I got to know the women through our encounter in the basin as well as by being present in the business. The exception in this case, was the fact that the owners also became subjects in the film. Since they were present in the salon while I was filming and frequently used the salon's facilities themselves, they were also washed and filmed by me.

### ***Café Tekoa: Gaining Subjects***

By living in the small settlement for a while before starting to shoot, I became rather famous (or perhaps infamous) amongst the residents by the time I filmed at the café. In addition to the loss of randomness in the nature of this project's filmmaking style, this time some of the filmed subjects had conversed with me prior to our filmed encounter. On the subject of subjects, there were a few people who spontaneously agreed to sit and chat, and others who scheduled a conversation with me after a very brief communication. I also sat for conversations with people I socialised with. A few subjects were approached by me or introduced by a mediator. I sent an email where I called for people to get involved in the project. Some subjects came back for a second or third chat.

## **5. Conversation rather than Interview**

### ***My Kosher Shifts: A Window into Each Other's World***

The front desk interaction of receptionist and guests produced spontaneous and unexpected conversations, fuelled by a mutual curiosity to learn about the other's experiences and worldview. The conversations were freestyle, with no pressing time constraints and no purpose or leading agenda: trying to order a taxi for a guest led to a discussion about the importance of marriage, while a dialogue that began with questions about my motivations for making the film ended with an explanation about the danger of marrying a non-Jew.

The unintentional turns in the conversations comprised much of their strength. Both sides opened up to each other, which deepened the intimacy. This allowed the creation of organic conversations about general themes from a personal angle driven by free association, the latter of which gives the viewer insights about the thought processes on either side of the window – information that is beyond the explicitly said.

### ***Women in Sink: Informal Conversations***

With the aim of replicating the reciprocal and impromptu nature of the hotel's encounters, in the hair salon I intentionally tried to create conversations that would move away from the formal and unbalanced dynamic of an interview. To encourage that, I announced, when needed, that this was not an interview, that I had not prepared questions or predetermined a direction for the conversation; I just wanted them to ask me questions and response to my own as they would in a normal situation. I also opened up to the women I was chatting with, sharing a lot of personal information and opinions.

As a hair wash usually has a five-to-ten-minute duration (in my case slightly more, as I was new and a little slow), and since the issues of Arab-Jewish relationship and Israel's politics are ones that trigger me much more than the world of Orthodox Judaism, I was more dominant, leading and outspoken in

some of the conversations, than as a receptionist. Owing to my agenda, some of the conversations were more topic driven, as I was motivated to learn something by being in this community: if I had an Arab teenager in the sink, for instance, I was interested in hearing about her experience of growing up as an Arab in Israel, yet I never asked about that directly, but rather I let the conversation take a natural turn, and when something felt like a promising pathway of discussion, I explored it.

Judging by the feedback I asked for from the filmed subjects, and by watching the hours of filmed materials, the conversations have a different nature to that of traditional interviews. Unlike the latter, the sink conversations very quickly, sometimes immediately, got into personal dimensions, were unstructured and informal, and were reciprocal, impulsive and stimulating.

### ***Café Tekoa: Would You Be My Frenemy?***

The fashion of the interaction in the settlement changed from the role-playing of striking up a conversation in a framed commercial exchange (as was attempted earlier in the pizzeria) to fixed conversations for the cameras. It was therefore harder to escape the formal interview codes and dynamics, given that the overt aim and role-playing here are that of a filmmaker who wants to learn about the subjects' culture.

Owing to the fact that settlers generally have strong stances on the media and complex relationships with cameras, the subjects in this film were more cautious of chatting with me while being filmed than the subjects in my previous films. Many of them started off as rather passive and opened up gradually. While conversing with people, I had to give an account of my motives, the film's desired direction, the previous films I made, and generally began the interaction by talking a lot about myself, in order to lay the first stone and reduce the formality and performativity of the inherently staged and artificial situation.

Unlike the previous projects, in this project many times I had to explain the game rather than play it. When subjects asked me about the aim of my project, I actually introduced to them the concept of my interviewing method and its

rationale. By revealing the mechanism of my documentary approach and its ethnographic goal I attempted to encourage the subjects to allow a more reciprocal and casual dynamic, as well as illustrate the significance of the experimental documentary method, which I considered as more important than the content of the conversations. While initially fearing that I had arrived with a certain agenda and the mission of presenting settlers in a negative way, by emphasising the importance of the documentary encounter in the context of my research I managed to get subjects to view me not as left-wing media or journalist, but rather as an artist or ethnographer.

Subjects eventually talked a lot and opened up to me, and in this third film, as a lesson from my previous film, I tried to control my enthusiasm and talkativeness; I also curbed my impulsivity and criticism as I endeavoured to reduce the effect of the political friction in order to avoid getting into TV-like political debates. The conversations here had no time limit, they were longer than the previous “customer service” encounters, and eventually, despite the factors discussed above, achieved a very high level of openness and intimacy for a documentary encounter.

### **Evaluative Summary of the Three Projects**

As the original inspiration and testing ground for the documentary method, *My Kosher Shifts* is the piece from which the method’s elements have been derived, with the two following projects serving as adjustments of the prototype in new contexts. While *Women in Sink* took place in a situation that allowed similar or even more advanced implementation of the documentary method, and therefore became an interesting field for exploration, the uniqueness of the circumstances of the *Settlers* project and the chain of events involved in its production, resulted in the elimination of some of the method’s fundamental elements and adjustments of others.

The partial or different implication of the method as it occurred in the *Café Tekoa* project nevertheless has a significant value for this research as production of knowledge. It allows an understanding of the necessary conditions for the method to be implicated and its limitations; it serves as an experiment in

shifting or lessening some parameters and reflects the outcomes of such adjustments, while highlighting the weight of the subjected community factor and of the compatibility between the filmmaker and the community.

The price of having to waive the customer service role-playing in the filmmaking process in the settlement, has proven its importance and its centrality to the creation of an unmediated and casual interaction between filmmaker and subjects, which worked so strongly in the first two projects. The customer service dynamic, in the hotel as well as in the hair salon, resulted in a reduction of the awareness of being filmed – which is the ambition behind the documentary method at the heart of this research.

As the goal for the documentary practice for all the three projects of this research was having customer service exchange as a starting point, given the circumstances under which the third project did not involve the customer service element, scrutinising the Settler's project according to the method's key elements (as described in the third chapter) could only be done partially. Only a further attempt of documenting this community of settlers, with new understanding in hindsight of the limitations and requirements, could provide new insights about how and whether the method would work *in full* in this third community. In retrospect and after carrying out *Café Tekoa* project, I can assume that where there are both disharmony between the filmmaker and community members combined with a community's reluctance to engage with media, an *instant* implementation of this method is problematic and may be impossible. However, I assume that after a transitional period in which the filmmaker is gradually integrating into the community and gain some of the members' trust, an implication of the commercial role for the purpose of documenting conversations with random clients could be practiced. At this point, for instance, having lived in the settlement for a while and gained many of its members' trust, I believe that now I would be able to go back to Tekoa, get a job position for the purpose of making a documentary, and have more willing subjects. That being said, although the position of the filmmaker in a commercial role, which is perhaps the most significant element of the method, was not present in the third project, the other elements, such as the abandoned

camera and the conversational natured encounter, proved to be effectual in producing a more balanced interaction and getting subjects to open up.

It is interesting to examine the cooperation and openness of subjects of the three communities of this research, in the context of the contemporary perspectives of subjects and viewers that have been discussed in the second chapter: the first-hand experience in filming and creating content, the documentary (or nonfiction) literacy, and the high degree of performance in the everyday, virtual life. The first community, of ultraorthodox Jews, is the least exposed to mainstream media, social media and documentary films, with many of them not using smartphones or social platforms like Facebook. They are in many ways living in a consciously old-fashioned world, one in parallel to that of the Western pop culture, with parallel values of modesty and privacy. Despite being part of a society which considers being filmed a secular and immodest act, many people agreed to being filmed. I believe that not being exposed to reality TV and documentaries, with the naivety to the manipulative nature of the filmmaking process, made them less concerned about their representation, or affected by the imaginary audience, compared with the women in *Women in Sink*, for instance, who were many times excited about being filmed, asking me if it was going to be on television even before I turned the camera on. The settlers, on the other hand, are very educated when it comes to the impact of the documentation and representation of their community in the media, and have some very negative stances concerning their portrayal in the media. Several of the subjects, such as Matanya, actually wanted to be filmed because they believed that my aim is to bring a more complex and authentic gaze on their community, so both the cooperation and the rejection I have faced in Tekoa were linked to their documentary literacy.

It is also interesting to note the symbolic/metaphoric aspect of the three films: in the first project at the hotel there was a gap of knowledge, a wall, between a secular Jewish woman and ultraorthodox Jewish men, and each of the sides opened a window to their world for the other. As a Jewish habitat in a non-Jewish land, the hotel was the link between these two different Jewish worlds as well as the meeting point in which they can communicate and explore their

differences and similarities. In the second project, women from different groups met in the washing-basin, and this feminine bond allowed the filmmaker to get very close to them, to touch them, as well as to be washed herself as part of the experience. In the third project, in which the filmmaker was not able to find her place in the closed and dissonant community, the filmmaker was left out, and the encounter could only take place outside. The filmmaker thus became a “settler” in the settlement.

### **The Girl Who Works Alone**

Both the fact that I go to the field alone, with no help of crew, and my physicality – being a small woman who carries and operates heavy equipment – have proven to be an advantage in my projects. It was less intimidating to the communities than, for instance, a production team. Psychologically, production team with more formal work procedures, can be identified with more established and commercial media. My motivation, from the reactions I received from subjects, seemed to them as less cynical and more artistic and personal, and many times people have cooperated with me due to the guerrilla nature of my project and to the sense that it is non-constitutional. Additionally, the personal nature of my encounters resulted in having people on board many times simply because they wanted to help me; being filmed for the project was, for some of the subject, making a friendly gesture. In the settlement, for instance, some people saw my frustration in not being able to film, my hard and committed physical work, so when I eventually found a spot to film, they agreed to being filmed so that I could get the material I needed. In the hair salon, the owners and clients cared about me and, once they realised how committed I am to the project and how hard I work, they were keen to help me by being filmed.



Research Question 2:

## **Strengths and Limitations of the Method**

### **1. Strengths of the Method**

#### **Instant Openness and Intimacy with Random Subjects**

Many of the conversations captured for the three documentary projects (although some did not make it into the edited film) became intimate and entered into personal dimensions, despite the fact that the filmmaker is an outsider to the community and communicated with most of the subjects only once, during the filmed encounter, without any previous communication. The positionality of the filmmaker, as one who immerses herself in the community, resulted in intimacy and openness, which occurred swiftly rather than gradually, especially in the two cases where she held a commercial position. The conversational nature of the interaction, where the filmmaker herself opens up to the subjects and answers all their questions, was a key factor in helping to reduce the defences of the subjects and in encouraging them to share personal stories and opinions. Both the immersion of the filmmaker in the community and the conversational nature function as a means of shifting, as much as possible within this staged situation, from the more traditional roles of interviewer/interviewee to a documented conversation of two individuals.

#### **Open and Unguided Conversations**

The free association which is created through a conversation, as opposed to prepared or goal-driven interviews, leads to unplanned themes and dimensions as well as to mutual stimulation. In this sense, the term 'open' conversation not only refers to the openness of the subjects to the filmmaker, and vice versa, but also to the open nature of the conversations themselves, by being unguided and unexpected.

Although the starting point of an encounter between the filmmaker and individuals from a certain society does prompt some topics, the conversations in

all the three projects can be characterised by their open nature. In the salon, for instance, I was interested in the Arab-Jewish aspect, due to the location's unique story that was revealed to me during my time in the location. The conversations started with a casual chat – usually about the salon, how long the woman had been visiting the place, what hair treatment she was going to have that day or about my film – but then the conversations took unplanned turns, according to the person with whom I chatted, their answers and their questions to me. I had no idea, for instance, that Dalia who spoke with the hairdressers in Arabic when she entered the salon (which I asked her about when she sat down for a hair wash), would later express very conservative opinions about Arabs in Israel. Similarly, I did not know that Leah, who mentioned that she had visited the salon for years due to her wish to support Arab businesses in Israel, had actually experienced a personal tragedy, with a family member who was the victim of a nationalistic terror attack by an Arab. Equally spontaneous was the couple who came to the front desk in *My Kosher Shifts* in order to book a minicab and surprised me with their out-of-the-blue question, of whether I would like them to match me up with a man. I had not even planned to ask them about their stance on my singlehood, but the initial subject of marriage led to some interesting exchanges of opinions between the couple and myself.

### **Random Subjects**

There was no prior research carried out in order to find and select strong subjects for the film, but rather a real-time exposure to random, unplanned individuals from the community who happen to be in the location. When a filmmaker follows her agenda for her film, the story in mind she wants to tell, she usually searches for characters that would support her plan. The act of finding the “right” documentary characters for the story could mean that the characters simply function to echo the filmmaker's intended message, becoming a composed choir of non-dissenting voices.

The motivation of this documentary method is to undergo an authentic journey within a certain community, through the filmmaking process, one which will unpredictably expose the filmmaker, and later on the viewers, to a variety of

people. The incentive here is to let a community depiction emerge from the field, to allow space for experimentation, chance and surprise. The objective is to eventually create, through the series of conversations, a mosaic of voices which is complex, with no intention of merging the voices together into a coherent portrait, but rather putting them side by side.

### **Reduction of the Awareness of the Camera**

The abandoned camera technique emerges from the understanding that people are not scared of cameras so much as they are scared of cameramen – a constant, silent party to a conversation that breaks any sense of intimacy and is a human reminder of the running camera. The abandoned camera, situated on a tripod or attached to the wall, is left unmanned throughout the conversation, limiting the interviewee's sense that they are being filmed, or worse yet, watched, and thus captures them in a more natural state. Additionally, the customer service role-playing creates an unmediated interaction, a catalyst in the process of making two strangers, the filmmaker and the subject, talk. There is a purpose for the conversation and it is not primarily the film itself, but rather the need to communicate for the service given by the filmmaker who functions also as a worker.

### **Representing a Community while Avoiding Homogenisation**

A significant goal of the documentaries was to explore a mode of non-homogenising representation by creating a personal, intimate interaction with individuals from a community, which gets into personal and psychological dimensions and explores the self-consciousness of the subjects. The documentaries made for this research aim at bringing about an inductive representation, one which highlights the subjectivity of the members and seeks to draw attention to selfhood and individuality rather than to collectivity and categorisation, and to provide the viewer with a portrait of the community which goes under the social glue which connects the members as one body. Cohen (1994) argues that 'sensitive ethnography demands nothing less than attention to other people's selves', and adds that 'it is perhaps an irony that we have to approach the fundamental problem of social cohesion through its apparent

opposite, selfhood and personal identity'. (Cohen 1994: 8). Since the individual's self-consciousness is a key to our understanding of the connection between individual and society, and therefore to our understanding of societies, Cohen contends, a society should not be explored from the top downwards, 'deriving individuals from the social structures to which they belong' (Cohen 1994: 6).; rather, it should be done inductively, with the essential recognition that the relationship between self and society is complex and should therefore be explored within the realms of self-consciousness of members, putting the self at the centre.

The motivation behind the three documentaries that were produced through this research is to present the subjected societies as nonlinear, as set of selves, where each has their own self-consciousness as well as social consciousness. By addressing topics that are related to that which makes the subjects in the film a community, but doing so by exploring each one's personal dimensions, the films wish to bring a representation that is from the bottom upwards, and attempts to allow the viewer to come to their own conclusions and understandings about the documented society.

### **Reflexivity and Subjectivity**

By being overtly and unapologetically subjective and introspective, in the field, the filmmaking process and the resulting films, the filmmaker wishes to also put her own self in the exchange, being vulnerable and functioning as a ground for exploration, allowing both her subjects and the active viewers a substantial understanding of her part as well as her interaction with each self in the film.

Referring to ethnographic representation, Coffman argues that:

texts are authored and peopled by a participating self. From this perspective the self should be present and emergent in the text. Establishing an autobiographical voice in the text is not an excuse for an unattributed celebration of the self. On the contrary, writing in the self can be a strategy for a more reflexive practice. (1999: 127)

The more autobiographical elements and the inclusion of reflexive moments in the documentaries, serve as a means for the active viewer to derive their own

meanings from the collection of people they watch. All this takes places with better knowledge of who the author of the film is, her agenda, what was said by her to the subject before they expressed themselves in front of the camera, the negotiations that took place, and so on. In an ethnographic documentary, just as in a written ethnographic research, this autobiographical account allows a wider and deeper understanding, by 'presenting insider accounts of how the research evolved and developed: how access and relationships were negotiated and managed; what went wrong' (Coffman 1999: 122).

This is the 'alternative honesty' discussed in the second chapter, which acknowledges and even embraces the performative and subjective nature of documentary filmmaking. The inclusion of the more unpolished moments of the conversations, like the way in which I tried to encourage and even provoke the Arab and Jewish subjects to speak about politics are included in the cut, as it provides the viewer the context to a statement made by a person, and to the general agenda with which I arrived at the washing basin. As Piotrowska writes, 'the spectator might have no idea how his or her perception has been altered through quite simple means: just cutting out a hesitation or a question could make an enormous difference to how you perceive the piece' (2014: 65).

Convincing settlers that it was not my intention to represent them as one-dimensionally negative, is an aspect which I inscribed in the documentary as this has been a part of the process of getting settlers to sit and chat with me. The purpose for the inclusion of the dance of persuasion as an element in the third film of the community of settlers, is to give the viewer a better insight into how a leftist filmmaker managed to get settlers to talk on camera, in spite of the latter's natural reservations about the filmmaker and the camera itself.

The shots of the apparatus, of focusing the camera and of doing some more mundane activities such as cleaning the desk or the salon's floor, are not only aesthetic choices but allow the viewers more context and a wider picture of the documented space, both the physical and interpersonal. This also reminds the viewers both of the performativity of the situations yet at the same time, of the everyday life moments that took place in between, allowing the filmmaker to

become a participant in the space and assisting her to better integrate. Yet it is important to notice the selective nature of these reflexive shots, keeping in mind that reflexivity is another aesthetic and political tool used by the filmmaker, as discussed in the second chapter.

## **2. Limitations and Weaknesses of the Method**

### **Limited Exposure to the Community**

As filming taking place in one location, with its specific characteristics, what is captured is only that which exists in this limited space, with no further exploration or extensions. If we take the chosen hair salon of *Women in Sink*, for instance, it is one which, despite being based in an Arab neighbourhood, serves a mixed clientele of Arabs and Jews. By being mixed, it presumably attracts certain women, from both ethnic groups: the Jewish women who visit there are likely to be more pro-Arabs, or at least ones who do not mind going, on a regular basis, to an Arab neighbourhood, hearing the owners speaking Arabic to each other, having the TV at the background playing Arab hits; the Arab customers are probably not ones who prefer to avoid mixing with Jews, chatting and laughing with them and speaking Hebrew when there are plenty of beauty salons in this radius where they can speak only Arabic and share experiences about the soon coming Christian holiday or the Arab curriculum of their children. Therefore, with this starting point of the selection of this specific hair salon, I did not get to chat with Arab women who do not define themselves as Israelis, but as Palestinians, as I would, for instance, if went to Haifa university. Moreover, by going to a Christian salon I did not interact with Muslim women that I would find in a local Muslim business in the area. If instead of filming at Fifi's hair salon, I were to stop random people in the streets of this very small Arab neighbourhood, for instance, I would probably get a wider range of opinions and a different representation of the "same" community.

Additionally, since the locations are only ones where the owners agree to the sensitive filming process taking place in the business routine, it narrows the selection of shooting locations, and therefore the exposure to people from the

community, and as a result, the community representation through the film. Moreover, having a business owner who is a part of a community to which I do not belong but wish to document, who cooperates with such a documentary project (such as Fifi, the hairdresser or Shternie, the hotel's manager), demonstrates the owners' openness to my otherness and to outsiders in general, and this might attract regular clients who are like-minded: Arab women who will happily accept a Jewish hair washer or ultraorthodox men happy to be served by a secular Jewish woman. The more extreme businesses or strictly enclosed communities, are somewhat beyond the reach of a documentary project of this kind, which requires a quick immersion of the filmmaker, as occurred in the settlement of Tekoa.

### **The Essential Match between the Method and the Community**

The instant and random virtue of the method does not suit a community which requires more gradual and extended process of trust-building and of having the filmmaker integrated into the community. Such is the case with the settlers, who have a negative stance towards media and cameras, as well as political conflicts with the filmmaker, or, even more significantly, as experienced with the Arab community in London, where the community is even more closed to outsiders and resistant to the idea of being filmed for a documentary.

### **Dependency on the Harmony between the Filmmaker and the Community**

The connection between the filmmaker and the subjected community is crucial to the implementation of this documentary method, since her acceptance by the community is key to the realisation of the documentary approach, of creating intimate interaction with many random subjects, and not over a long period of time. Jorgensen emphasises the critical importance of the social location of the researcher in relation to the observed, and its influence on her perspective, writing that '*where* the researcher is located socially determines *what* is observable, the character of observations, and opportunities to observe' (1989: 53). With the community of settlers in Tekoa, there are, despite our deep political conflict, some common elements that tie us together, and this connection allowed me to be accepted, to some extent, by the community and therefore to converse with and film people. This could probably not be done by

a Palestinian filmmaker, and, perhaps an ultra-Zionist American Jewish documentarist could have experienced smoother and quicker access into the community. Similarly, having little to no common ground between the Arab community in London and myself meant that I had no initial footing whatsoever and therefore I could not realise the documentary project within the community.

### **Brief and often Singular Interactions**

The nature of the documentary encounter, of being spontaneous and unplanned means that usually there is no opportunity for developing a continuous dialogue. An interaction that exists over a period of time produces a deeper relationship between filmmaker and subjects. The process of building and maintaining a relationship with a subject is on its own is a fertile source of knowledge, as it exposes in-depth aspects of the encounter between the two individuals – such as the process of building trust and attachment, or the tension that arise over time – a quality that sometimes can be seen in subjective documentaries where the filmmaker follows a character and include their filmed personal interaction in the film (as seen in Bar-Lev's *My Kid Could Paint This*, or in *Forbidden Lie\$* by Broinowski, where in both films the relationship and mutual trust between filmmaker and subject comprise central elements). If we take my relationship with Nawal in *Women in Sink*, for instance, the familiarity between us towards the end of my project, after having been working there for a month, is reflected in our personal natured conversation at the end of the film, but this probably could have grown into a deeper and more genuine interaction if I stayed there longer. An example of a longer lasting and therefore much deeper and more intimate relationship with a subject is my friendship with Matanya, which was documented in *Café Tekoa*. The process of building our relationship is a major part of this film, and the progress is shown through our growing confidentiality, in the way we confront each other more, as well as feel more connected to one another, stating that the journey of making the film had affected us both.

### **The Centrality of the Filmmaker's Personality and Openness**

The personality of the filmmaker has a massive effect on the encounter with her subjects in any documentary, but this method places yet more emphasis on



personality as the interaction is not an interview, that focuses mainly on the subject, but rather a conversation, requiring the filmmaker to open up to the subjects in return and allow them to ask questions. Applying the method as a documentary filmmaking technique for exploring closed community requires, then, a degree of self-exposure from the filmmaker and is dependent on her interpersonal skills.

The intimacy that was achieved with the subjects in the three documentary projects was affected and encouraged by placing myself in a more balanced filmmaker/subject position than the role-playing of interviewer/interviewee, and bringing my own vulnerability to this contract. By defining the boundaries (or lack of boundaries) on my side, through the highly personal information and the emotions I have shared with my subjects, I created a legitimacy or invitation for the subjects to do the same. I openly discussed my family background, my beliefs, my romantic life and even sexual background, when asked about it by a subject. Ignoring the weight of this virtue in regards to my documentary-filmmaking or ethnographic self would be overlooking one of the most significant techniques in accomplishing documented intimacy with subjects.

Research Question 3:

### **The Uniqueness of this Documentary Approach in Relation to Other Approaches (in the Practice of Ethnographic and Documentary)**

Each of the method's elements can be found in other documentary films and approaches, yet the combination of them all generates a particular documentation of communities. Here, I discuss some of the advantages that this method offers.

#### **No Research**

In order to avoid rigid or agenda-directed documentation of a certain community, and with the wish of capturing a more authentic journey of the filmmaker's immersion into the community and her engagement with the

members, there is no pre-production research carried out in order to find subjects or learn about the location. The idea is to allow the filmmaker to have a raw experience of the community and the space, without collecting data or gaining prior knowledge. Rather, the aim is to learn about the community and the place from the subjects and individuals around, and to have first-time interactions with them. A similar approach in terms of meeting random and unplanned subjects for the first time has been used in some personal journey documentaries, such as in Marc Isaacs's *Outside the Court* (2011) or *Lift* (2002) or in Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March* (1985) and Varda's *The Gleaners and I* (2000). More often than not, though, in documentaries with unexpected subjects, such as the ones mentioned here, the locations chosen for the documentary are selected because of their potential subjects or their specific nature, which have been explored prior to the film, whether by the filmmakers themselves or designated researchers. The location and the area are usually being studied for a better understanding of what is expected during the filmmaking, and for a smoother production – to avoid wasting expensive production time and to avoid unwelcome incidents.

When choosing Fifi's hair salon I had no idea that it had such a high percentage of Jewish clients nor was I aware of the fact that it only has Christian Arab clients and no Muslim ones. Even a cursory examination of the salon for film research purposes would have pointed out these characteristics, and I would have probably given up on this location in order to find one which better suited my political intentions for this documentary. This example, in itself, demonstrates the point of freeing the documentary from the research, of how the research can affect or guide the documentary filmmaking, and how the representation of the community is directed according to the filmmaker's orientation and aspirations.

### **The Customer Service Frame**

This element of filming an interaction while having the unmediated communication of commercial exchange is perhaps the most innovative and

experimental element of this documentary method and surely the foundation for the generation of the method.

The filmmaker is not only wearing the filmmaker's hat in this documentary encounter, but rather has another function and one which puts her in a subservient position to the subjects. The communication is established not only for the purpose of the film, but is rather initiated through the commercial exchange between one another. This core role had a crucial effect on the power dynamics between filmmaker and subjects in *My Kosher Shifts* and *Women in Sink*, and significantly helped in shifting the focus from the act of being filmed and in 'breaking the ice' in this intimate yet artificial situation. The lack of this key element of the method in *Café Tekoa* has been shown to have a significant effect on the power dynamic between filmmaker and subject, as well as on the sense of performance and awareness of being filmed. I assume that even if the conversations with settlers were shot using the same recording devices in the same shooting location, yet I served the subjects while filming, it would have been faster to achieve intimacy in our interaction.

### **The Abandoned Camera**

If the goal of this method is to document natural as possible conversations, and the customer service is the foundation for this method, then the abandoned camera can serve as an effective instrument to help establish a filming environment in which interactions can be captured under more natural conditions. Freeing the filmmaker from the camera, yet doing so without the price of having the presence of a third party, is an attempt to further balance the power dynamics of filmmaker and subject, and move away from the traditional ways of documenting two people talking.

The unmanned camera here functions as a witness, attempting to reduce the production interference and the awareness of the documentation, in order to decrease the tendency to perform for the camera, which comes with such awareness. Similar rationales have driven many reality TV productions, with the use of number of fixed and sometimes hidden cameras, that allow the filmed characters to behave as if they are not being watched. Surprising as it may

seem, both in this research documentary projects and in such reality TV shows, while on set, the idea that the documented will be watched later on publicly by a potentially large number of viewers is somehow less intimidating than the presence of a single person behind the camera.

In this research, *Café Tekoa* has functioned as a touchstone for this element, as the documentation did not include the frame of customer service, and also since the apparatus used in this production included many devices, which, unlike the two previous projects in the hotel and the hair salon, were more prominent and required high attention by the filmmaker throughout the documented encounter. Nevertheless, as was reported by many of the subjects, the unmanned cameras assisted in concentrating on the encounter, reduced the fear of being filmed. This was further illustrated many times on set, when the subjects and I stopped talking or felt more self-conscious when someone sat down near us and listened to the conversation.

### **Instant Openness and Intimacy with Random Subjects**

This documentary method is characterised by the capturing of the director's brief and usually one-off interaction with random subjects, in which the camera records the interaction without any warm-up time, any research or preparations, and both the filmmaker and the subject do not know what to expect. The camera documents the very beginning of the encounter, with no direction, in order to collect moments, of subjective and as natural as possible exchanges of thoughts. Nevertheless, as shown, the method produces conversations that can quickly become intimate.

The crucial element here is that the intimacy is created with subjects who are strangers to the filmmaker. This is different, and arguably more challenging, than capturing intimate interactions with subjects who are relatives or friends as does Alan Berliner in his family films or Sarah Polley in *Stories We Tell* (2012). It is also different than creating intimacy with random subjects, yet doing so gradually and over time. This occurs in Isaacs' *Lift*, for example, in which he bases himself in the lift of the building and connects with the subjects gradually, first by observing and establishing communication, and slowly, when his status

changes from a weird invader into a trustworthy listener, subjects become more openly responsive and intimate with him.

In *Women in Sink*, once I turned the camera on, the hair wash duration was 5 to 15 minutes. Yet the conversations became open and personal, even though the camera was just above the women's head and a shotgun microphone was pointed at them. In *My Kosher Shifts*, similarly, the conversations became casual and personal very quickly. *Café Tekoa* project did not have the key element of customer service, and this factor – combined with the community's political dissonance with the filmmaker and aversion to being interviewed for the media – meant that immediate intimacy became more challenging to establish. The interaction with each subject thus required more time and more reassurance from the filmmaker about her intentions. This stresses the centrality of the customer service function as a catalyst for this immediate intimacy.

### **Conversation**

Perhaps the most desired goal of this documentary method is to create a power dynamic which is closest to a conversation between two people, as much as possible with the presence of the documenting camera. The technical elements of this method – such as the customer service setting or the abandoned camera – are the means for accomplishing this goal. The filmmaker functions here as another documentary mean, by practicing a conversational dynamic in order to encourage and achieve one; she establishes this conversational manner by the way she reacts to the subjects' words and by setting an exchange where the confession is reciprocal, as well as establishing the legitimacy to ask questions. The fact that there is no pre-interview research about the subject and no prior acquaintance of one another, cultivates a more casual and authentic flow.

While some filmmakers do research subjects before filming, and others warm them up before shooting them, there are some filmmakers who also capture subjects spontaneously, while on the go. Marc Isaacs, for instance, does so, but he sets a very different dynamic with his subjects: he asks, subjects confess and he listens. He is not becoming a subject, a field of exploration and his self is

out of territory or only partially explored. A more similar approach to this research project, would be Ross McElwee's or Alan Berliner's, who converse with their subjects, allowing mutual curiosity and using their own vulnerability to encourage their subjects', or Jennifer Fox in *Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman*, who also tries to challenge the documentary traditional power relations by using her "passing the camera" technique and putting herself as a subject.

### **Representation through a Mosaic of Multiple Subjects**

While many documentaries focus on one or a few characters who serve as representatives of a wider phenomenon or societies, the aim here is to present multiple subjects belonging to a community that is considered as one; the inclusion of a range of different subjects in the film as a wide portrait of a community seeks to highlight the differences of the selves through the complex identity of the individual, drawing attention to cracks in the collective identity, encouraging the viewers to rethink the way they view a certain group of people.

A similar representational approach, of presenting multiple subjects, is practiced by filmmakers such as Rouch and Morin in *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961). Two other filmmakers whose films derived from a more personal oriented journey and ended up with representing societies through many subjective voices are Ross McElwee in *Sherman's March*, and Jennifer Fox in *Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman*. On the contrary, in Varda's *Gleaners and I*, capturing the ethnographic phenomenon is her motivation, yet it is done from a subjective gaze while reflecting on her own self.

### **An Enquiry or Journey, Rather than an Argument**

Openly and without concealment, in the making of the three documentary projects I have expressed my otherness to the community as well as my stance towards what the community represents to me, from my position as an outsider. Notwithstanding, the motivation was not to create films that would prove an argument, but rather, to go through an ethnographic journey, to test and challenge my preconception and allow space for surprises.

## **Significance in Terms of Research Question/Thesis within the Context of Other Practices and Theoretical Discourses**

The journey of conducting this research managed to elicit substantial outcomes about the main question, which is how the method works in different conditions and communities. It highlighted the strengths of the method, as well as its limitations, the latter of which were reflected in the more challenging or even failed attempts (the Settler and Muslim communities respectively) but nevertheless produced a deeper understanding of the essential terms for the method to be practised, above all, the match between the community and the documentary method and the community and the filmmaker. The *Café Tekoa* case has also tested the method by eliminating or lessening some of its core elements and therefore served as a fertile ground for comparison of what can be achieved without these core elements or with a partial application of them.

### **Challenging Traditional Interview Techniques**

The research attempted to explore a first person documentary method which challenges the traditional and common interviewing techniques. It did so by shifting the unbalanced power relations of filmmaker and subjects via a framing of customer service that generates an unmediated interaction which is primary and independent to that of the filmed interaction. In addition, it played with the power dynamics of an interview, by creating a conversation, where both parties are exchanging information and asking questions. It has engaged with anthropological practices, such as placing the researcher in the field within a community for participant-observation, or documenting a community for the sake of an ethnographic enquiry rather than an argument, yet with a documentation that is inherently subjective, ultimately comprising an artistic and entertaining film.

### **Advocating Subjectivity as a Means to Stimulate Encounters**

The subjective elements in this filmmaking are central: there is the personal motivation of the filmmaker to explore certain communities, a representation which is driven and affected by the identity of the filmmaker; there is the

personality of the filmmaker that significantly affects the encounter and stimulates the conversations; the gaze is subjective, the narrative is subjective, and there is also a lot of attention given to the subjectivity of individuals from the community.

### **Highlighting the Self**

In terms of its ethnographic perspective, this research stresses the importance of the self when learning about a society and the perception of community as a group of people that while connected by shared factors, are still a set of individuals. By presenting communities through a mosaic of individuals, the films show the differences and the little cracks that are tangible due to the attention paid to the subjective point of view. Each of the three films bring about a collection of voices from each community, allowing the viewer to get a sense of the community through the documentary film which wishes to avoid delineation but rather to encourage interpretive and rhizomatic way of reading.

### **Challenging Ethical Concepts**

The research tackles the triangle of filmmaker, subjects, viewers, within which the filmmaking process exists and which was presented in Chapter 2. The research raised and explored some fundamental ethical issues between filmmaker and subjects, and demonstrated the fluidity and contradiction of the documentary's integrity, which has to be stretched and outspread over the three conflicting entities of filmmaker, subjects and viewers. The research illustrated the negotiation between protecting the subject, respecting the viewers and staying loyal to the filmmaker's aims and artistic aspirations.

### **Filmmaker and Subjects**

This research shed light on the ethical aspects characterised by instant and brief encounters between filmmaker and non-familiar subjects. This encounter is different in nature to one that involves subjects who are relatives or friends of the filmmaker (that is, close relationships) and also different to one that involves long and gradually developing relationships between filmmaker and subjects. There was the issue of trust between the subject and the filmmaker and the



responsibility of the filmmaker in representing the trusting subject, of negotiating between the urge to protect the subject and the filmmaker's own vision.

### **Filmmaker and Viewer**

The research also dealt with representations of societies and individuals, and therefore with the ethical responsibility towards the viewers. In addition, this thesis accounts the viewers' responses - by having the filmmaker reflecting on the distribution phase of the films and the reactions of viewers.

## **Broader Application of Findings and the Value of the Practice as Production of Knowledge**

### **Documentary Filmmaking**

The outcomes of the research do not only function as answers to the research questions, but can offer a frame for further application of the suggested method as a documentary model, or, of some of the method's elements as inspiration for different documentary situations and approaches. The suggested documentary method that this research has explored can be used by filmmakers to document different communities in different geographic areas, albeit with necessary attention to the limitations of the method and to the essential terms of its application.

For such an application of the method, it would be important to consider the community's relationship with media – to consider the unique characteristic of the community, and accordingly, to find the location that would suit the project (for instance, Muslim and Jewish religious women will not expose their hair, so a hair salon would not suit such communities). It is also crucial to take into account the connection between the filmmaker and the group she documents, considering what she might represent to that community and what tensions her presence might create. In *Café Tekoa*, for example, the political conflict between the parties became an obstacle to the filmmaker's integration into the community. As important is the filmmaker's components of identity and social status, such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religiosity and appearance. The

documenting of a Muslim business in London that is owned by a religious family, for example, would be far easier for an observant, male filmmaker related to the community. As I have also learnt, there is a great significance to the bond between the owners of the location and the filmmaker, and this has proven to be the key in the research projects in instances such as the hair salon and the Jewish hotel.

There is also potential for adopting just one or some of the key elements of the method. For instance, the idea of conversing with subjects, instead of interviewing them – as was done in the settlement after giving up on the aspect of working in a business – or the ‘abandoned camera’ element with the elimination of crew, which could be adopted when there is a wish to reduce awareness of being filmed.

### **Wider Context**

In a wider context, the significance of this research lies in the fact that it is a practice-based research, in which the author of the research is the practitioner herself, rather than a scholar whose analysis is produced from a distance. As a result, the research documents not a final product, such as individual films or specific scenes, but rather, the entire process of the practice. This allows attention to many ingredients that do not always exist in the finished and polished product, nor in the scholarly analysis of such products. Moreover, this dual function, of researcher-practitioner exposes and highlights the ethical aspects of the practice - both the artistic and the ethnographic; it encompasses the first-handed ethical account of the filmmaker with regards to the subjects and viewers. By incorporating the readers into the inner workings of the process, it allows them to consider the whole process, and to derive meanings both about this specific research but also in a more general perspective, about the relationship between author and creation, and about research as practice.

## CONCLUSION

This is the end of this PhD journey that began at the reception of the Kosher hotel in North London, continued to Israel, to my hometown of Haifa, and ended in The West Bank. It has been an academic and artistic journey, but also a significant personal one. Thus, this thesis ends in a personal tone, just like it opened, in the preface.

### **The Films**

Each of the documentary films submitted with this thesis might stand-alone, yet together the three could make a trilogy, being similar in their style and essence. Each of them may focus on a different community, though all the three communities are ones to which I relate, in different ways. In a way, my character and her journey is the line that connects the three films; in each of them I am the insider/outsider, a curious visitor who wants to know more about the subjects while putting herself in the middle. My character sheds light on the subjects and they shed light on me, as a character. The heart of the three films is the open conversation, the dialogue that is created between the subjects and me, using the researched Abandoned Camera technique for filming and interviewing.

All the three films use an unchanging fixed frame as the key frames of the recorded conversations. In *My Kosher Shifts* it is the frame of the reception window, where I am seen from my back, as the receptionist. This key frame reflects my side, of the outsider observing this community, and a wall between us separating the Ultraorthodox subjects and me. In *Women in Sink*, the camera position above the sink allows an intimate gaze at the faces of different women. I am seen through my hands, touching the women I chat with and am eager to get close to. In *Café Tekoa*, I seek to create a dialogue with a group that is so far from me, suspicious of the media and is uncomfortable with opening up to me and my cameras, so that I'm sitting down, positioning myself at the same level of my subjects. In this film I am seen on screen too, just as my subjects, having my face and gestures as exposed as theirs. Perhaps this is

what it had required in order to get settlers to be filmed: putting myself in the same vulnerable position as theirs.

In terms of documentary and ethnographic filmmaking, together the three films say something: about the Abandoned Camera interviewing method and how it functions in each of the three cases; about ethnographic participant observation; about representing societies through a dialogue with different individuals, seeing what members of a community have in common and the contradictions between them.

### **The Communities**

The communities are represented in the documentary films through our dialogue; an open conversation, both in the sense that it is unguided and evolves organically, and also by the wish to have an honest exchange of thoughts and opinions, without performing to the camera or holding back.

Immersing yourself in a culture, trying to integrate into a community rather than to observe it from a distance, brings a more in-depth understanding; much knowledge is collected not within the camera, but rather as memories and insights from the everyday experiences of temporarily being in a community. Actively communicating with many individuals allowed me to get to know the subjected societies with an attention to the individuality of its members and the differences between them.

This inductive experience of getting to know a community is what I wish to translate to the films and emphasise through them. To represent communities through individuals brings a non-monolithic and intimate look on different people as well as on the personal journey of me, the filmmaker. Depicting communities as a choir made of different voices could encourage a more complex perspective, and break away from viewing societies as one-layered or united, as they might seem from a distance.

## **The Research**

Practice-based research puts the author in a double position; she both creates the art and scrutinise it. This double role of artist and exegete means that she does not have the detachment that an extrinsic, critical researcher could have. She is psychologically involved and invested in the creative work. She is the work.

This double function, though, could be a fertile ground for knowledge and understanding that could be achieved from her subjective position only. I found the process of making documentary films and at the same time analysing that process, fascinating. It is exactly this process that is crucial when discussing documentary films, as making them involves many elements that do not exist in the final, polished piece of art.

Being a field that involves representing people for other people, using social actors to create an art, means that there are a lot of ethical junctions in the path of making the films. The final piece of art, the films, do not consist of all the turns and negotiations that had taken place while creating them, and the written thesis has allowed me to share some of these experiences.

During this PhD journey, I felt that I was gaining a lot from doing research about my own filmmaking, and that both the filmmaking and the thesis benefitted from one another. This research has forced me to pay more attention and be more sensitive to the experience of the entire cycle of creating the films. From the very first steps of finding locations or subjects to the very last ones of distributing the films, I have had the research in mind, acknowledging many details that later on I put on paper. And when writing the thesis, I included this hands-on knowledge of real situations that took place in the process and demonstrated many theoretical concepts I addressed in the literature review. Reflecting on the practice meant that I brought the insider's understanding to the process of making these films, which no one else could have brought, such as why I selected specific content or style, or how I felt about a certain community.

Throughout the process of making the documentaries the triangle that I focused on in this thesis, of filmmaker, subjects and viewers, and the tension which is the result of the three conflicting angles, has been constantly practised. Being the documentary filmmaker, I had to face these three angles and negotiate between their interests: the subjects who I captured and edited to the film, and who later on watched themselves in the film and reacted to it; the viewers, of many different audiences, with whom I discussed the films after the screenings. The experience of presenting my film to people and learning how they read and interpret the film has opened another dimension for me as a filmmaker and researcher. There is the film, there is how I feel about my film and react to it, and there is how others do.

## **Me**

It was a journey of identity exploration, which has not only visited different communities, but also different components of my own identity; of being Jewish, being a foreigner in the UK, of being an Israeli, of having an Arab family background, of being a woman and of holding the opinions which shape my political self. This self-exploration voyage symbolically ended in me leaving the UK after eight years, and coming back home to my country, Israel.

The research journey, in terms of its creative outcomes - the three documentary films - has been one of advancement and growth; from the first film *My Kosher Shifts* to the third, *Café Tekoa*, the artistic work has evolved in different creative aspects. Most obviously and literally one, the film's length has grown: *My Kosher Shifts* is twenty minutes long, *Women in Sink* is thirty five and *Café Tekoa* is seventy minutes in length. The subjects of the films have also developed: from a community of Ultraorthodox Jews from around the world, with which I have no clear tension, to Arabs in Israel, with our ethnical, political and religious otherness, and finally to settlers in the West Bank, who as a group represent the extreme opposite of my political agenda, with an apparent tension between us. It was interesting and useful to test my documentary technique in this more conflicting environment, but as importantly, to develop my ability to show empathy to a dissonant group and to manage to be embedded in it. The apparatus has grown too: from one camera on a tripod at the hotel's reception,

to a built rig in the hair salon and finally to a mini pop-up studio of three recording cameras on big tripods, in the settlement. Cinematically, the language of the films has developed and enriched: while in *My Kosher Shifts* and *Women in Sink* the experience of making the film functioned mainly as transitions between characters, in *Café Tekoa* it has become a significant layer in the film; a language of sounds and images that tell stories about the community and the space, but also express a political gaze, and have much weight in the overall film.

This journey has also matured me as an author. My production, directing, funding, promoting and distribution skills have all been developed through this journey. I started off amateur, experimenting with documentary filmmaking for the very first time, without a clear professional intention, and I have ended with a distinctive personal artistic style and strong career aspirations.

This journey has definitely been the most significant I have taken in my life. It made me evolve as a filmmaker, a researcher and a person. Having gained this vast knowledge from doing this PhD, I now wish to keep developing both elements, the practice and theory; I want to keep experimenting with documentary filmmaking, exploring new filmmaking methods in different communities and places, and at the same time to share my research insights as a tutor and lecturer for documentary and visual anthropology students.

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*The Ride* (1994) [Reality TV series] ITVS, 3 November 1994.

*Roger & Me* (1989) dir. Michael Moore, US: Warners Bros.

*Sacred Sperm* (2015) dir. Ori Gruder, Israel: Go2Films.

*Sherman's March: A Meditation on the Possibility of Romantic Love In the South During an Era of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation* (1986) dir. Ross McElwee, US.

*Silverlake Life: The View from Here* (1993) dir. Peter Friedman and Tom Joslin, US: Zeitgeist Films.

*Sink or Swim* (1990) dir. Su Friedrich, US: Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre.

*Stories We Tell* (2012) dir. Sarah Polley, Canada: Mongrel Media.

*Strictly Jewish* (2016) *Untold Australia*, 3 of 3. [TV programme] SBS, 27 April 2016.

*Supersize Me* (2004) dir. Morgan Spurlock, US: Samuel Goldwyn Films.

*Sweetgrass* (2009) dir. Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Ilisa Barbash, US: The Cinema Guild.

*Tarnation* (2003) dir. Jonathan Caoette, US: Wellspring Media.

*This Is Spinal Tap* (1984) dir. Rob Reiner, US: Embassy Pictures.  
*Tracking Down Maggie* (1994) dir. Nick Broomfield, UK: Channel 4.

*Trembling before g-d* (2001) dir. Sandi Simcha DuBowski, US: New Yorker Films.

*24 Hours in A&E* (2011-) [Reality TV series] Channel 4, Channel 4.



*Video Nation* (1993-2001) [Interactive Video Project] BBC.

*Wide Awake* (2006) dir. Alan Berliner, US.

*Yoman (Diary)* (1983) dir. David Perlov, Israel.

*Z32* (2008) dir. Avi Mograbi, Israel.

# Appendix 1 | SCREENINGS AND AWARDS

## ***My Kosher Shifts***

### **Awards**

1st prize – MyStreet competition, Open City, London, 2011  
Best Student Film - Astra Film Festival, Romania,  
2012 Best Ethnographic Film - Intimate Lens, Italy,  
2012 Special Mention – GIEFF, Germany, 2012  
Special Mention – Contro Squardi, Italy, 2012  
Special Mention - International Festival of Ethnological Film, Serbia, 2012

### **Screenings**

Open City, UK, 2011  
Quadrangle Film Festival, UK,  
2011 Films On Fridges, UK, 2011  
Rhode Island International Film Festival, USA, 2012  
Palm Springs International Film Festival, USA, 2012  
Gottingen International Ethnographic Film Festival, Germany,  
2012 Astra Film Festival, Romania, 2012  
Edindocs, Scotland, 2012  
Moscow International Festival of Visual Anthropology, Russia, 2012  
Washington Jewish Film Festival, USA, 2012  
Haifa International Film Festival, Israel, 2012 Intimate  
Lens, Ethnographic film Festival, Italy, 2012  
Contro Squardi – International Anthropological Film Festival, Italy, 2012  
SERET Israeli Film Festival, UK, 2012  
Trier Ethnographic Film Festival, Germany, 2012  
Israel Film Festival Berlin, Germany, 2012  
One With a Movie Camera, Germany, 2012  
Serbian International Festival of Ethnological Film, Serbia, 2012  
DocTent, UK, 2013 Wychwood  
Festival, UK, 2013  
Blissfields Festival, UK, 2013  
Berlin Jewish Film Festival, Germany, 2013  
Bremen University, Germany, 2013  
Filmisrael, Netherlands, 2013  
St Albans Film Festival, UK, 2013  
Paul Spiegel Filmfestival - Jüdische Welten, Germany, 2013  
Yebisu International Festival for Art and Alternative Visions, Japan, 2014  
Summer school of Swiss Ethnological Society, Switzerland, 2017

## ***Women in Sink***

### **Awards**

Grierson Award for Best Student Documentary, UK 2016  
Innovation Award, AHRC Films Awards, UK 2017  
Most Innovative Mid-Length Film - Visions du Reel, Switzerland, 2015  
Special Jury Mention - Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic, 2015  
Best Short Documentary - Haifa International FF, Israel 2015  
Best European Documentary - ÉCU - European Independent FF, France, 2016  
Special Jury Mention in 'Movies That Matter' - ZagrebDox, Croatia, 2016  
Audience Award – Best Short Foreign Film - Films de Femmes, France, 2016  
Best Short Film – Jewish Motifs, Poland, 2016  
Best Short Film – Filmes do Homem, Portugal 2016  
Special Jury Mention – Corsica.Doc, France 2016  
First Prize - FOCI Magazine competition, UK 2016  
Best Short Film - SVA Film and Media Festival, USA 2016  
Finalist – SIMA Social Impact Media Awards, USA, 2017  
Finalist – One World Media Awards, UK, 2017

### **Screenings**

IDFA – 'Best of Fests', Netherlands, 2015  
Visions du Reel, Switzerland, 2015  
AFI DOCS, USA, 2015  
Hamptons International FF, USA, 2015  
Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic, 2015  
Haifa International FF Israel , 2015  
ZagrebDox, Croatia, 2016  
RIDM, Canada, 201  
Viennale, Austria, 2015  
DokumentArt, Germany, 2015  
Cleveland Jewish FF, USA,  
2015 UK Jewish FF, UK 2015  
San Francisco Jewish FF, USA, 2015  
Films de Femmes, France, 2016  
Budapest Intl. Doc FF, Hungary, 2016  
Other Israel FF, USA, 2015  
Watch Docs, Poland 2015  
London Short, UK 2016  
Stockholm Feminist Film Festival, Sweden 2016  
Filmmor Women FF, Turkey 2016  
Gottingen Ethnographic FF, Germany 2016  
Sola Luna, Italy, 2016  
EthnoFilm, Croatia, 2016  
ÉCU- The European Independent FF, France, 2016  
Middle East Now, Italy, 2016  
Annapolis International FF, USA, 2016  
Docudays UA IDFF, Ukraine, 2016  
Women's Freedom Center, USA 2016

Woman Festival, Israel, 2016 Vermont  
 International FF, 2016  
 WOW – Women of the World, Folkestone UK, 2016  
 About Time – Leeds, UK, 2016  
 Films de Homem, Portugal, 2016  
 Barcelona international women's FF, Spain, 2016  
 Society for Visual Anthropology (SVA) Film Festival, USA 2016  
 NAFA Film Festival, 2016  
 Aegean Docs, Greece, 2016  
 Budapest International Documentary FF, Hungary, 2016  
 Women of Pamplona, Spain, 2016  
 Olhares do Mediterrâneo, Portugal, 2016  
 FF DMZ Docs – Korea, 2016  
 Sole Luna Treviso Documentary FF – Italy, 2016  
 WoFF: World of Film Intl. FF – Scotland, 2016  
 Religion Today, Italy, 2016  
 Women Make Waves, Taiwan, 2016  
 International Festival of Ethnological Film, Serbia, 2016  
 La Cabina, Spain, 2016  
 Zonta Intl. FF, Canada, 2016  
 Creativity for Peace, Santa Fe, USA, 2016  
 This Human World, Austria, 2016  
 IntimaLente, Italy, 2016  
 EASA2016: Anthropological legacies and human futures, Italy, 2016  
 Tucson Jewish FF, USA, 2016  
 San Diego Jewish FF, USA, 2016  
 Washington Jewish FF, USA, 2016  
 Copenhagen Jewish FF, Denmark, 2016  
 Westchester Jewish FF, USA, 2016  
 New Jersey Jewish FF, USA, 2016  
 Vermont Jewish FF, USA, 2016  
 Central Queens YM & YWHA, USA, 2016  
 CRONOGRAP Jewish Motifs FF, Poland, 2016  
 Toronto Jewish FF, Canada, 2016  
 Westchester Jewish FF, USA, 2016  
 Cherry Hill Jewish FF, USA, 2016  
 Filmsreal, Netherlands, 2016  
 SERET London, UK, 2016  
 New Jersey Jewish FF, USA, 2016  
 Gainesville Jewish FF, USA, 2016  
 Lisbon Jewish FF, Portugal, 2016  
 Zurich Jewish FF, Czech, 2016 Doc  
 Israel Stockholm, Sweden, 2016  
 Copenhagen Jewish FF, 2016  
 Washington Jewish FF, USA, 2016  
 San Diego Jewish FF, USA, 2016  
 Berlin Jewish FF, Germany, 2016  
 Chicago Festival of Israeli Cinema, USA, 2016  
 Jewish Motifs, Poland, 2016  
 Chicago Festival of Israeli Cinema, USA, 2016

Philadelphia JFF, USA, 2016  
Sao Paulo JFF, USA, 2016  
SERET – Israeli Film Festival, UK, 2016  
Combined Jewish Philanthropies, USA, 2016  
Jewish Museum Frankfurt, Germany, 2016  
Sao Paulo JFF, Brazil, 2016  
Summer Shorts, Phoenixville PA, USA, 2016  
Temple Beth-El, USA, 2016  
Carpentras JFF, France, 2016  
Chicago Festival of Israeli Cinema, USA, 2016  
Philadelphia JFF, USA, 2016  
SERET Amsterdam, Netherlands,  
2016 Boston JFF, USA, 2016  
RUTGERS JFF, USA, 2016  
La Rochelle Intl. FF, France,  
2017 Exile Room, Greece, 2017  
Filmer le travail, France, 2017  
Trento Film Festival, Italy, 2017  
Alice Women FF, USA, 2017  
FICDH - Human Rights Film Festival, Buenos Aires, 2017  
Freiburger Filmforum, Germany, 2017  
Reading Jewish Film Series, USA, 2017  
Santa Barbara JFF, USA, 2017  
Cineprod Israel, France, 2017  
Northern Virginia JFF, USA, 2017  
Greater Ann Arbor JCC, USA,  
2017 Atlantic JFF, Canada, 2017  
Summer school of Swiss Ethnological Society, Switzerland, 2017  
Palm Beach Israeli Film Series, USA, 2018  
International Bremen Film Conference, Germany 2018  
OTHER/CINEMA - Critical Cinema Lab, Finland 2018

## Appendix 2 | PRESS REVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS

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Fox-Bevilacqua, M., 'Suds Up: Israel's Race Relations Bubble to Surface in "Women in Sink"', *Haaretz*, 16 November 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2.3006/.premium-1.686373>

Gabor, P., 'Film Review: Women in Sink (2015)', *Gabor Por's personal blog*, 18 February 2016, <https://www.pgabor.com/2016/02/18/film-review-women-in-sink-2015/>

Ghert-Zand, R., 'Up in the Orthodox Hotel', *Forward*, 16 January 2013, <http://forward.com/schmooze/169275/up-in-the-orthodox-hotel/>

Ibrahim, M., 'The Power of Human Relationships in Ethnographic Movies (Week 9)', *Anthropological Diaries*, 14 March 2015, [https://minaibrahim92.tumblr.com/post/113612872559/the-power-of-human-rAnthropological Diariesrelationships-in-ethnographic](https://minaibrahim92.tumblr.com/post/113612872559/the-power-of-human-rAnthropological-Diariesrelationships-in-ethnographic)

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Stone, A., 'Women in the Sink: Iris Zaki on Her "Abandoned Camera" Filmmaking', *Lilith*, Winter 2015-2016, <http://lilith.org/articles/women-in-the-sink-iris-zaki-on-her-abandoned-camera-filmmaking/>

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