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# Bridging the Visual and Social Science Research Gap through Film

A visual insight into the stories of four  
undocumented women in Geneva

Maevia Griffiths

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## BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Passionate about filmmaking, storytelling and the transformative potential of visual representations and aesthetics, Maevia Griffiths works both as social science researcher and as a film director, aiming to bring together both disciplines. While Maevia grew up in Switzerland, she then studied a BA in Disaster and Emergency Management and at York University (Toronto CA) and at SOAS (London UK) and then spent a few years travelling and working for diverse humanitarian organisations around Europe, Asia, Western Africa and Latin America. Through a focus on visual studies and visual anthropology, she graduated from an MA in Development Studies from the Geneva Graduate Institute (2021), specialized in Power and Conflict and Gender studies and is currently finishing a Masters in Screen Documentary filmmaking at Goldsmiths University of London (2022). Her works includes various social activist film projects, such as the documentary film *The Drop* (2019), the art video *Grievable//Ungrievable* (2020) and the documentaries *Elles les (in)visibles* (2021) and *The Kingfisher* (2022), which all recount untold stories for social justice. Maevia uses filmmaking as a medium to visually engage with social science research and social activism, and regularly works with vulnerable populations in diverse cultural settings. Aware of the power dynamics involved in research and filmmaking, she attempts to integrate visual anthropological perspectives into her work, ensuring that the recording of different populations is always carried out with great respect for their needs and beliefs.

## ABSTRACT

This research explores how the medium of filmmaking can be mobilised as a tool to bridge the gap between visibility and qualitative social science research through the making of an anthropological documentary film, *Elles les (in)visibles*, which explores the political and social (in)visibilities of four ‘undocumented’ women in Geneva. Through the stories of these four women, the film utilises visibility’s emotive power to reach a wider audience, enabling the formation of a new gaze, shifting interpretative frames which structure the perception and recognition of these ‘undocumented’ migrant women’s humanity. Understanding how filmmaking can be used as a method, a process and a subject of research within sociology and anthropology opens up new realms for relating the visual to the textual.

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**Keywords:** Film as social science method; Undocumented domestic women workers; Migration Switzerland; Operation Papyrus

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The documentary film *Elles les (in)visibles* started as a bold idea of including a 'small' documentary film to my thesis research – today I can say with certainty that my thesis has rather become a 'smaller' written research for my 'large' documentary film project. This project has propelled me so much further than expected, and has become a stepping stone to the next stages of my personal and professional life. This documentary film has received outstanding waves of support, including emails by undocumented people, interviews, diverse interests taken by many institutions and news media such as RTS (19h30 téléjournal interview) etc. This attention attests to film's ability to travel across diverse spheres and open academic debates to wider circles of people around the subject of 'undocumented' women in Geneva and hopefully also the questioning of it within other parts of Switzerland as well. I could not have wished for a better way to diffuse my academic research for this thesis within the completion of my Masters in Development Studies.

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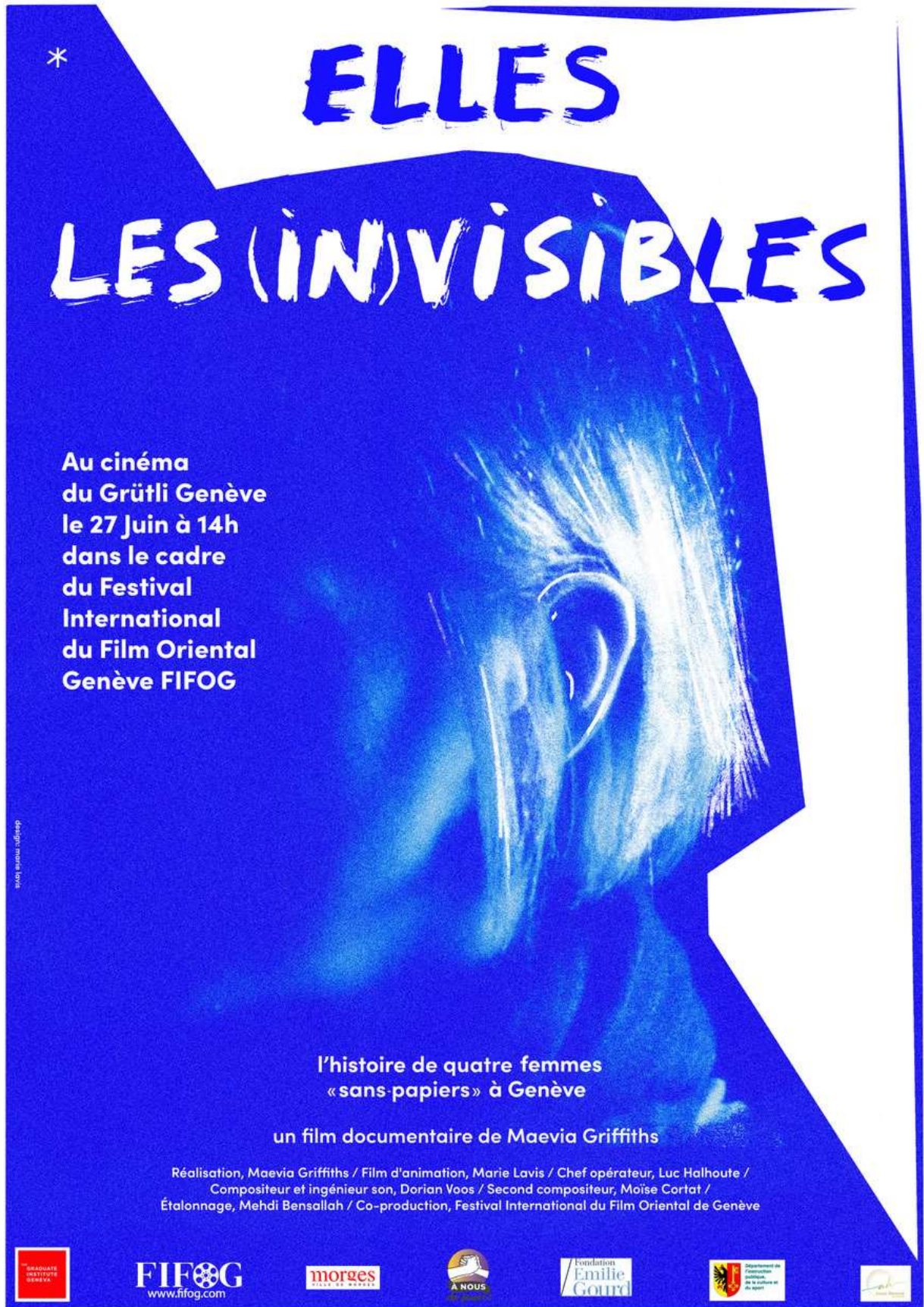


Figure 1: Poster of the documentary's premier

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*“Avec mes enfants au Brésil, j’ai vécu des situations très difficiles, mais je n’ai jamais senti ce manque de ne pas exister”*

Re. 2021

Walking on the lake side in Geneva accompanied by Re., I hold my camera in one hand and my note book in the other. It’s already dark, we sit in the freezing March wind staring at Lake Lemman; the lights of Eaux Vives’ prestigious stores glaring back from its surface, as expensive cars and corporate suited men and women walk by. I ask a few questions, she tells me her stories, I listen, we discuss, I film, I stop filming, we discuss again. It has only been a few months since we embarked on this project together, but I somehow feel close to her, to her story, to her difficulties and triumphs. My camera becomes part of our relationship, it punctuates our friendship, our trust, our common goal; visibilising a part of her story which has often remained in the shadows and has come to shape my own since. We walk together, she looks at my camera and says: “I always said that one day my story will be on television”. We continue walking, I squeeze both the camera and my notebook in my hands – I am going to have to construct a bridge between my left hand, holding my filmmaker’s camera, and my right hand, holding my social scientist’s notebook. I am going to have to conduct research that allows me to ‘hold both hands together’ in solidarity with Re. and all the other women that recognise themselves in these stories.

The gap between anthropological writings and films, often entrenched within interrogations of subjectivities, knowledge production, audiencing and veracity of the visual, is in a continuous state of reshaping. As there are no defined ways to go about anthropological filmmaking, defining what is considered anthropological or not, what are the methods, the choices and the styles enabling legitimacy in the human sciences is constantly being remodelled. While often compared with one another, social sciences and film in fact crystallise their strengths when placed as complementary. As David MacDougal (2011, 100) articulates “[a]nthropology, as a discipline of words, developed specific methods of research and forms of discourse that were both challenged and complemented by anthropological filmmaking”. Hence, there is a need to understand the knowledge produced by writings and films as uniquely different and powerful, and as crucial to the transformative change potential of critical human science research. It is within this overlap between the two disciplines that a malleable fertile terrain for experimentation emerges: where visuality and written research merge, creating new

knowledge for the advancement of social science and society as a whole. In this thesis, I will practically engage with this overlap, mobilising the tool of filmmaking to discuss questions of visibility and human recognition of humanity.

Dynamics of visibilities and invisibilities delineate our visual fields, shape our gaze and inform our moral responses to other people's lives. Guided by visual theories and questionings of gaze, this research thus articulates itself around the exploration of politics of visibilities and invisibilities and the ways in which they intersect as a dominant matrix of experiences for 'undocumented' women in Geneva. Through the realization of an anthropological documentary film about the political and social (in)visibilities of four 'undocumented' women in Geneva, *Elles, les (in)visibles*, I wish to explore how the medium of filmmaking can be mobilized as a tool to bridge the gap between visibility and qualitative social science research. By reaching a larger audience through its emotive power, it enables the formation of a new gaze - *the silhouette gaze* - for people that cannot be fully depicted on screen and shift interpretative frames which structure our perception and recognition of 'undocumented' migrant women's humanity. Thus, understanding how filmmaking can be used as a method, a process and a subject of research within sociology and anthropology opens up new realms for relating the visual to the textual.

As a young woman, I often questioned the trajectories and realities of the women working in the care economy and who have become an allegory for our globalised economic gendered system – simultaneously crucial and (mostly) invisible. Indeed, the care economy is at the heart of feminist concerns. Since the 1980's, economic migration shifted from largely 'masculinised' to 'feminised' labour undertaken by women from the Global South to replace domestic tasks left by white privileged women in the Global North. The devaluation of domestic work within the private sphere thus permeated our global economic system. It is those global dynamics embedded within our *white supremacist capitalist patriarchal* (hooks, 2000) system which shape and reshape millions of women's realities, fashioning their visibilities and invisibilities. In Geneva, there are an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 'undocumented' migrants (UNIGE 2017). This population constitutes an important cog of the economy, allowing society to function but remain, mostly, invisible. Over the past decade, Geneva has stood as a unique example in attempting to tackle this matter. Through associative and collective bottom-up efforts, the two-year long Operation Papyrus emerged in January 2017 as the first pilot project of its kind in Switzerland, establishing objective criteria for facilitated regularisation of 'undocumented' migrants in the canton. Practically engaging with this topic through the making of an anthropological documentary film, this thesis will not only enable a visual insight into the lived realities of four 'undocumented' women in Geneva, but also an exploration of how both the Operation Papyrus and the medium of film can play a role in their visibilisation and the recognition of their humanity.

In order to merge these different interrogations, my overarching research question is articulated as:

What kind of knowledge does film allow for?

As fully answering this question goes beyond the scope of this research, I will organize my reflections in three sub questions:

1. Focusing on practical questions about filmmaking: What are the limits of filmic writing (editing, effects, juxtaposition of sequences)? What are the risks induced by the use of the camera (notably linked to anonymity)? How can these risks be reduced?
2. Bringing in questions of ethics and positionality, especially regarding my role as the filmmaker: What does the taking into account of images and the representation of otherness bring to the wider field of anthropological research? What are the ethical and epistemological questions that arise when intervening with a camera in the field?
3. The last will concentrate on the bigger picture: What is the contribution of this tool in the construction of the object of research? What are its limits? And overall, how can I bridge the knowledge produced by social sciences through written text and ethnographic fieldwork with my camera?

To apply these questions to my case study, my literature review will concentrate on three main bodies of literature. The first will frame notions of visibilities and invisibilities in the context of the care economy, mainly drawn from feminist studies. The second part will look at visual theories of recognition of humanity and gaze. The third part will look at critical filmmaking's power relations. These different literature and theories will allow me to establish a theoretical framework in order to discuss my research questions. Then, I will contextualise my case study through an overview of 'undocumented' migration in Geneva and the regularisation pilot project Operation Papyrus. The methodological section of my work merges the different filmmaking steps undertaken for this documentary, already addressing one subsection of my research questions. Finally, I will provide analytical reflections around three main points: first, filmmaking and the Operation Papyrus as a visibilisation strategy; second, how this project has involved different levels of gaze and the creation of a new gaze; and, finally, how the final filmic product plays a concrete role in bridging the gap between social science research and visibility, answering my last subset research question. I will end this thesis by looking at filmmaking's limitations. Guided by underlying questions about visibility, I will draw upon W. J. T Mitchell's (2005) interrogations about images from her book *What do pictures want?* such as: what

images want from us as spectators? What do they attempt to convey and diffuse? How do they tell life histories and affect their audiences?

Practically, filmmaking is both my method and the object of my research. Hence, I wish to put into conversation both the visual product and the writing by reflecting on the documentary as a means of bridging knowledge production in an articulation between text and film. By becoming the core method and the central output of my research theoretically and visually, this thesis and documentary film aim to bring into resonance the depth of written analysis and the capacity of visuality to speak for itself.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 The Care Economy and Invisible Work**

My literature review will concentrate on three main bodies of literature. The first will frame notions of visibilities and invisibilities in the context of the care economy, mainly drawn from feminist studies. The second part will look at theories of visual recognition of humanity and gaze. The third part will look at filmmaking's power relations.

#### **2.1.1 'Undocumented' migration and the care economy**

As Grace Chang (2000) points out, the distinction made between “economic migrants” and “political refugees” is often determinant in national discourses and migration policies giving access to assistance and social services. Where “political refugees” are seen as having been forced to flee their countries because of persecution and life-threatening conditions, “economic migrants” are rather framed as ‘opportunists’ searching for a better economic and material life. Indeed, states rarely acknowledge collective responsibility for global inequality dynamics which create violent economic and political crisis, forcing people to leave their homes for ‘financial’ reasons. However, as argued by Ayse Ceyhan and Anastassia Tsoukala (2002) the recent mechanisms put in place to criminalise migration are blurring the distinction between “migrants” and “asylum seekers”, overall reducing the chances of obtaining refugee status. The increased suspicion on the origins of migration embeds notions of ‘good genuine’ versus ‘deceitful’ migrants, entrenching economic migration within narratives of ‘invasions’ of ‘aliens’ and threats to national identity and unity. For instance, the case of the USA is very representative: Latin American workers are seen as abusers of the welfare system and as endangering the nation state not only through their increased presence but also through myths about their high reproduction and fertility rates (Ibid). Thus, when economic migrants do not succeed in entering the system legally, they become ‘undocumented’, with no permits allowing them to settle and work on the territory – denied from any type of citizenship, rights and benefits. In the context of care economy, despite many female migrants being highly skilled, they are commonly

underpaid and exploited, making up a large portion of the cheap labour. While they often pay taxes and social security insurance, they are unable or afraid to use welfare services (Chang 2000). This feminised work and its (in)visibilities are thus shaped through gendered politics of inclusion and exclusion, where employers and states capitalize upon irregular women's vulnerability, and regulate irregular migration through the threat of police checks and deportation (Fischer and Dahinden 2017). Through the precarity of this system, women become, using Chang's (2016, 23) words: "disposable workers". As explained by Michèle Gagnon's interview, administrative secretary at le SIT (Syndicat Interpersonnel des travailleurs et travailleuses) in Geneva:

"C'est un mauvais calcul pour Genève. Parce que ces gens-là remplissent une fonction économique que personne d'autre ne va remplir, donc quand il y a une personne sans-papiers qui est prise comme ça et qui est renvoyée dans son pays, il se passe quoi ? La personne chez qui elle travaillait, en général en économie domestique, se retrouvait coincée sans personne pour garder son parent âgé et malade, ou ses enfants. Donc elle allait voir son voisin ou sa voisine en disant 'Ah toi aussi tu as une personne qui garde tes enfants ? Est-ce qu'elle n'aurait pas quelqu'un dans son pays qui pourrait venir parce que là j'ai vraiment besoin de quelqu'un dans l'urgence. Ce qui fait que la personne sans-papier qui était expulsée était rapidement remplacée par un autre sans-papiers, mais un sans-papiers qui débarquait et qui ne connaissait rien, qui ne parlait pas français.'" (00:39:59)<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, irregular migration is mostly framed through the ambivalent negotiations of being simultaneously "wanted and unwanted - wanted for their labour but unwanted as human beings" (Doty 2011, 600). Many states attempt to navigate between their interest in "protecting capital accumulation within industry" while still safeguarding "the state's own political legitimacy in the eyes of the public" (Harrison and Lloyd 2012, 365).

The term "invisible work" was articulated in the 80s by Arlene Kaplan Daniels (1987) to describe, mainly, women's unpaid work, often constrained to the private spheres, including volunteer work, housework, care to children and elderly, and which remains unvalued and unconsidered within the global economy (See also: Charles and Galerand 2017; Masterson and Hoobler 2019; Star and Strauss 1999) Erin Hatton (2017) established a framework to explore invisible work through three intersecting sociocultural, sociolegal and sociospatial mechanisms of work devaluation: 1) "cultural hegemonic ideologies" normalise the labour and

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<sup>1</sup> All interviews conducted for the documentary film will be referenced with the film's time code. Other information drawn from interviews will be referenced as: (Personal interview: Name of interviewee, Date)

skills, 2) legal mechanisms exclude the work from fitting into the legal definition of employment and 3) spatial segregation separates the labour from spheres defined as work sites (private homes etc.). These mechanisms all contribute to the invisibilisation of the work and thus the workers' bodies and existence (Harrison and Llyod 2012, 337).

The politicisation of the gendered separation between the “unproductive” feminised work of women at home in the private sphere, and the “productive” work of men in the public sphere is at heart of the feminist struggle (Daniels 1987, 404). Feminist studies have thus explored the gendered paradigms attached to the care economy through various angles. For instance, scholars such as Ayse Akalin (2015) have investigated, through the notion of “transnational motherhood”, how women’s essentialisation as intrinsically caring mothers feeds into this system. Akalin (2015, 65) explores how the global market mobilises women’s labour as “mobile bodies infused with affective histories of maternal care”, perpetuating “global care chains and transnational motherhood”. The feminisation of labour, such as that of care work, thus merges with the “feminisation of migration” (Castles, Miller, and Ammendola 2005, 9), increasing women’s mobility in order to “to socially include them under imposed conditions of enforced and protracted vulnerability,” (De Genova 2002, 429). Domestic workers either work “cama adentro”, sleeping and living at the employer’s home, or “cama afuera” accumulating different work hours with many employers and living in their own homes. Those living “cama adentro” have to negotiate the blurring between the private/personal and the public/work spheres. As working hours become obsolete, they are expected to be in constant readiness to execute services, and remain in continual exploitation through emotional pressure of loyalty resulting from being ‘one of the family’ (Bakan, Stasiulis, and Stasiulis 1997, 11). The commodification of care work thus capitalises upon the feminisation of migration through women’s emotional labour and affect production, requiring the suppression of their own feelings in the execution of the services demanded. By exploiting their naturalised ‘mothering skills’ it denies them from having their own family, yet forces them to transfer their care skills to other families (Akalin 2015). These essentialising dynamics of care work thus push domestic women’s work into exploitative ‘non-work’, reinforcing the invisibility of their physical and emotional labour as well as the personal cost inflicted upon their humanity and self.

While most literature tends to focus on imposed invisibilities, increasingly more research acknowledges that transnational mobility of labour can also develop potential for women’s emancipation. Certain feminist scholars, such as Leaticia Carreras (2008) Nando Sigona (2012) and Preeti Shekar (2015) tackle feminised migration and labour as a potential source of resistance and opportunity across global spaces. Their research explores different resistance and coping strategies developed by irregular migrant women to personally and practically, negotiate their experiences. As Akalin (2015) states; “mobility holds a power to

induce transformation because there is always an associated and parallel movement in migrants' 'subjective behaviours, claims, desires, affects, imaginations'". More concretely, Carreras (2008) looks at the ways in which women negotiate their conditions and make sense of their experiences at both intra-individual and inter-individual levels by comparing and discussing their living and working conditions with other women in the same situation. These studies also highlight how 'invisibility' is challenged through different strategies, such as the inscription of their bodies within social events, festivities, cultural performances, and spending time in bistros etc. (Cretton 2020). These strategies allow one to visibilise their presence in the visual field of Geneva and in the eyes of local communities, allowing further recognition. Such resistance through visibility also shaped the premises of The Operation Papyrus, where the irregular migrants themselves gathered, mobilised and organised to reclaim their rights to visibility and recognition. This allowed the different associations working for The Operation Papyrus to gather the required figures in order to create a database to justify their regularisation to the city, the canton and the state (Personal interview: Gagnon, 2021).

### 2.1.2 Undeclared work

Building upon the notion of states and employers' interdependence on workers' vulnerability and invisibility, these dynamics question the politics of internal exclusion which shape 'undocumented' migrants' 'illegality'. As theorised by Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) and mobilised by Marie Segrave (2019), *differential inclusion* defines how irregular migrants' inclusion is achieved through diverse *necessity strategies*. Becoming a member of a community, a consumer, using public transport and other services and, clearly, being employed become a "practice that counters the nation-state's efforts to insist that those who are unlawful must be excluded" (Segrave 2019, 203) . This situation creates sites of ambiguity, becoming a form of grey zone. This middle ground or *grey zone* will be further discussed through Gil Z. Hochberg's (2015) work on visibility and can be useful to further explore the "travail au gris" in Switzerland and in Geneva.

The term "travail au gris", or undeclared work defines work that is carried out by a person without legal status but that is declared to the social security and/or to the tax authorities (SIT 2004) This grey zone, created between the irregular and the regular zones, produces spaces of *differential inclusion* by allowing 'undocumented' migrants to work and be declared to income tax and social insurances, while remaining 'illegal' to the state. Thus, exclusion is not only produced through geographically fixed bordering practices, but also constantly reproduced through multiple dynamics, practices and performances beyond borders' physicality (Segrave 2019). It is those practices and gaps created within the internal legal, economic and social regimes that lay the premises for a messy and ambiguous controlling of 'undocumented'



labour, however also creating space for agentive invisibility. As argued by Michel Foucault (2007, 6) there is a “bandwidth of the acceptable that must not be exceeded” within the “permitted” and the “prohibited”, shaping the complex internal border politics of exclusion and inclusion. Once certain policies and strategies are established, the “apparatus of security” provides leeway that “let things happen” instead of using disciplinary power (Doty 2011, 606). In this way, “[s]afety and invisibility are temporary and shifting” meaning that the repression and precariousness experienced by ‘undocumented’ women through the established legal migration regime can be internally resisted and subverted through negotiations between the inclusion/exclusion, the legal/illegal, the visible/invisible in order to “foster belonging” ” (Segrave 2019, 207).

### **2.1.3 Intersectionality and White Supremacy Capitalist Patriarchy (WSCP)**

In order to truly understand the underlying matrixes of recognition politics and the sociocultural mechanisms participating at different degrees to the devaluation of ‘undocumented’ women’s work and the furthering of their invisibility, it is crucial to include an intersectional approach. The term “intersectionality” has become a new buzzword and tool for recognition of differences and multiple inequalities that one can experience. The popularity of this word however tends towards a static hierarchical additive objectification which fails to grasp the interactions of processes within the “matrixes of dominance” (Collins 1998). Recognising differences is a crucial first step in understanding the complex intersectional dynamics of one’s social and political identities such as gender, race, class etc. (Fraser 2000). However, Hae Yeon Choo and Myra Marx Ferree (2010, 131) argue for a nonadditive process-centred model shifting from the notion of separate subordination dynamics towards multiple overlapping and interlinked complex processes of domination: it is not the sum of multiple inequalities but rather the intersections between each which creates a new web of unique personal experiences of subordination (Ibid). Thus, people are located within imposed “power hierarchies” and gender is a dominant building block that functions “simultaneously on multiple spatial and social scales (e.g., the body, the family, the state) across transnational terrains” (Mahler and Pessar 2001, 445).

This approach allows a reading of ‘undocumented’ women working in the care economy through its various axes of power and domination, such as race and class, placing it as a central maxim to intersectional and decolonial feminist studies. First-wave feminism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century which fought for (white) women’s access to voting, civil rights and access to the global economy often failed to consider the unique intersectional experiences of “women” as a heterogenous group. Situated within a neo-liberal system, this contributed partly to the transferral of domestic work upon other categories of women which did not fit the western hegemonic feminist paradigm. Postcolonial power dynamics then merged with those of capitalism, bringing women from the Global South to work for women’s emancipation in the

Global North (Chang 2000). As stated by Trinidad Galván (2016, 348), non-western female bodies become a commodity of neoliberalism, “a type of trophy to property, a recolonization of body as territory”. bell hooks (2000) summarises this through her concept “White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy” (WSCP), providing a semantic tool to concretely consider simultaneously the interlocking systems of domination that shape experiences. As argued by Sheba Mariam George (2005, 67), women’s independence and emancipation through women’s inclusion in the global market have not broken the patriarchal relations of the “women mother” bound to the private sphere and the “men breadwinner” in the public sphere. Rather, women are now exploited in the private and the public spheres, reinforcing the capitalist system. While neo-Marxist feminism understands this as a “by-product of class relations”, socialist feminism rather frames it as an independent oppressive system built upon patriarchal values.

Based upon this understanding of domestic work as linked to gendered and colonial power dynamics, shaping dehumanization and unrecognised struggle, suffering, existence, and agency, I will further explore how visual culture such as film has the capacity to alter the reading of female bodies towards the recognition of their experiences and the re-establishment of their humanity.

## **2.2 Theory of Representation and Recognition through image/film**

### **2.2.1 Visibilities and invisibilities in recognition**

As highlighted above, diverse structural global, political and social systems devalue certain jobs and invisibilise workers, entrenching inequality, exploitation and denial of humanity. In this way, regularisation plays a role in legally shifting those invisibilities. I will explore the ways in which film can equally work as a visibilising tool, shifting our understanding about recognition of the “other” through visibility in ways that written social science research may not.

The politics of visibility and invisibility are constituent of our visual field, delineating what and how subjects and objects are made perceptible within a given spatial array of visual sensations. This visual field contributes to structuring one’s capability to relate to and recognise others as ‘human’. As argued by the philosopher Stanley Cavell, when confronted with suffering, *acknowledgement* allows the “recognition of the other’s specific relation to oneself” (Reinhardt 2007, 31). However, the ways in which images circulate, depict and frame suffering rarely help the subjects to truly reach acknowledgement of their condition and self. Honneth (2005, 42) defines “invisibilisation” through the act of “regarder à travers quelqu’un”. He argues that we retain the power to “look through” people with contempt, and while these people remain physically existent, their presence is simply not considered on an equal human level, which he refers to as “l’acte de non-perception” (Ibid). Therefore, as people remain physically visible,

invisibility does not crystallise as a cognitive fact, but rather as a specific social situation where the person is robbed of their visibility as a human being.

### 2.2.2 Recognition of humanity

For Judith Butler (2009), we respond differently to diverse bodies through our own interpretative frames and feel responsible only for the “community” we “belong to” and people who are “recognizable like me in some way” (36). This creates interpretative frames that regulate and shape our moral responses (41). Thus, the framing of an “ungrievable life” is dehumanised by having “never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all” (38). While she uses these critical models in the context of modern warfare, these concepts can help us understand social invisibilities imposed upon ‘undocumented’ women. Her work elicits the question: what “implicit political order produces and regulates “likeness” in such instances?” (Ibid). These dynamics makes us *recognise* which lives are to be saved, commemorated, mourned, valued and whose lives become *grievable* or not. Through these notions, we can position ‘undocumented’ women within the intersectional interpretative frames of gender, class, race, patriarchy and coloniality – connecting to WSCP - where racialised, foreign bodies become the least *recognisable* and thus, the least *likeable*. Not only are these bodies less recognisable because of difference, but equally because of their invisibility. By failing to represent these women, it becomes impossible to recognise ourselves in their realities. Then, as Butler highlights, responsibility towards the ‘other’ in which we do not see similitude might begin through a “critical reflection on those exclusionary norms by which fields of recognizability are constituted” (Ibid).

Axel Honneth (1996; 2005) furthers this notion of dehumanizing social invisibility by looking at the ways in which physical visibility demands identification in order to “know” “connaître” or “erkennen”. As argued by García-Del Moral (2018, 931), colonialism has used the human and nonhuman distinctions between the coloniser and the colonised as a basis for its exploitative relationship of land, labour and bodies. Thus, within our globalised system, certain bodies are transformed into “things” to be consumed and discarded” (Monárrez 2010b, 68, as cited in García-Del Moral 2018, 938). The concept can apply to the case of ‘undocumented’ women as their existence is often considered through their bodily capacity to fit the productive work machine of our system (Sayad 1999, 359) and as a consequence, experience dehumanisation by being read through interpretative frames of “disposability”, remaining as *ungrievable* and invisible lives.

While Butler’s understanding of human recognition situates visibility in its potential to shift those *grievable frames*, this vision is often contrasted with authors such as Foucault when discussing “biopower” dynamics. Abdelmalek Sayad (1999, 459) arguing that recognition can

never fully be achieved for migrants as their 'othering' is continually marked upon their bodies through racialised traits such as skin colour, accents or 'culture', becoming acts of betrayal to their integration. Even after being regularised and changing their legal status, regularisation does very little to erase those features or change their social condition. Crum (2012, 62) uses Ahmed's (2004; as cited by Crum 2012) term "stickiness" to refer to those stereotypes placed upon certain bodies where "the misreading of the "other" is done from the surface of the body" through recurrent "circulation of affect" creating deterministic forces upon their beings. This connects back to hooks' concept of WSCP, where she maintains that identification is reliant upon the "separation between self and the other" as it requires "sameness, necessitates similarity, disallows difference" (Friedberg, as cited by hooks 1992, 124) thus reproducing systems of patriarchy. These considerations thus complexify the notions of recognition of humanity when situated within systemic and structural exclusion, racism and exploitation.

### 2.2.3 Power of images

If recognition of humanity can be retrieved through the shifting of Butler's *frames of grievability* in order to allow acknowledgement of similarity to others, then where does visuality stand? The debate around images' power is a divided one; authors such as Lene Hansen (2011), W. J. T. Mitchell (2005) and Frank Möller (2007) claim that, while images offer spaces for resistance, they are also reliant upon multiple possible readings, meanings and interpretations by the audience, rendering them ambiguous, or as stated by Rune Saugmann Andersen, Juha A Vuori, & Can E. Mutlu (2014); polysemous. Thus, the power of images is contingent on the audience's receptivity. Gillian Rose (2016) defines "audiencing" as the process by which audiences renegotiate the meanings of images within different contexts and circumstances. She argues that the visual compromises "the cultural significance, social practices and effects of its viewing, and reflects on the specificity of that viewing by various audiences" (32). Similarly, according to Mark Reinhardt (2007, 14), the highly sensitive topic of representation of suffering is related to one's receptiveness, relying on individual nature, values and "social location, collective identification and political affiliation". Depictions of suffering thus shape interpretation, "moral concerns and the making of political claims" (Ibid).

Susan Sontag (1977; 2003) was also originally sceptical about images' potential, claiming that photography needed captions in order to rationalize the visual and trigger compassion or action by the audience. According to her, the "bombardment" of images has diminished our ethical responsiveness, eventually leading to the "numbing" of the audience. Gil Z. Hochberg (2015, 34) equally understands the overexposure to familiar images as "blinding". Nevertheless, Sontag (2003, 955) later carried out a reflective revision of her thesis stating: "narratives can make us understand: photographs do something else. They haunt us". Thus,

many scholars position themselves on the other end of the spectrum, arguing that images retain power and shock potential that should be consciously mobilized as they hold the power to move the audience and mobilize people (Andersen et al. 2014; Butler 2009; Rose 2016; Sontag 2003). As in Rose's (2016, 378) words: "precisely because images matter, because they are powerful and seductive, it is necessary to consider them critically". According to Andersen et al. (2015, 112), since images are polysemous, a greater focus should be aimed at the "emotive power of images" and the "atmosphere of affect". He further argues that images should be studied in terms of spectacle, repositioning the spectator as a central agentive subject, considering the interpretation, performativity and circulation of images (Ibid). Visuality thus allows the audience to feel empathy for other people's suffering, and he states: "If seeing is, in fact, believing, then seeing is also feeling" (101) and defines images as "affective 'spark plugs' that have the potential to move us socially, and politically" (104). Reinhardt (2007) however warns about the dangers involved in aesthetic representation. To him, there is a tendency to fall into *aestheticization* of suffering, becoming "inherently both artistically and politically reactionary, a way of misreading the subject and inviting passive consumption, narcissistic appropriation, condescension or even sadism on the part of the viewer" (14). MacDougal (2011, 102) further emphasises that filmmakers are responsible for using the medium in ways that allow understanding and not obscuring of the subject, and questions "at what point aesthetic choices begin to undermine the creation of new knowledge".

This literature allows us to frame visibility as a tool for recognition, and which can be mobilized through diverse strategies. Many artworks have been studied in terms of their political potential for change. Scholars such as Kia Lindroos and Frank Möller (2017, 51) highlight art's capacity to work as a witness and spectator of politics, underlying its politicised essence able to "shape our vision of life or (what we regard as) reality ... by ... inviting audience engagement with conditions referenced in a given work of art". In this way, Ariella Azoulay's book *Civil Contract of Photography* (2008) claims that photography has the potential to create an alternative civil union that surpasses the nation-state's sovereign power and which can grant forms of citizenship to the subject. Through this theory, Azoulay provides a highly optimistic understanding of the power of photography, claiming that agency and citizenship can be restored through viewing, allowing acknowledgement of suffering and thus humanity of the subject by the audience. She however insists that the spectator must spend time 'watching' instead of 'looking', and must understand the image's status not in terms of past documentation but as a continuum connecting the past to the present. While Azoulay theorises this for photography, film (24 frames per second) is simply a three bladed shutter which recreates multiple photographs. In this way, the concept of the *civil contract of photography* could extend to filmmaking, and further question the meaning of capturing the representation of the subject with not just one still image, but multiple, in motion and through sound.

#### 2.2.4 Voice in film

Sound and especially voice thus become important factors to consider when talking about filmmaking. As argued by Marjorie L. Devault (1990, 101), language is gendered in such ways that social scientist researchers may question women with a vocabulary that does not fit their experiences, making parts of their lived realities 'disappear'. Feminist researchers have thus highlighted that in order to "recover" these parts of women's lives, researchers must develop methods for listening around and beyond words". Thus, listening to stories becomes an important process to reach empathy by placing oneself in the position of the protagonist. Vicki Squire's (2018, 442) research in qualitative strategies claims that storytelling can "re-humanise" people in precarious situations of migration. She places the strength of stories as a tool enabling agency through the capacity to consider the experiences and demands of the people concerned, as well as bearing witness to their condition by "grounding the connections between diverse constituencies in relations of equality and respect." (442). She further states: "[q]ualitative participatory approaches to research have a long history of asking 'who has been excluded' and in reflecting on how research can contribute to positive social and political transformations through 'bearing witness' to injustice" (Fine 2006 as cited in Squire 2018). This allows the making of "affective consciousness" (453). Situating this notion within WSCP, voice can be read through a gendered lens, whereby men are always encouraged towards public speaking, claiming the audible space and asserting their voices, whereas women have been constrained to their essentialised position of quiet listeners, marking questions about gendered knowledge production and control (Kramer and Hsieh 2019). By making voice heard through film, documentary film can become a potential witness to the condition of 'undocumented' women in Geneva. Thus, in contrast to written social science research, filmmaking, its audible message and aesthetic can provide a vessel for this *affective consciousness* to be delivered. Based on this hypothesis, it is through the emotive power of images - here film - that empathy can be triggered for the audience, allowing the shift of interpretative frames toward the recognition of the subject's presence and humanity.

#### 2.2.5 Gaze theories

Visuality is thus structured through a two-way process of 'seeing' and 'being seen'. In order to question humanity's recognition through images and film, notions of gaze theory are helpful to reposition the audience and the subjects' relationality in terms of spectatorship. Honneth (1996) places the physical act of "perceiving" and "being perceived" as central to the concept of invisibility and recognition, thus positioning the gaze as structuring the diverse dynamics discussed above. As stated by Andersen et al (2014, 89), "[o]f key interest here are the intersubjective relations between those that can watch, and those who are (in)visible". The

power of gaze regimes, as understood by Foucault (2007) and Derrida, are structured by tensions of domination between the gazer and the gazed upon, becoming an apparatus of control (Ibid). The Foucauldian concept of the panoptic gaze, theorised by Bentham – by which one internalises the gaze of the state (or the powerful) and disciplines their behaviour according to displays of surveillance – frames vision as associated with power: “the gaze that sees is a gaze that dominates” (Foucault 1991, 39). Referring back to the decolonial and intersectional notion of care economy and visibility, the role of the gaze is crucial to further deepen the role of power relations within the triangulation of the filmmaker, the subject and the audience through the active/passive, viewer/viewed binary reinforcing the colonial ‘othering’ (Zapperi 2016). These theories will constitute part of my theoretical framework, guiding the written work as well as my practical visual research.

In order to understand how to shift the recognition of humanity out of the *frames of ungrievability* constructed through WSCP, it is important to frame visibility in terms of the act of looking, the power relations attached to the gaze and the different resistance strategies which can emerge from it. Gaze theories within film first emerged as a means to explore “the pleasures and powers of the viewing experience” (Russell 1999, 121). In the 1970’s, female gaze theories crystallised within cinema through the emergence of feminist film studies and the resulting Women’s Cinema, “Shaped by critical and curatorial as much as artistic and activist practice” (White 2015, 8). This worked towards both shifting the iconography of women’s representation through mainstream film and pushing for female filmmakers within the male dominated cinema industry for a change in directing approaches. Women’s cinema thus inscribes itself within “counter cinema” where its distinctiveness does not emerge from essentialist gendered subjectivities, but rather from practices merging the critical questioning of diverse interlocking systems of domination (Ibid).

While the representation of women in media is more questioned than ever before, media and cultural studies scholars such as Patricia White (2015) and Douglas M. Kellner and Meenakshi Gigi Durham (2012) question women’s place in media and the impact of their silenced voices on culture. Feminist scholars such as Laura Mulvey (1989), bell hooks (1992), Judith Butler (2011), Anne E. Kaplan (1997) and Iris Brey (2020) question the notion of the *gaze*, *spectatorship* and *agency*. According to Mulvey (1989) and later Butler (2011), hooks (1992) and Brey (2020), the *male gaze* remains the prominent frame through which culture is delivered and depicts the female body as permanently associated with the implicit presence of a male spectator situated outside of the frame. Challenging the *male gaze* with the *female gaze* attempts to counter gendered power dynamics reifying women as objects of pleasure and desire on the screen, perpetuating the male imaginary as the norm within popular visual culture. Gaze theories thus are not about censoring, but rather about the questioning our look through representation. As Iris Brey (2020, 32) states: “La question du male gaze n’est pas un

questionnement sociologique sur une œuvre, c'est l'analyse d'une esthétique". From these theories, multiple other types of gaze were researched, where for instance hooks (1992) conceptualised the *oppositional gaze*, countering and complexifying western feminism through black female spectatorship by developing consciousness about the politics of race and gender and by placing the gaze as a "site of resistance for colonized black people globally" (116). Other scholars have looked at the gaze in terms of the direct confrontation to moral obligations and recognition towards other human beings (Honneth 1996; Kramer and Hsieh 2019). Useful to this research, Melissa Crum (2012, 61) theorises *the liberatory gaze* as "an act of resistance that re-humanizes the subject in the face of images and structures that attempt to marginalize, dominate, and exclude".

Questions of gaze thus highlight deeper notions of existence and representation, overall shaping the production of subjectivity through one's capacity to recognise one's self in the available visible representations. This draws a tension between becoming visible in visual terms through images, and in terms of agency (Chow 2002). As Russell (1999) argues, there is a need for a "plural notion of spectatorship and a more flexible notion of textuality" understood as a "site of power and resistance" (121), reinforcing the idea that 'looking' is embodied, "undertaken by someone with an identity" (Pink 2003, 187). While Foucault insists on the fact that domination is a system of power relations which leaves no room for freedom, hooks (1992, 116) challenges that through her attempt to find gaps and spaces within which resistance can emerge "on and through the body where agency can be found". Gaze thus inscribes itself within visual regimes, laying out the rules which govern visibility and structure the ways in which we see, are seen and perform visibilities and invisibilities. It is therefore crucial to question visual fields and visual productions in their capacity to crystallise epistemological ideologies as they can become powerful means to produce knowledge, subjectivity and meaning (Zapperi 2016). Indeed, the ways in which knowledge can be gained through visibility and reversely, the ways visual practices are shaped through knowledge, places the gaze as determinant within representation.

Gaze and visibility in these terms can generate transformative power through resistance. To consider the ways in which visibility is distributed, who is made visible and for what purpose is here crucial to further understand how 'undocumented' migrant women in Geneva navigate this terrain. Gil Z. Hochberg's research *Visual Occupations* (2015) looks at Israeli spatial control within the Palestinian Occupied Territories and explores the *grey zone* between the politics of visibility and invisibility, allowing space for contestation and freedom (7). She constructs her analysis through the Israeli politics of "concealment", "surveillance" and "witnessing", which structure the dominant forces of the Israeli visual field. In this context, the constant manipulations of visibility and invisibility dynamics imposed upon Palestinians become as much of a "byproduct of political denial" (24) as an apparatus of control through



display of surveillance, which creates spectacles of power. However, this “blindness”, the lack of agentive gaze and the “uneven distribution of visual rights” (3), is complexified through her understanding of the *grey zone*, modelled through “sites of ambiguity” (1), between the Israeli dominant gaze and the gaps of invisibility which allow contestation and resistance strategies. Thus, “[p]olitical transformation and empowerment [...] are dependent on opacity, the ability to disappear, blindness, failed visions and invisibility at least as much as they are on visibility being visible or having access to the gaze” (7). In similar ways - while in extremely different contexts - ‘undocumented’ migrants in Geneva also mobilise this *grey zone* in order to negotiate their experiences through, for instance, the “travail au gris”, political and social mobilisation with associations, cultural gatherings etc. Voice here again is an important consideration, as silence is often attributed to lack of agency while it can in fact be a “mechanism of power” (Ibid). Self-muting and the consciousness of one’s voice enable the reassertion of agency and becomes a source of power and resilience (Devault 1990; Hochberg 2015; Weitzel 2018). Filmmaking thus retains potential to bring the reader closer to what Hochberg defines as “this painful experience of coming to terms with my own blindness” (34).

### **2.3 Power relations within filmmaking**

If visuality stands as a powerful method to shift our frames for conceiving of humanity and recognising the “other”, then the tool of filmmaking which is used in this research also needs to be critically problematised. Historically, ethnographic filmmaking has been studied through an observational approach with a truth-telling aim. Ethnographic photography and film found their roots in the colonial endeavour, entrenching the “salvage paradigm and the myth of primitivism” (Russell 1999, 2). By reinforcing “otherness” through the pornographic or voyeuristic images of the “uncivilized”, claiming realism through the archiving of the “authentic” and “primitive”, it preserved the power dynamics at play through the perpetuation of a certain visual field (Ibid). The notion of “truth telling” is however now well in decay, and the “sites of authenticity” (Ibid, 3) have shifted towards a multiplicity of techniques and strategies to not only embrace the subjectivity which informs filmmaking, but also to translate the “[i]ntercultural exploration of social representation” (Ibid). The debate thus still divides today around the ways to comprehend the dynamics involved in filmmaking. As Catherine Russell (1999) argues, while the understanding of the realism in ethnographic film has changed, postcolonial culture still produces hierarchies of power which manifest through filmmaking and representation. Many other authors, such as Teju Cole (2019), also theorize photography and image as a colonial tool of violence, perpetuating damaging power relations upon the subject. As stated by Sarah Pink (2003, 180) “film represents knowledge about an ‘other’ and “unknown” culture by using the narrative devices of cinema”. Thus, many authors mobilise a post-colonial lens which frames film as a device to accumulate information about a subject, becoming an

epistemological tool of power. For Margaret Mead (2009) and Fatimah Tobing Rony (1996), this turns knowledge into intellectual capital, while for Foucault (1991) it becomes a tool to exert control. Other authors oppose this vision, such as Markus Banks (2001, 112), who understands visual research as a “collaborative project” between the filmmaker and the subject. His argument is twofold: first, that it is about recognition of the subject’s “co-humanity” rather than “experimental subjects” and second, that social knowledge is relational and not simply extracted from the informant. Thus, Pink (2006) and Banks (2001) argue for a methodology that considers informants’ understanding and relationships to images. Pink also provides an interesting visual anthropological methodology for systematically looking at images by: “(a) the context in which the image was produced; (b) the content of the image; (c) the contexts in, and subjectivities through, which images are viewed; and (d) the materiality and agency of images.” (2003, 187). She argues that visual meaning emerges from the intersection of these different focuses rather than being discovered in only one of them (Ibid). Critical reflexivity is thus crucial in order to balance the power dynamics at play within the relational aspect of research.

Finally, MacDougal (2011, 100) explores how the medium of anthropological filmmaking should not be seen as a way of conveying the same knowledge embodied in written social science, but rather as creating different types of knowledge and meaning. While writing is able draw direct conclusions in a way that film cannot, cinema is, however, able to explore different stories: individually and collectively through combinations of visuals and speech, combining the performance of social interactions, body language, expressions, agentic dynamics and the relationships to the physicality of the environment, “not only visually but also in its temporal, physical, and emotional dimensions” (101). This situates anthropological filmmaking in a unique position within research, making it complementary to texts as a method as well as a way to share knowledge to a wider audience.

### **3. CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Drawing upon the interdisciplinary theoretical literature discussed above, it is clear that there is a need to rethink qualitative research mediums in ways that connect social sciences and visuality, enabling further recognition of the subjects of inquiry by a wider audience. I will thus argue that it is crucial to encourage the transformational potential of research in concrete outputs - may they be through emotional consciousness, relational awareness, policy-oriented results or others - and that filmmaking has a central role to play in this. The medium of film thus allows one to rethink research through visuality, acknowledgement of the subject and audience receptiveness, allowing a wider democratisation of knowledge outside of the realm academia or of international institutions. In order to address the lack of research on how to

practically mobilise images and representation for this purpose, I will merge the theories discussed above and the tool of filmmaking to not only theoretically discuss but also concretely put those notions into practice through the making of an anthropological documentary film on the realities of four ‘undocumented’ women in Geneva. As these women tend to remain socially, legally and spatially invisible, they are rarely ‘recognisable’ and often lose acknowledgement of their humanity through these interpretative frames. This research allows the practical investigation of film’s potential to shift those frames of interpretation and shape a new gaze, allowing recognition of humanity and new forms of belonging and ‘citizenship’ to be restored. By opening a visual and auditory space for four irregular migrant women to tell us about their stories, this documentary attempts to concretely engage with these different theoretical notions. Finally, the aim is not to measure visibility’s impact, but rather to rethink the ways in which to bridge the gaps between social science research and visibility through filmic representations of human experiences.

### 3.1 Terms definition

I will first clarify the meaning of some of the terms I use within this research:

**Women:** While these dynamics of visibilities/invisibilities can impact both men and women, my focus remains on women as they constitute the majority of irregular migrants working in the care economy in Geneva - about 80% (SIT 2004). Moreover, they experience unique and diverse (in)visibility forces intersecting as prevailing systems that shape their lived realities. Here, the term “women” does not define a static homogenous group but rather a gendered social construct complexified through an intersectional and decolonial perspective which understands every situation and experience as a unique crossroad of interlocking power structures of domination, considering not just gender, but race, class, ethnicity, sexuality etc.

**Undocumented:** Through legal and spatial mechanisms of work devaluation, by not fitting the legal definition of employment and by spatially segregating their jobs from spheres defined as work sites (Hatton 2017), the term ‘undocumented’ conceals the fact that a vast majority of these women in fact *have* documents. However, these papers are not recognised by Swiss law, making it ‘illegal’ for them to reside and work in the country. It is thus essential to underline that the term ‘undocumented’ can also work as an invisibilising factor. The term “irregular” or “without legal status” thus better defines their actual situation, and works towards avoiding further denial of their existence. I will use the term ‘undocumented’ with single quotation marks and the term “irregular” interchangeably.

**Visibilities, invisibilities and visuality:** Visibility and invisibility are here understood as socio-political dynamics which constitute visuality and visual fields. While ‘seeing’ and ‘being seen’ is a crucial human sense which enables recognition and representation, many different structural, political, social (and many more) factors influence the ways objects and subjects are rendered visible or invisible - not as separate elements in a vacuum, but rather as interconnected dynamics which shape our visual fields and our ways of seeing (Andersen et al. 2014). It is crucial to highlight that, while I concentrate on notions of visibilities and invisibilities, I do not wish to apply a fixed presumption of invisibility upon these ‘undocumented’ women’s bodies and experiences. Visibilities and invisibilities are rather constantly negotiated within different contexts and settings, shaping their lived experiences. I will also use Honneth’s (1996) understanding of social invisibilities as people “looking through” other people by intentionally not considering them and denying their existence by acting as though the Other is not physically present.

**Recognition:** Recognition allows the acknowledgement of “social value” (Honneth 1996) through socially intelligible manifestations. Thus, recognition of humanity is not about rehumanising ‘undocumented’ migrants - as their humanity was never lost - but rather about re-establishing the recognition of their humanity through intelligible representations: here within moving images and sound, utilising an anthropological documentary film.

### **3.2 Theoretical framework**

The diverse scholarship mentioned above will help me define an analytical framework in order to understand visuality through its diverse meanings and allow me to question the theoretical and practical ways in which to represent ‘undocumented’ women through moving images. While *The Operation Papyrus* contributed in some ways to politically and visually inscribe ‘undocumented’ migrants’ humanity and existence within Geneva’s visual field, it is important to not only question visuality in terms of re-establishing humanity. As argued by Bigo (2002, 81), it is crucial to also consider the risk of falling into visibility strategies which can result in criminalisation of the subjects: he states “giving a face to crime is therefore giving the migrant a face”. This consideration will be applied throughout the making of the documentary film. Drawing back on the literature’s discussions of power relations within filmmaking, I will situate my research within Pink’s (2003), Mead’s (2009) and Foucault’s (1991; 1983) understanding of scopic regimes perpetuating different levels of power structures and accumulation of knowledge capital. However, like Pink (2003), I nuance my stand through Banks’ (2001, 112) understanding of the importance of the relationality constructed between the imagemaker and the image subject allowing “co-humanity and interdependence” of both entities, reclaiming a balance within power asymmetries.

Diverse points drawing from the theory will frame my analysis.

1. Through hooks concept of WSCP, I will critically problematise these stories as uniquely shaped through those unique power dynamics.
2. I will draw on Butler's *frames of grievability* in order to explore how visibility's emotive power has the capacity to shift those interpretative frames for the case of 'undocumented' women in Geneva.
3. Azoulay's *civil contract of photography* will allow me to rethink the power of visibility through notions "citizenship"<sup>2</sup> and belonging, allowing recognition of the presence and humanity of those who are deemed 'invisible'.
4. Gaze theories – such as the *liberatory gaze* – will allow me to question the power structures of both the audience's gaze upon the women's experiences, as well as the women's gaze upon themselves on the screen.
5. Hochberg's notion of the *grey zone* between the visible and the invisible as a space for resistance will be useful to discuss the ways in which Geneva's migration policies impact its visual field and how the work "au gris", crystallises some of those tensions.
6. In order to address the questions of recognition, I will also discuss a potential new gaze – *the silhouette gaze* - to be created for people that cannot be physically visibilised (for anonymity) because of legal repercussions, but who can be visibilised through different strategies such as voice.

As Andersen et al. (2014) argue, it is difficult to methodologically study visibility's potential in emotional and affective intensities as they are hard to identify and cannot be fully theorised through words. Therefore, I will be drawing from the literature which theorises the affective and the emotive power of filmmaking to practically apply those notions through filmmaking, questioning the place of image and voice. Thereby, my methodology already works as a means to practically apply these theories to filmmaking, allowing me to concretely build a bridge between the social science research and visibility.

#### **4. CONTEXT: IRREGULAR MIGRATION IN GENEVA**

In this section, I will contextualise my case study: lived experiences of four 'undocumented' women in Geneva.

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<sup>2</sup> In this research, I do not use the term "citizenship" in its full implication, as it would involve a discussion around wider scholarships about the politics of inclusion/exclusion of civil rights as citizens. Here, the term should rather be understood as one's visible recognition by the state and its citizen, allowing acknowledgment of presence, humanity and belonging to a country.

#### 4.1 'Undocumented' migration in Geneva

International migration (outside of national borders) represents 200 million people, or 3% of the world's population. Nearly 82 million migrants live in Europe. In this context, forced labour, also called "contemporary slavery", represents 26% of human trafficking in Europe (McAuliffe, Khadria, and Bauloz 2019). In 2002, Switzerland counted about 1.6 million foreigners, or 21.6% of its total population. This is the highest foreigner rate in Europe, not because of its open immigration policies, but rather because of the highly restrictive citizenship laws augmenting the numbers of people defined as 'foreigners' (Riaño 2021). According to recent statistics, about 200,000 people without legal status, known as 'undocumented migrants', live in Switzerland (SIT 2004, 7). In Geneva, they are between 8,000 and 12,000, 80% of whom are women (Law Clinic UNIGE 2019). Since Geneva is an urban canton and a large part of its economy is based upon international businesses and organisations, the majority of 'undocumented' migrants' working positions are in the care economy (78% of all work positions). These women mostly come from Latin America and south east Asia (SIT n.d.; Efionayi-Mäder, Perroulaz, and Schümperli Younossian 2008).

<b>Les secteurs</b>	<b>Nombre</b>	<b>%</b>
Economie domestique	2259	78.1
Hôtellerie-restauration	294	10.2
Services	104	3.6
Nettoyage	103	3.6
Bâtiment et industrie	93	3.2
Terre	41	1.4

Figure 2: The sectors of irregular labour in Geneva (SIT 2004)

## L'économie domestique en chiffres

C'est sans aucune surprise que l'économie domestique figure en tête de toutes les statistiques issues de nos permanences, en bref :

- Les 2/3 des travailleurs-euses sans papiers sont employés-es dans ce secteur, soit 1321 dossiers (sur 1972), représentant 2883 personnes; l'écrasante majorité des personnes est constituée de femmes, 89,47%.
- Comme beaucoup d'emplois du secteur sont segmentés et limités à quelques heures hebdomadaires, de nombreux-euses sans-papiers occupent plusieurs emplois, soit au total 2106 sur les 2696 identifiés; dès lors, l'économie domestique augmente encore d'importance; elle concerne le 78% des emplois totaux.
- Les trois nationalités les plus représentées sont les personnes venant du Brésil, de Colombie et des Philippines.

Emplois par nationalité	nombre		%
Brésil	263		19.2
Colombie	260		19.0
Philippines	247		18.0
Bolivie	193		14.1
Equateur	192		14.0
Pérou	79		5.8
autres Am.latine	55		4.0
Afrique	54		3.9
Europe	25		1.8
autres Asie	2		0.1
Am.Nord-Océanie	2		0.1

- Les emplois actuels dans le secteur se subdivisent de la façon suivante : 23% employés-es de maison, 1% garde de personnes âgées et gardes malades, 9% garde d'enfants, y compris «jeunes filles au pair», 65% femmes de ménage, 2% personnes à tout faire.



Figure 3: Care economy in Geneva in numbers (SIT 2004)

'Undocumented' women working in the care economy is not a new phenomenon in Switzerland. It strongly emerged in the 1960s with the growing 'illegal' presence of seasonal workers' wives who were employed as cleaners while their husbands worked in construction. Today, 'undocumented' workers constitute an important cog of the economy, allowing society to function but remaining, mostly, 'invisible'. As declared by the SIT (Syndicat Interprofessionnel des Travailleuses et Travailleurs) (2004, 2), 'undocumented' migrants thus constitute "les secteurs les plus précaires de l'immigration".

In Switzerland, the law LEtr (Loi sur les étrangers), replaced in 2019 by the law LEI (Loi sur les étrangers et l'intégration), regulates the entry into and departure from Switzerland, the residence of foreign nationals, family reunification as well as the promotion of the integration of foreigners (Etat de Vaud n.d.). While the law LEtr came as a response to the working conditions of seasonal workers by officially suppressing the title of 'saisonnier', the free circulation of European workers and the subsequent facilitation of working rights in fact transferred the issue to other demographics – extra-European workers (Etat de Vaud n.d.; SIT 2004). According to the SIT (2004), this law has enhanced the precarisation and the clandestinity of those workers, arguing that “cette loi est une véritable machine à fabriquer les sans-papiers!” (Ibid 5). While Europeans are delivered work permits when they are employed, extra-Europeans have very few opportunities to obtain one. Thus, extra-European migrants who are not recruited for high skilled labour often settle on the territory for a long period of time with no legal permission for residency, having to work ‘illegally’. This situation turns them into ‘undocumented’ migrants as their papers are not officially recognised by Swiss law (Carreras 2008).

It is important however to point out that the term ‘undocumented’ is sometimes confusingly used for rejected asylum seekers who become ‘undocumented’ once they decide to remain in Switzerland despite the refusal of their refugee status. Here, this research does not focus on asylum seekers, but on migrants who arrive as workers, sometimes first as tourists, and who overstay their visa (if entering through official border crossing points), then becoming irregular workers. As explained by the SIT (2004, 7), this confusion is not beneficial to either of these two categories as “la première relève de la Loi fédérale sur l’asile et doit être défendue dans ce cadre-là, la seconde est à considérer comme population migrante intégrée dès son arrivée dans le monde du travail, et concerne la Loi fédérale sur le séjour des étrangers”.

As a result of Switzerland’s foreign labour quota system, the number of working permits granted to the cantons are not sufficient to meet the needs of employers, and residence permits are mainly granted to companies and multi-nationals in the “new economy” to hire (highly) qualified and specialised personnel. Consequently, no permits are left for less “promising and prestigious” economic sectors such as the care economy (Ibid). For those extra-European migrants, the only way to obtain a working B permit in Switzerland (except through marriage), is to remain ‘undocumented’ for a minimum of 10 years (5 if they have children in school). During that waiting time, the migrants must remain hidden, cannot leave the country, face fear of expulsion and are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. After 10 (or 5) years, they then have to prove their presence on the Swiss territory in order to fit the regularisation criteria.

Here it is important to clarify that the terms ‘illegal’ and ‘undeclared’ work tend to be unquestionably assimilated and misused. In fact, the confusion around the different terms



seems to be consciously exploited by employers and the state; “*la terminologie courante elle-même est révélatrice du flou existant entre différents phénomènes*” (SIT 2004, 6).

**Undeclared work / Travail au noir:** work done by a person who is neither registered nor declared to the social security system nor to the tax authorities; it can be a person with or without a work permit: Swiss, immigrants (with a B or C permit), asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, students etc. (SIT 2004, 6).

**Illegal work / Travail clandestin:** work that escapes social insurance and tax authorities and is carried out by a person without legal status, by an ‘undocumented’ migrant (Ibid).

**Grey work / Travail au gris:** work carried out by a person without legal status but that is declared to the social security authorities and/or to the tax authorities (Ibid).

While the extent of undeclared work is hard to determine, various indicators estimate that it constitutes about 5.8% (2018 figures) of Switzerland’s gross domestic product (GDP), representing approximately 40 billion francs escaping the tax and social security systems (AVS) (ULAM 2019).

#### **4.2 Grey work – “Travail au gris”**

As described above, the “travail au gris” defines the work which remains ‘illegal’/irregular without a working permit, but which is nevertheless declared to social security (AVS) and/or tax authorities (ULAM 2019). This zone of ambiguity, often mis-understood, lies at a crossroads of many diverging opinions. On the one hand it provides a “safer” space for ‘undocumented’ workers to work in a “better” environment by ensuring a certain wage and social insurances, but on the other, it is also reflective of the hypocrisy of the system which, as the SIT (2004, 2) states, places workers as “toléré-e-s, voir encouragé-e-s à rester chez nous, car ils et elles sont indispensables à la bonne marche de notre économie intérieure. Sans eux, des secteurs entiers tels que l’hôtellerie, l’agriculture et, surtout, l’économie domestique, seraient en crise”. In an attempt to encourage this grey declared work, the Department of Social Action and Health established a service called Check Service in 2014 in order to regulate the wage distribution in the care economy and facilitate the procedure for employers to declare their workers (SIT 2004, 9). This service was often used by the four protagonists of this documentary film. Nevertheless, those services fail to address the underlying structural and systemic dynamics of exploitation that crystallise within the care economy. As stated by the SIT (2004,8), “l’économie domestique est un secteur éclaté, hybride, inorganisé, laissant le champ libre à toutes les formes d’exploitation, en particulier en ce qui concerne les conditions de travail”.



Figure 4: Illustration of the "travail au gris" (SIT 2004)

### 4.3 The Operation Papyrus

While irregular migration is found throughout Switzerland, Geneva has stood out as a unique example in attempting to tackle the situation. Since 2001, the SIT trade union started holding a reception centre and having meetings with 'undocumented' workers to collect data about their conditions and the situation of their children. Based on the collected data and figures, they filed a request for collective regularisation in 2003, aiming for a law facilitating the principle of "a job = a permit" (Personal interview: Gagnon 2021). Following over 15 years of negotiations with the cantonal and federal governments, The Operation Papyrus was finally launched in the canton of Geneva from February 2017 to December 2018. This operation is the fruit of cooperation between the Trade Union partners, the association networks such as the Collectif de soutien aux sans-papiers de Genève, the CSP (Centre Social Protestant) and the Office Cantonal de la Population et des Migrations (OCPM) as well as with the Office Cantonal de l'Inspection et des Relations du Travail (OCIRT). It established a clear process for regularisation and normalisation for 'undocumented' people. The aims of the operation were twofold: to regularise the situations of 'undocumented' people; and to fight against the negative economic effects generated by these situations - mainly illegal work and wage underbidding. Finally, it established a transparency mechanism for employers and employees to legalise their irregular situations by encouraging them to collaborate and reveal their situation to the authorities. In exchange for this transparency, the cantonal authorities have loosened their procedures and criteria. The new, and clearer conditions established for regularisation within the Papyrus framework were:

1. length of stay of 10 years for singles, couples without children and couples with very young children not attending school;
2. duration of stay of 5 years for families with children attending school;
3. financial independence (no social assistance);
4. compliance with the legal system; and
5. good integration (in particular, knowledge of French level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) (SIT n.d.; ge.ch 2020).

The Operation Papyrus was described as being a “pragmatic, comprehensive and innovative response to the personal and professional situation of undocumented foreigners” (ge.ch 2020). With 2,390 people regularised, The Operation Papyrus remains the first initiative of its kind for the facilitation of regularisation and protection of ‘undocumented’ migrants in Switzerland (SIT n.d.). Born as it was from the collective efforts of the associations, the ‘undocumented’ workers themselves became central actors in the Operation Papyrus. As the SIT states: “Ils/elles demandent que soit mis fin à l’hypocrisie actuelle, car ils/elles ont un emploi, il est donc logique qu’un permis de travail, donc de séjour, leur soit octroyé.” (SIT 2004, 43).

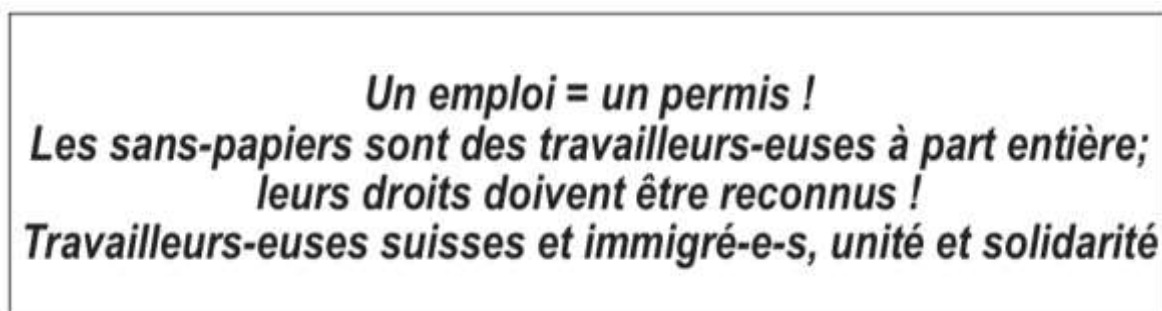


Figure 5: Operation Papyrus' slogan (SIT 2004)

As argued by Riaño (2003, 2) the numbers and statistics highlight the undeniable reliance and importance of women in contemporary migration, urging a shift in the “sociological invisibility” imposed upon them towards recognition as “active agents of migration and not simply as passive appendices of migrant men”.

## **5. METHODOLOGY AND FILMMAKING STEPS**

My methodology is informed by both the practical filmmaking and the reflective written component of my research. Thus, my documentary film simultaneously becomes the method for data collection and the object of my research. I wish to put into conversation both the visual product and the written texts by reflecting on the process of filmmaking and the product of the

film as a methodological and empirical means for visuality to restore knowledge. As my methodology is the object of my research, this section will already include reflective and analytic notions of the choices made. My methodology will thereby allow me to answer my first question, focusing on practical questions of filmmaking:

1. What are the limits of filmic writing (editing, effect, juxtaposition of sequences)?  
What are the risks induced by the use of the camera (notably linked to anonymity)?  
How can these risks be reduced?

As MacDougal (2011, 103) argues “[a]nthropological filmmaking involves both filming methods and research methods, although in practice the two are closely intertwined. When filming is itself a form of investigation, the two become almost synonymous”. More than simply considering filmmaking as a technological means to conduct fieldwork investigations, it has become a practice and “a way of actively exploring social phenomena.” (Ibid).

### **5.1 Entering the field: making contacts, finding the protagonists**

In terms of data collection, the film was constructed through various distinct stages. First, a primary literature review of the question of ‘undocumented’ women in care economy and in the context of Geneva brought me to talk to many contacts that were involved with The Operation Papyrus or who were working with irregular migrants.

I made contact with those working for The Operation Papyrus and the Parchemin Study (HUG/UNIGE 5 years study about The Operation Papyrus) as well as contacting people working for associations and trade Unions such as le SIT (Syndicat Interprofessionnel des Travailleuses et Travailleurs), who had already established a relationship of trust with ‘undocumented’ women. Through snowball sampling, I was first referred to Rocio Restrepo, the Director of the *Association Découvrir*, helping migrant women with professional reinsertion and to *Bateau Genève*, a cafeteria supporting people in precarious situations. I gradually got in touch with the four women who agreed to work with me on this project. Interestingly, the process then went into reversed. The women themselves then helped me get in touch with further social structures by virtue of the trust relationship I established with each. For example, they connected me with organisations such as le *Centre de la Roseraie*, and enabled film shootings at *Geneva Hostel* and *La Galerie*, a shelter and association assisting people in precarious conditions.

### 5.1.1 The participants

The four protagonist women<sup>3</sup>:

- R.: from Peru, 'undocumented' for two years in Geneva, plans to leave to Spain or Germany.
- Re.: from Brazil, 'undocumented' since 2013, came with her four children, three of which now live in a foster home in Valais and one in France.
- B.: from Bolivia, first came alone and then brought her daughter to Geneva, regularised in 2016.
- Floreta Jashari: Albanian from Kosovo, regularised in 2019. She is the only one who wished to be visible on screen.

Additional speakers and actors in the field of migration:

- Rocío Restrepo: Director of *Association Découvrir*
- Marianne Ebel: Co-author of the book "Derrière les murs" (2020) and president of the Women's International March - Swiss branch.
- Michèle Gagnon: Administrative Secretary at the SIT (Syndicat Interprofessionnel des Travailleuses et Travailleurs)
- Yasmine Briki: Administrative Secretary at the SIT (Syndicat Interprofessionnel des Travailleuses et Travailleurs)
- Pierre Maudet: Cantonal Minister (2012-2021) and political figure as initiator of The Operation Papyrus

The sampling of the four main protagonists was structured around the criteria of having two women still in an irregular situation and two that had been regularised, allowing for diverse perspectives and experiences surrounding the question of visibilisation through regularisation. The original aim was to reach a varied set of protagonists from diverse backgrounds and origins. Nevertheless, the sampling resulted in having three out of the four women being from Latina America, and the fourth from the Balkans, which is reflective of the fact that the majority of 'undocumented' migrant women in Geneva are from Latina America.

It is also very important to remember that social dynamics of invisibility were determinant in my sampling. It is extremely hard to contact women from other origins in Geneva as they tend to remain isolated from local associative networks. For instance, the Filipino community constitutes an important part of domestic work in Geneva, however, they almost all work for the international community, implying that they usually work as "cama adentro" – literally "bed

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<sup>3</sup> Three of the four women participating in the documentary are anonymised with a one letter pseudonym

inside”, living at the employees’ house and rarely learning French. This situation often restricts them from starting a regularisation process and prevents them from knowing their rights as workers and how to receive support from associative networks. Thus, the four women that I was able to connect with are women who were able to reach out to associations, or the SIT, and who have developed a level of trust in those structures allowing them to agree to take the ‘risk’ of speaking up and voicing their experiences in front of a camera – a risk that poses an actual threat to the situation for two of the four. A more diverse population sampling was thus impossible in the very short amount of time and had to be done rather through the criteria of irregular/regular status, rather than those of variation in origins. The thesis and documentary film are however not an attempt to compare, analyse and normalise experiences through data collection. They rather present an opportunity to stop, watch and listen to stories that are rarely heard through this medium. As such, the origins of the four protagonists were not a major limiting factor in achieving the projects’ aim.

Before starting to film the interviews with the five external speakers and the intimate discussions with the four women (nine people in total), I completed the second and central part of my literature review about visual anthropological perspectives and film methods, questioning the position of the camera, of the filmmaker of the respondents. A first part of my primary data was thus collected from the interviews with those nine interviewees. These filmed interviews with the four women were open-ended and discussion based, leaving space for each to express their stories in their own way, while guiding them towards the few themes of my storyboard. For the five external speakers, the filmed interviews were structured around a few specific questions, but flexible enough for discussions. However, what constitutes the core of my analysis is not the content during the interviews but rather the dynamics around the process filmmaking.

## **5.2 Direction: technical and aesthetic choices**

### **5.2.1 Production work**

The first filmmaking stage was constituted by the production work and involved fund raising. After interning with the International Oriental Film Festival Geneve (FIFOG) for 6 months, the organisation offered to become my co-producer. While they provided some assistance in the making of the production file and budget, I independently managed all the fundraising. Overall, 6 foundations/donors and crowdfunding allowed me to raise enough money to gather a small team for the project:

- Fondation Hans Wilsdorf
- Fondation Ammani Harmonic

- Foundation à Nous de Jouer
- Département de L'instruction Publique, de la Culture et Du Sport - DIP
- Fondation Emilie Gourd
- Ville de Morges
- WeMakeit – crowdfunding

### **5.2.2 Film shootings: camera work and chief operator**

As the director, I decided to work with Luc Halhoute, chief operator, for the shootings. While I directed the framing of the shots, his technical work allowed me to concentrate on the interviews. As argued by Banks (2001, 12) “all films, photographs and art works are the product of human action and are entangled to varying degrees in human social relations; they therefore require a wider frame of analysis in their understanding”. Luc’s work enabled me to focus my attention on the human aspect of the shootings, paying attention to behavioural, human and relational aspects of the discussions with the women and participants. However, considerations regarding the gender dynamics during the interviews complexified my choice with regard to having Luc on the shootings. While I would have preferred being alone with the women or with a camerawoman, the difficulty of being alone and the lack of women in the filmmaking industry (generally and in my sphere of acquaintances), informed my decision to work with him. However, I also did a lot of the filming alone, making me conscious of the difficulty of managing simultaneously the aesthetics of the framing of the image, the sound, and the relational aspect of the research. When filming alone, I realised that the challenge of ethnographic film also lies in the ephemerality of the moments; in wanting to capture everything while trying to balance the focus on the different aspects of filmmaking. I made the mistake of either over-concentrating on the image, and losing some of the relational interactions, or over-concentrating on the interview, neglecting certain aspects of the image: the stability of the camera, the focus and most importantly, the sound. In those moments of technical issues (such as sound saturation), I was also confronted by the difficulty and fear of breaking the moments of exchange by having to ask the protagonists to repeat or start again.



Figure 6: During a film shooting at Re.'s house: Her cat Quinoa, Re. in the reflection of the mirror and myself filming (personal footage)

### 5.2.3 The storyboard

My storyboard guided me through the film shootings and the editing process. It is however important to highlight that I used a more adaptable form of storyboard than a precise script. As opposed to those used for fictions, scripts for documentary films are harder to follow, especially for ethnographic documentary films that are based upon partly inductive fieldwork research. The number of uncertainties and unexpected turns of event require high levels of flexibility and an ability to bounce back when falling away from the said “script”. Thus, I worked my storyboard through the different themes I wanted to cover and created a narrative structure that could remain flexible. Concretely, I used post-it notes on the wall of my room in order to remain flexible in the ways of locating the different themes, sections, images and interviews (moving post-its around the wall).





Figure 7: Post-it storyboard (personal picture)

#### 5.2.4 The camera

The strong level of trust and relational bonds created with the four women enhanced the spontaneity and flexibility during the conducted shootings, allowing me to adapt my shootings to the storyboard just as much as I adapted my storyboard to the shootings. This flexibility enabled the filming process to become a natural part of our interactions, while also complexifying the narration by sometimes losing track of the directive guideline. As argued by MacDougal (2011, 107), the camera creates a triangular relationship between the filmmaker, the filmed subject and the audience, mediated through the camera which “inevitably means placing a piece of alien equipment between oneself and one’s subjects”. I thus questioned how the camera became an influential subject in my research. The same way a voice recorder would impact a social scientist conducting qualitative research, I explored how the camera changed the social dynamics at play and the ways in which one performs one’s identity in front of a recording device. I decided to embrace those dynamics and integrate the camera from the very first interview as a “trusted companion” (Ibid, 107) in order to shape my own relationship with the participants in triangulation with the camera. Integrating the camera later would have probably changed the nature of the established relationship making the camera the “intruder”. The challenge of not being able to film the women’s faces (three out of four) to ensure their anonymity and protection was also a crucial one. Here, I was directly confronted by my theoretical reflections: How to shape a new form of gaze for people that are in many ways invisible? How to use filmmaking as a tool of visibilisation while providing the required invisibility (grey zone) to avoid legal repercussions? How does this invisibility and anonymity

in fact provide a site of power and agency for the women to construct representation and recognition?

The different camera modes in visual anthropology include the responsive, interactive and constructive modes (MacDougal 2011, 108). While the responsive mode reacts and investigates by placing the audience close to the filmmaker, this documentary rather inscribes itself within an interactive camera mode merged with some constructive approaches. As argued by MacDougal (2011), filmed interviews are the recordings of a certain interaction between the protagonist and the filmmaker sitting behind the camera. In this way, even if I (the filmmaker) remain invisible and silent for most of the film - except for two moments where we hear my voice, and the last sequence that visually embraces my positionality as the filmmaker – the discussions and events would not have occurred if I had not incited them. This places the audience further away from the subject, watching the filmmaker at work. The constructive camera mode focuses on the ways in which to manipulate and connect images in an attempt to show the “filmmaker’s interpretation or impression” (108) rather than to fully re-transcribe “reality”. This invites the audience to understand the filmmaker’s consciousness about the event, interpreting images in certain ways. Merging the two modes thus enabled me to convey informational interviews as well as more constructive ways of aesthetically representing the topic.

I decided to use two cameras during the interviews – Canon EOS 5D mark IV and mark III (rented out from Activités culturelles UNIGE and the FIFOG) giving more choice for a dynamic editing rhythm. For some illustrative and aesthetic scenes, such as the images of the women by night, we used a large angle to explicitly mobilise the environment and space in directed ways according to our storyboard. However, many other moments were filmed with the camera by hand, following the participants in some moments of their lives. The way the camera is used functions as a vehicle for conveying the filmmaker’s vision, it’s “a matter of personal stylistic choice, the filmmaker’s own preferred way of seeing the world” (MacDougal 2011, 108). These diverse camera modes are thus used to engage with visuality’s power in aesthetics, balancing the information loaded interviews in an attempt to transport the audience through visual narration.

## **5.3 Post-production**

### **5.3.1 Music and sound post-production**

As discussed before, filmmaking is not only about images; the sound, music and voices are crucial in particular for this film which cannot show the faces of the protagonists. I thus decided to work with Moïse Cortat and Dorian Voos for the interview sound work, sound design, the final sound mixing and the music composition. We first decided to provide space for voices to

be heard by not overloading the scenes with music and rather, prioritized sound-design and the creation of sound matter to fashion different atmospheres. While there are a few emotive musical moments in the film, we attempted to place speech as central, trying to avoid using music as a dominant emotional trigger to prompt the audience to feel a certain way. This choice enabled images to speak for themselves, actively trusting the power of visuality and speech, leaving the audience to interpret and feel according to their own perception.

### 5.3.2 Animation film

I also decided to work with illustrator Marie Lavis, to integrate animation film within the documentary. This artistic practice enabled us to translate the complexity and ambiguities between these women's narratives and the depth of their experiences. Through slightly abstract, intuitive and sensitive drawing representations, Marie was able to represent their challenges and strengths while leaving space for interpretation. The main sections of animation depict the stories of trauma and fear that have shaped and continue to reshape their experiences as 'undocumented' migrants in Geneva. The colour blue can take many diverse meanings such as serenity, wisdom or even sadness. Here, beyond the attached meanings, it mainly refers to the primary colour blue, which retains an intensity that makes it very *visible*, overall contrasting the colour semantic used to discuss the *black* illegal economy and the *grey zone*. As Russell (1999, 3) argues, "a new critical vocabulary is desperately needed, appropriate to filmmaking that is simultaneously "aesthetic" and "ethnographic" work in which formal experimentation is brought to bear on social representation". While mixing other forms of art with filmmaking is a way to rewrite a new vocabulary, prompting emotional connections to discourse, it also distances itself from conventional ethnographic films and rather approaches fiction. Therefore, while this film is based upon ethnographic filmmaking methods and reflections, it also merges aesthetic and methodological approaches based upon contemporary documentary filmmaking. Drawing upon the diverse gains that those different methods have to offer, it also complexifies the overall storyline by ensuring an aesthetic and narrative consistency throughout. While the animation film allows a sensitive touch, it is also an aesthetic choice to rhythmise the editing, breaking the monotony of interview shots. When using aesthetics for such a subject, one must be aware to avoid falling into what Reinhard (2007, 14) calls *aestheticization* which represents suffering of the subject in ways that further perpetuates harm by misreading their condition through visual aesthetic and beauty, inciting "passive consumption" and the denial of recognition of their condition and humanity.

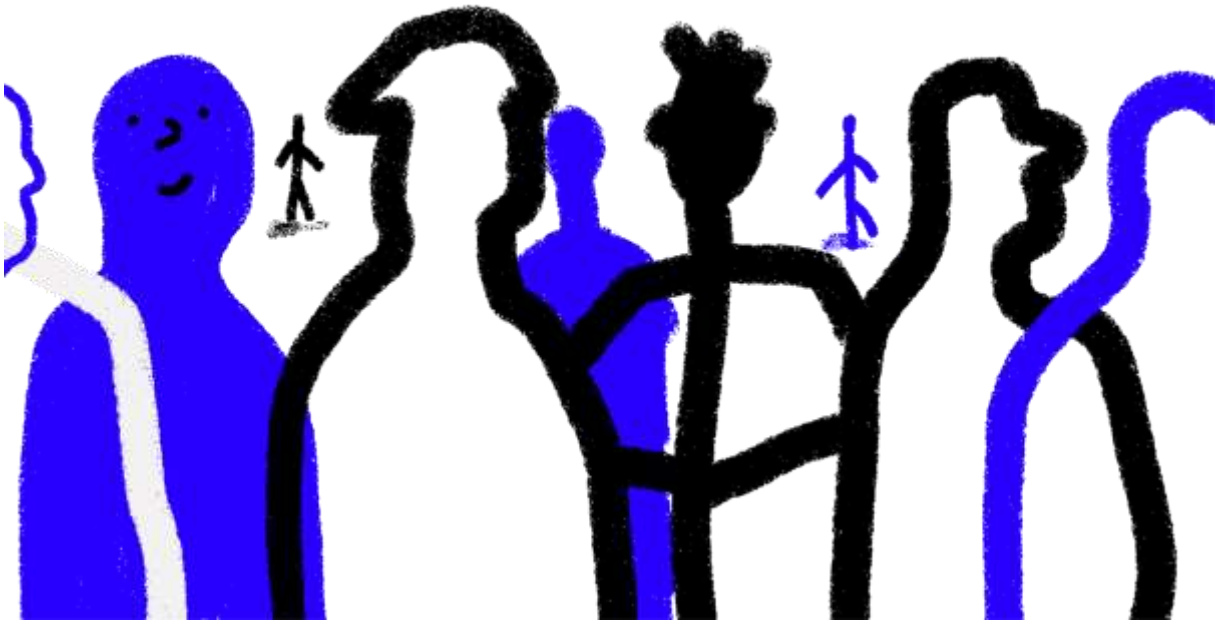


Figure 8: Animation by Marie Lavis (footage from film)

### 5.3.3 Editing

The process of editing, when having to de-rush the hundreds of hours of film, made me, to use the words of Hochberg (2015, 3) “come to terms with my own blindness” – in both a figurative and literal way. It confronted me with the words of the women, and with their images again and again, forcing me to place my agency within the process of cutting and cinematographically re-writing their stories. I started by listening to all the interviews again, colour coding the different themes for each woman, sometimes keeping the content of what they were saying and sometimes keeping only the images. Here the editing work in filmmaking is radically different from that of written transcription. As argued by Paget (1983, as cited by Devault 1990), when transcribing and editing conversations, sociologists can easily erase emotions and thus different techniques of transcription for hesitations, hums, emotions, rhythms, silences etc. are necessary to both grasp the content and the structure of the discourse. Filmmaking however captures the original voice, body gesture and environment instantly. The ways in which editing may distort narratives, however, is in no way less important. The questions of neutrality and objectivity delimiting filmmaking’s legitimacy, especially for research, are central to this step. Having to make choices at this stage is inherently political. As MacDougal (2011, 103) argues:

“anthropological filmmakers can never present reality as a single objective fact (assuming this even existed), just as they can never avoid the selectivity involved in filming from a specific camera position, or having certain interests, or being part of a particular historical and intellectual generation.”

Therefore, filmmaking, just like ethnographic writings, are “authored works” informed by certain interests, points of views, contexts and choices (Ibid). It is not a means to provide a mirror reflection of the world. It remains partial in that it is both biased and incomplete and should not be seen as “une copie de mauvaise qualité, mais plutôt comme un compte rendu nécessairement idéalisé” (Henley 2011, 16).

Embracing these editing ambiguities, I decided to tell the story through a few different themes that could translate their stories and the notions of (in)visibilities through different spectacles.

The themes were:

- the reason of departure and journey to Switzerland;
- work and lodging situations – socio-spatial mechanisms of invisibility;
- stories of employers’ abuse – social invisibility;
- fear of the police and deportation - reinforced vulnerability and invisibility and reduced participation to the visual field of Geneva;
- the women’s regularisation process and current legal status; and
- the women’s hopes for the future – resistance strategies

I then placed the external speakers’ interviews around those themes, contextualizing and framing the stories through the additional information provided by migration professionals. I edited the film with the program *Adobe Premier Pro 2020*.

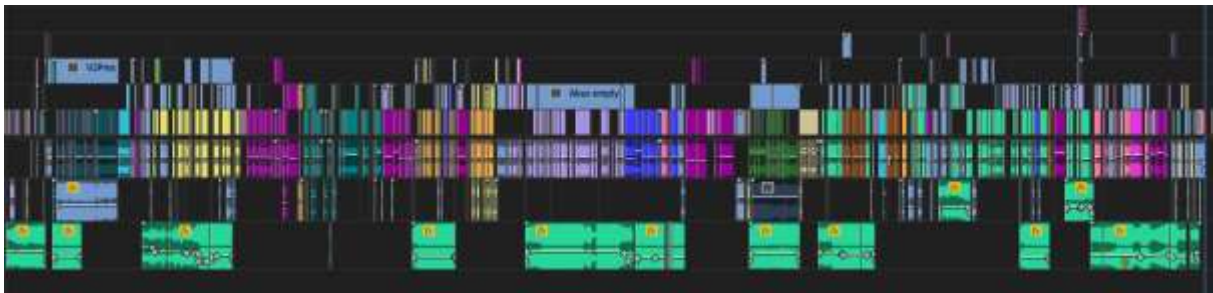


Figure 9: Screenshot of the film editing on Adobe Premier Pro 2020 - shows editing cuts, theme colours, music

### 5.3.4 Subtitles

Every step of the post-production required reflection, even the subtitles. Should we subtitle the whole film? Only the parts where some women are talking? To avoid having to subtitle some parts and not others, deciding on who is “articulate enough” in French or not, we decided to have only English subtitles everywhere and translate Spanish into English and French. When translating, we also had to take into consideration whether we would translate literally, leaving the small mistakes in order to reflect exactly the words and intonations. As the voice and the body are already the vessels of the story, we decided that the subtitles could be simplified to allow further concentration on the actual content and stories, rather than having to concentrate on too many words. These considerations are very common in qualitative data collection methods. Devault (1990, 107) discusses how transcribing and translation methods are often conflicted on whether to allow “interpreting, condensing, excerpting, and polishing respondents' talk”. Here, the emphasis was put on ensuring that the voices were heard and the images seen, rather than exactly transcribing the words which can result in repetitive, lengthy and confusing subtitles.

### 5.3.5 colour grading

Similarly, the choice of the colour grading of the image was also a consideration. I worked with Mehdi Bensallah and provided him with a Moodboard which included images and atmospheres that I wanted for the film. We decided to give a blue tone to the image, providing contrast and intensity, recalling the blue of the animation film, something a little cold, but not overly dramatic.

## 5.4 Last steps: watching themselves on the big screen

Finally, while this is not a collective participatory film – due to lack of time for the project, COVID uncertainties etc.- I have included the four women’s consent in diverse steps of the editing, making sure the ways the stories are told fit their own vision and experiences. The last two methodological steps to my research were to reflect on the ways in which the four protagonists experience watching (gazing at) themselves on a screen, first during an intimate screening of the movie among the four of them and myself. The second stage is a reflection upon their experience of watching themselves in a cinema with an audience. This last step is determinant in understanding the dynamics of the *liberatory gaze*, the shifting of frames of *grievability* and the recognition of their humanity in relation to the audience’s spectatorship dynamics. This point will practically mark the application of my hypothesis, attempting to further

understand how to bridge the gap between visuality and social sciences through the emotive power of filmmaking.

### **5.5 Ethical and normative considerations - filmmaker's subjectivity**

Here, I will answer the second subset of my research questions, bringing in considerations of ethics and positionality, especially regarding my role as the filmmaker:

2. what does the taking into account of images and the representation of otherness bring to the wider field of anthropological research? What are the ethical and epistemological questions that arise when intervening with a camera in the field?

Ethical considerations and positionality will be part of my work not solely as a methodological aspect of research but will also be concretised visually through the aesthetic choices of my documentary. Part of my method is based upon critical reflection of my filmmaking process, acknowledging my own subjectivity and power dynamics as a young white woman from a privileged background. As the filmmaker, I wish to engage with Foucauldian notions of gaze and power relationships between the viewer and the viewed, acknowledging that filmmaking and especially anthropological filmmaking was a colonial tool which reinforced "Otherness" through the myth of the "uncivilized" (Russell 1999, 2). As Russell (1999, 10) states "the history of ethnographic film is thus a history of the production of Otherness". While the context has evolved, images and filmmaking still maintain strong ties to those power dynamics and require the filmmaker or imagemaker to be critically reflexive.

As argued by MacDougall (2011), filmmaking is not just a recording method to extract data, but is a process where "research data becomes the fabric of the finished work" and where each choice is an ideological position (101-102). I thus attempt to adopt an intersectional approach within my analysis but also upon myself as a researcher and the ways it shapes my own research through diverse dynamics; what is said to me, what is not, what is performed and in what way. Furthermore, my own positionality as a woman enabled me to recognise facilitated access to some parts of this field which a man filmmaker could not. A few months back, I met Lionel Rupp, film director of the documentary "No apologies" which looks at police brutality and the realities of stigmatised black men in Lausanne. When I explained my project, he said "I would not even attempt such topic as a man". He had directly grasped the underlying dynamic which I was able to tackle more easily as a woman filmmaker.

In this project, I am not only the researcher but also the filmmaker, producer, director and editor who decided how the final construction of the stories of these women are to be represented. As I have discussed in the literature review, representation through image always requires a level of agency and there are multiple ways in which to visually acknowledge this

subjectivity. For instance, Joe Sacco, the comics war reporter, embraces the subjectivity of his drawings by representing his own person in his comics. "Subjectivity and objectivity are not possible alternatives; they are elements to be balanced in the work, and each filmmaker will balance them differently" (MacDougall 2011, 103). I will thus reflect on my own choices in the making of this documentary and attempt to inform my aesthetic choices by methodologically considering my position as a filmmaker. For instance, I will only appear in the same way that the women appear: as long as their faces are not visible, I remain invisible too. However, to touch upon the notion of depicting subjectivity, sometimes I will appear through over the shoulder shots (OTS) while having a discussion with the women. Nevertheless, as stated above, my voice is rarely audible, leaving their own voices as central. At the end of the film, I switch the audience's perspective to behind the camera – showing the camera and myself filming– in the way Joe Sacco does. I appear at the end to remind the audience that these are the stories that these four women have agreed to tell me, and that I 'subjectively' framed the stories for this film. However, as stated by Andersen et al. (2014, 105) "images indeed are manmade, and this is precisely what gives them their power".

I attempt to negotiate a balanced relationship with these women and not extract their stories for my own benefit. I am aware that these women often work many jobs, have little time, and face many difficulties in their everyday lives. I thus try to spend time with them also when not filming, showing my genuine interest in the human experience of meeting them. I also attempt to support them by accompanying them to informational sessions to find solutions to their situations, sometimes translating between Spanish and French and working as a liaison with other institutions when needed. I hope that my work will go beyond the collaboration of the researcher extracting data from the informant, and to rather foster a project "in which informants are empowered through the production of images that will serve to represent them and further their own causes" (Pink 2003, 190).

Finally, based upon Subeshini Moodley's (2018, 480) interrogation: "Could the interface between the medium of self-reflexive film, the academic filmmaker and the narratives [...] translate into meaningful social action that would offer a platform for resistance to mainstream (mis)representations?", I hope this visual output can contribute in some way to the recognition of the humanity of 'undocumented' migrant women in Geneva and that this film project will become a useful tool to resist mainstream (mis)representations as well as shifting the protagonists' own gaze upon themselves, supporting resilience and resistance.

## **6. REFLECTIONS AND ANALYSIS**

This section will provide analytical reflections around three different notions of the role of filmmaking within social science research and within the case study of 'undocumented' women



workers in Geneva. First, I will look at both *The Operation Papyrus* and the process of filmmaking as visibilisation strategies. I will then question how this project has worked towards building a new gaze and finally I will discuss how the final product of film plays a concrete role in bridging social science research and what are its limits. These three sections will allow me to answer my last subset question:

3. What is the contribution of filmmaking in the construction of the object of research? What are its limits? And overall how can I bridge the knowledge produced by social sciences through written text and ethnographic fieldwork with my camera?

## **6.1 Visibilisation strategies**

### **6.1.2 The Operation Papyrus as a visibilisation strategy**

As explored above, *The Operation Papyrus* is the first pilot project of its kind in Switzerland and has become a political and visual tool acknowledging the case of ‘undocumented’ migrants in Geneva and within the Swiss context, in a way never-before attempted. Despite Switzerland’s right wing and conservative political reticence and resistance, shedding light on this topic has become a political strategy and a unifying axiom within Geneva’s civil society and political parties on both the right and the left (Personal interview: Maudet 2021). While regularisation stands as an extremely important “cultural, legal and spatial mechanism” of visibilisation (Hatton 2017, 337), the process of regularisation put in place by *The Operation Papyrus* should also be acknowledged in its potential to displace the recognition of ‘undocumented’ migrants’ humanity. Through this regularisation process, their visibilisation was contingent on the framing of their work and bodies as crucial to Geneva’s economy. As Michèle Gagnon, administrative secretary at the SIT, stated during her interview “Si demain on prend les 10’000 sans-papiers qui sont à Genève, on les met dans l’avion et on les renvoie chacun chez eux, Genève est bloquée parce que le travail qu’ils font permet aux autres de faire tourner l’économie genevoise”. As seen here, the framing of this subject has stayed within the realm of economic benefit to Switzerland’s economy; by legitimising regularisation through the compliance of specific working criteria, it perpetuates an image of irregular migrants as productive bodies for capital accumulation. This consideration should not be understood as downgrading legal regularisation as it evidently stands as a crucial step in establishing a stable material life and as retrieving human recognition and feelings of belonging. However, simultaneously it contributes to the commodification of their bodies and of care work, in some ways denying recognition of their presence as a potential benefit for society outside of economic considerations.

This economic view is very clearly highlighted within the interview of Pierre Maudet, cantonal minister of Geneva (2012-2021). While he represents the political figure that launched

The Operation Papyrus, in 2012 he was simultaneously working on the establishment of an administrative detention centre for irregular migrants' expulsions in Grand-Saconnex (GE). He states, "pour moi c'était les deux bras du même corps" (00:37:41). He explains his position by stating that those two projects had to be concurrent as the regularisation of the 'good workers' needed to be balanced by the expulsion of the 'bad ones'. This discourse is illustrative of the State's underlying interests in controlling normalised bodies for its own benefit.

While this 'good versus bad apple' narrative is demonstrative of the ways of framing irregular migrants' experiences and visibilisation in Geneva, their humanity and existence have punctuated Geneva's visual field in various ways. The COVID 19 pandemic, for example, strikingly highlighted, in concrete visual terms, the sheer number of people navigating situations of precarity: enormous lines of people in Les Vernets (GE) collecting food donations from *Les Colis du Coeur* - most of them 'undocumented' women working in the care economy. While these lines served to force the acknowledgement of a precarity that was previously more easily ignored, as argued by Bigo (2002, 81), certain visibility strategies also have the capacity to harm those concerned, reinforcing criminalisation. Indeed, the direct and very visible need for assistance during this pandemic has also increased the vulnerability of irregular workers. In January and February 2021, the swiss border patrols undertook numerous police raids in Geneva for identity verifications: at the train station, supermarkets and even at food distribution points (at *Les Colis du Coeur*). According to numerous associations in support of 'undocumented' migrants, these have been some of the biggest police operations of their kind in over 10 years (RTS 2021). One should thus question the tensions that arise when visibilising this problematic and rethink the potential consequences of over-visibility and direct gaze upon those human lives. Such an approach repositions the *grey zone* as a crucial resistance mechanism to challenge certain oppressive forces, connecting back to Foucault's (1991) hooks' (1992) and Hochberg's (2015) understanding of scopic regimes.

### 6.1.3 Film as a visibilisation strategy

Used endlessly within popular culture, news reports, social media, advertisement etc. film is easily definable as a straightforward visibilising tool. However, as argued by Sontag (2003), the "bombardment" of images can become desensitising, especially when focusing on images of suffering. Indeed, the ways in which popular images represent, circulate and frame the lived experiences and conditions of (irregular) migration is often based upon miserabilist and victimising reifications used for humanitarian and charitable purposes. In this visual work, the focus upon individual stories makes the process of recognition central to the image diffused. Thus, questions about what is visibilised through this documentary, and how it is made visible, are fundamental. Comparable with that of Chris Methmann's (2014) research upon the

construction of the “field of visibility” (416) for climate-induced refugees through what remains invisible, I realised that, as a researcher and a filmmaker, I must concentrate just as much on what is recorded, as well as on what is said, embodied and performed once the camera is switched off, if I am to fully grasp the polysemy of images (Andersen et al. 2015). Images, just like writing, are a product of subjective framing and, as stated by Sontag (2003, 21), “to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude”. Thus, while what lies outside of the frame and what happens once the camera stops recording remains invisible, it speaks to its power.

#### 6.1.4 Sequence analysis – Between the visible and the invisible

I wish to discuss this consideration in more depth through a short analysis of a sequence of the documentary from 00:37:41 to 00:42:55. Here, the visibilisation mechanism of film extends beyond the frame of the camera and crystallises in the shaping of human relationships between the researcher/filmmaker and the informant. As argued by Pink (2003, 182), knowledge created through ethnographic film is not the result of an objective observation by the researcher on the informants, but rather the “relationship and negotiations” shaped and created between both. This sequence provides visual understanding of the emotional power of filming to shape these “relationships and negotiations” (Ibid), sometimes being capable of blurring the distinctions between the filmmaker and the filmed subject.

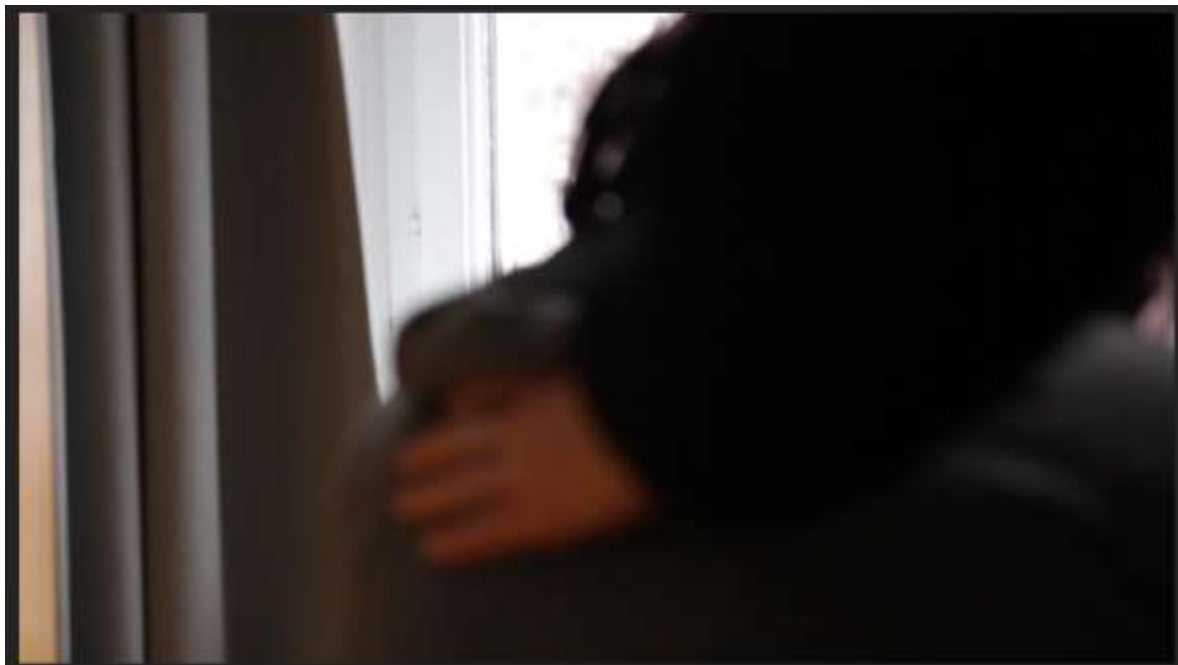


Figure 10: Screenshot of R. in her room at Geneva Hostel (footage from the film at 00:42:41)

This small sequence (00:41:53 - 00:42:55) starts with a wide-angle image of R. facing the window while eating her lunch in the shelter where she lives. Throughout our meetings, I

quickly understood that I could not solely remain the filmmaker, I needed to become a form of trusted companion and maybe even a friend on some levels for her to tell me her story. On that day, she was telling me about the day she left Peru - her home country. Strong emotions surfaced and her silent tears inhibited her from continuing the story. At this point, I was propelled out of my filmmaker's position into the relational aspect of research, and felt the need to be close to her, to show my support; that I was not just there to film and use her story, but that she had someone to talk to. The distance between me (with my camera) and her was about 3 or 4 meters, this was physically too far to show my support. At this point, I lost all notions of filmmaking, focus, angle, light and simply moved the camera abruptly while still recording, and went up to hug her. Then, she asked if we could stop recording, "Podemos parar un momento?", which I did.

At this moment of the sequence, R. is not completely visible, the shoulder shot only shows part of her body, and my arm around her takes up most of the image. The blur out of focus enhances the sense of concealed identity. I will argue that positioning R. as unidentifiable and blurred through the sudden change of camera framing and the shift out of focus is not a mechanism of denial of her person, nor erasure, but on the contrary, here provides a site of resistance, which underlines Butler's concept of shifting the frames of *grievability* and Hochberg's *grey zone* between visibility and invisibility. Unlike a photograph of a migrant on an overcrowded boat in the Mediterranean Sea, the "emotive power" and the "atmosphere of affect" (Andersen et al., 2015, 112) transmitted through this sequence allows the spectators to personally relate and identify with the subject. This allows recognition of the other, thus transforming R.'s body and self into a *grievable* subject for the audience (Butler 2009). While dissimulating her identity, she nevertheless actively affirms her physicality within the Swiss and Genevan visual field, mobilising her body as a "means of self-expression and as a carrier of a message to spectators" (Michel 2015, 416). Additionally, the blurriness of the image and the two indistinct human silhouettes make the audience question the image, and ask what it is showing. In this way, it forces the spectator to switch from mere 'looking' to an act of 'watching' the image with attention. This notion is one of the two conditions constituting Azoulay's (2008) theory to restore universal civil rights via photography. Therefore this image could also participate in re-establishing a claim for recognition of her citizenship through Azoulay's *civil contract of photography*, reflecting simultaneously Andersen et al.'s (2014) emotive power of images. All these points thus attest to the power of such an image, combatting the above mentioned xenophobic "visibility strategy" (Bigo 2002).

The sequence also questions the spatial dimension of migration's visibility. Whilst R. and my arm around her remain blurred, the focus of the camera is in fact on the window and the curtains in the background. This distinction of focus positions her body within a space separated from the outside world, the one which, for now, is a threat to her status. The only

place she feels 'safe' is in her room - especially after the police raids of February 2021. While deciding to remain inside, out of the visible public sphere could be seen as an expression of vulnerability, it is crucial to also understand this as an agentive choice. The ways in which she decides to visibilise her body within public space (and to open or close the window and curtains) is representative of Hochberg's (2015) *grey zone*, by exerting agency and resistance in her own visibility or invisibility. Additionally, when R. asked me to stop recording, she also positioned herself within the power dynamics of visibility and gaze regimes - as understood by Foucault and Derrida as an apparatus of control - structured by the tension between the gazer and the gazed upon subject. As argued by Shinko (2013, 162) bodies can become binary "absorptive surfaces" marked by productive power dynamics as well as "reflexive surfaces" of resistance and agency. This body/power nexus, theorised by Foucault allows us to rethink resistance as inscribed "within, on and through the body" (Ibid). Thus, this image functions as a double injunction of resistance which participates in the questioning of self-making and performativity through the body and space (Ibid). Interestingly, this image is in fact the result of this relational power between the subject and the imagemaker. The process of shifting into blurriness is reflective of the relational emotional impact of R.'s self and story on the filmmaker. It is, therefore, when understanding that power of agency also lies within that *grey zone*, that the emotive power of visibility is able to shift the frames of interpretation and *grievability*, allowing for humanity and a form of citizenship to be retrieved. More broadly, the different attempts to conceal the three women's identity while still making them 'visible' on screen is reflective of the strength that emerges from the negotiations within this *grey zone*, between the visible and the invisible.

### 6.1.5 The grey zone and differential inclusion

Through this understanding, I have paid just as much attention to what is filmed as to what is not; the ways in which the women tell their stories and change their tone, the language used and the details that emerge once the camera is switched off. I have also had to personally deal with my own frustrations when I felt that I was missing out on important information while not filming, and then realised that these invisible zones revealed some of the most interesting dynamics within my research. Indeed, the women negotiated these zones of visibilities and invisibilities and adapted their stories accordingly. Aware that I could edit their interviews, they opened up on certain details, sometimes almost forgetting the implications of the camera. They often said: "is this ok? Sorry I'm so emotional, oh you don't put this in the film, right? You're not recording right?". Thus, for the first time, in their context as 'undocumented' (or recently regularised) women in Geneva, they were able to visually and publicly tell their stories and to perform their identities and bodily presence in the way they wanted. Hence, this film is not

about retracing the entire *truth* nor the *complete* story, but rather about exploring the processes of engaging with the camera and with their own representation which becomes significant. Overall, the breaches and disparities between their discourse in front and behind the camera became central to my learning process as a researcher and especially as a filmmaker. Instead of forcing their stories into a rigid structure to fit my storyboard, I decided to concentrate my work on the relational aspect of research; letting go of my expectations, I proceeded to a more inductive research method and overall learnt to stop and listen. As argued by Devault (1990, 105) “feminist researchers can be conscious of listening as process, and can work on learning to listen in ways that are personal, disciplined, and sensitive to differences”.

When listening to these four women, their discourses nevertheless tended to construct the legitimacy of their presence in Switzerland through the internalization of the productivist narrative of migrant workers required to fit within the Swiss economic machine. In this way, they construct their stories around capital accumulation, highlighting the importance of the “travail au gris” allowing them to work while paying taxes and social insurances, contributing to the Swiss state. It is the extension of this grey zone within ‘grey work’ which shapes their *differential inclusion* (Segrave 2019). Their discourses in front of the camera highlight: how they work extremely hard; how they have never asked for help or abused the welfare and assistance systems; their impeccable relationship with their employers; how they themselves give back by helping and volunteering in different organizations; and overall show their efforts to integrate. This “travail au gris” becomes a site of resistance where their necessity strategies create *differential inclusion* as well as becoming a space representative of the porosity between the state’s need for labour and the simultaneous illegality of that work.

It is thus very clear that this system only allows recognition and integration through the commodification of the women’s bodies and their care work – while their subjectivities are silenced by overarching power relations. As stated by R. “ je dois prouver que je travail, c’est normal” (00:51:24). These contradictory tensions of having to prove that they work while remaining invisible to the law encompasses the messiness of this grey zone. By presenting those parts of their discourses in the film, I myself have to balance the navigation of the complex ambiguities between the reinforcement of the narrative on screen to a wider audience, against the need to respect their voices and choices in performing their presence within this frame. It is also crucial to underline that these forces of visibility and invisibility have not only shaped these women’s experiences but have also been internalised by them to a certain degree. This makes it hard for them to understand themselves through frames of recognition other than those imposed upon them. In this way, film and filmmaking enables a new gaze through an oppositional spectatorship for the public and for the women themselves, creating new frames of interpretation and recognisability.

## 6.2 Towards a new gaze

As discussed above, the medium of film plays an important and complex role in visibilising and shaping the understanding of different social dilemmas such as that of ‘undocumented’ women in Geneva. When talking about film’s potential to trigger recognition by the audience, it is necessary to tackle notions of spectatorship, and acknowledge that when one spectates, one automatically produces a gaze. Here, I will draw upon the different gaze theories to rethink film’s emotional power. I will look at three different levels of the gaze: 1.) the audience gazing at the women on the screen; 2.) the women gazing at themselves on the screen; and 3.) the women gazing at the audience gazing at them on the screen.

### 6.2.1 The audience gazing at the women on the screen – the silhouette gaze

Throughout this documentary film, the audience’s gaze is confronted with personal and emotional testimonies which work towards creating *affective spark plugs*, generating an *atmosphere of affect* and an *affective consciousness* (Andersen, Vuori, and Mutlu 2014). Conscious about the camera and the spectators addressed, the four women oriented their stories to an audience which represents the society by which they want to be recognised and within which they wish to be integrated. They are, for once, addressing that audience directly through the film. Thus, the gaze of the audience is directed and reshaped through those emotions, constructing, as Crum (2012, 57) argues, a *liberatory gaze* which will “create alternative stories that humanize marginalized bodies”. What is important to highlight here is that the gaze can become a two-way relationship where the subject looks back to the audience. Honneth (1996) states, “When gazing at another person who looks back, we feel a mutual recognition of life” (As cited in Kramer and Hsieh 2019, 40). In this way, when confronting the audience with a topic which usually remains invisible and silenced, the women are faced with moral imperatives and obligations, “when we are fixed by the gaze of the Other, each sensing the Other as alive and aware, a shared dimension of mortality, fear, and responsibility prevails” (Kramer and Hsieh 2019, 40). However, in this documentary, the audience cannot gaze upon the full person depicted on the screen as they are only partly visible in order to remain anonymous and resist any legal repercussions (all except one participant who wished to be visible). In this way, these conditions of anonymity do not allow ‘undocumented’ women to ‘look back’ at the audience. Nevertheless, even if the audience does not witness the women’s gazes, their visual testimonies still crystalize the sense that looking is embodied, thus “undertaken by someone with an identity” (Lister, M. and Wells, L. 2000, 65) and that these women are imbedded in gaze relationships, placing humanity at the centre of the system.

Interestingly then, the gaze of the audience is shaped not solely through the visual *silhouettes* on screen but rather through the audible experience of their voices. While the importance of their speech in this film does not diminish the images' power to connect the audience to a more personal account of experiences, it rather works as complementary, merging the auditory and visual aesthetics to bridge the gap between discourse and gaze. The audience can thus fully experience the environment of the protagonist through the performativity of practises and the audible social interactions (MacDougal 2011). When looking at the diverse gaze theories available, none pertain to this specific way of representing subjects on screen. As such, I would argue that there is a need to develop a new gaze for those who cannot be fully depicted. This new gaze, which I will call *the silhouette gaze*, could articulate meaning around the *silhouetted* representations and subjectivations of gaze, repositioning the importance and complementarity of voice testimonies and listening skills within gaze theory. This may allow one to rethink the gaze as a site of resistance for those that remain invisible and inaudible from common depiction and question whose bodies and voices are socially, politically and legally erased; whose are overrepresented and stereotyped; and how can filmmaking contribute to representing those people in a way that allows for recognition of their humanity?

Speech thus plays a direct role not only in developing a new form of gaze but also in the ways in which the four women have experienced recognition - or denial of recognition. R. once stated "et entendre une réponse: vous êtes une clandestine" (00:43:53) which triggered a yearlong depression, resulting in the loss of all her jobs and leading to the halt of her regularisation process. Similarly, for Floreta who frames her experience as an easier journey to regularisation states, "Moi j'ai eu toujours le courage, je me suis jamais sentie comme une sans-papier ou préjugés ou stigmatisé ou rien" (00 :32 :43). Indeed, Floreta never uses the term "sans-papiers" (undocumented) but rather always used "sans-permis" (with no permit), highlighting the wider implications of speech upon her lived-experiences. While these stories will be heard and interpreted differently according to the audience's past experiences, their context, their collective identification and their previous exposure to these questions (Reinhardt 2007; Rose 2016), listening to speech, words, stories and voices that are usually unheard through film may facilitate the recognition of the Other (Devault 1990). It thus becomes an important axiom of empathy towards those lives that are less often depicted, heard and which are less recognisable, allowing recognition through the echoing of our own emotions.

### **6.2.2 The women gazing at themselves on the screen**

The second level of the gaze analysis here comes into play during the last stages of my methodology; showing the film during an intimate screening among the four women and myself



before finalising the post-production editing of the documentary. During that showing, the women met each other for the first time. Here, they were able to gaze upon their own stories, look at their own presence on screen and become the audience of their own experiences. After watching the film, emotions were strong and they all stated that they felt connected to each other's stories – feeling less alone in their experiences. As hooks (1992, 115) states, “there is power in looking”, which here emerges as collective power of interrelation. This connects back to notions of intra-individual and inter-individual levels of comparison between each woman, allowing them to consider their life paths as a form of collective experience: “Considérer sa vie comme n'étant pas si différente de celle des autres, voire valoriser cet itinéraire difficile permet de donner un sens à la situation présente” (Carreras 2008, 96). By showing empathy and admiration for each other's stories, the four women collectively opened a space to make sense of their own paths. They all laughed, cried and expressed different emotions stating, “ah c'est toi là? Oh tu as vécu tout ça et avec des enfants en plus ? Bravo!”. Finally, while they all expressed that the film represented their stories in ways which were *right* for them, they also articulated a feeling of frustration in wanting the film to tell the full story in more details. All of them said: “ah je sais que tu ne pouvais pas, mais tu n'as pas raconté toute l'histoire”. In this way, the will to represent their *full* stories reflects the importance they place on representation, underlining one of filmmaking's limitations; having to choose to tell the story through a certain lens, leaving some (or many) things out. As argued by MacDougal (2011, 112) “[p]eople's responses to seeing themselves in films can tell us much about what we as filmmakers have got right and what we have got wrong, even if this does not always coincide with what they like or dislike. Their interpretations will also undoubtedly change over time”.

### 6.2.3 The women gazing at the audience gazing at them on the screen

The third level of gaze pertains to the last part of my methodology: the women gazing at the audience gazing at them on the screen. This last step allows for the *liberatory gaze* or the *silhouette gaze* to be completed as the women can spectate their recognition through the prolonged gaze of the audience upon their presence and stories. Since these women rarely find visual representations to relate to, gazing upon their own images allows them to challenge, on some levels, Foucauldian scopic regimes of power asymmetries based upon the ‘gazer and the gazed upon’ paradigm. Here, resistance is not only noticed through the choice of visibilising their story through a film with the threat of legal repercussions, but also through the courage it took to come to the cinema and visibilise their bodies within a crowd that will have an insight into their personal life stories. This concretely testifies to their agentive strength in challenging their invisibility and disposable humanity. Their responses after seeing themselves on the screen with an audience also show the importance of this step. They all decided to speak up

during the Q&A discussion and addressed the public directly. The impossibility of 'looking back' discussed in the first stage of the gaze - as women are not fully visible - suddenly shifted through this third stage, making their own looks the witnesses of their recognition. After the screening, the overall emotional response of the women and the audience seemed to attest to filmmaking's power in triggering affect and contributing to these women's recognition of humanity.

### **6.3 Final product – bridging the visual and social science gap**

Throughout this research, the different theories of representation, recognition and gaze have helped us understand the underlying dynamics at play within the triangular relationship of the filmmaker the subject and the audience. The above two sections thus frame filmmaking as both a visibilisation strategy and an approach to develop a new gaze allowing us to concentrate on the last point of the final subset of our research questions:

How can I bridge the knowledge produced by social sciences through written text and ethnographic fieldwork with my camera?

As explored above, the tensions between anthropological writing and film are continually being discussed and often stand within an “uncomfortable position between cinema and social science” (MacDougal 2011, 101). Nevertheless, this research has shown that it is important to re-situate anthropological filmmaking not simply as a means of communication comparable to text, but as “a way of creating different knowledge” (Ibid, 100), and a “powerful means of producing subjectivities and meaning” (Zapperi 2016, 556). MacDougal (2011) argues that despite the interrogations about the subjectivities attached to visual representations, films provide details that transport the audience in concrete ways, providing something closer to the “visual and auditory experience of the anthropologist in the field than to reading an anthropological text” (100). This situates filmmaking as complementary to anthropological writing as together they make possible a mutual balancing of the visual and the textual, becoming a tool for ethnographic fieldwork and creating new kinds of knowledge. Filmmaking thus retains a strong political dimension and can be used as “political art”, operating “across aesthetic and affective registers to engage audiences directly as witnesses of contemporary conditions” (Lindroos and Möller 2017, 33 as cited in Squire 2018, 452). This positions filmmaking as an art that has the capability of utilising its affect for transformative change, by bringing *affective consciousness* beyond passive empathy and by converging different types of audiences and people together. In this way, “filmmaking is a way of looking” (MacDougal 2011, 101) which can provide a new look and gaze upon anthropological and social science research, bridging what text and images cannot reach alone. The strength of visuality and

aesthetics should thus not be diminished to the state of a subjective mirroring of reality (Henley 2011). Rather, they should be seen as a way to mobilise creativity, aesthetic imagery, emotional power and affective triggers toward “enlarging previously unexamined subjects and increasing anthropological understanding” (MacDougall 2011, 101) and enabling a recognition of the humanity of the subjects discussed.

On June 27th 2021, over 100 people watched the premiere of *Elles, les (in)visibles* at the Grütli cinema in Geneva. In this moment, the impact of visuality became tangible. While it is impossible to generalise and speak for anyone on their behalf, I can state with a certain assurance - based on feedback, testimonies and myself as a witness - that the audience members were moved by the four stories told on screen. They collectively created an *atmosphere of affect* and all showed emotional receptiveness, triggering a form of moral awareness about the situation and a strong will help diffuse the topic to a wider audience. The power of filmmaking here is self-explanatory, as it allows a much faster, wider and extensive diffusion of the topic to more diverse spheres than would a written thesis or ethnography. The final product of the film has the capacity to be diffused, reproduced, and shared very efficiently through festivals, online viewing platforms, television, events etc. Thus, the diverse ways of engaging the audience with the recognition of ‘undocumented’ women’s presence and humanity through visual representations situates visual sociology and anthropology as a bridge spanning the gap between social sciences, visuality and a wider audience. Overall, these different levels of analysis and the associated considerations allow us to answer (partly) our overarching question: “what kind of knowledge does film allow for?”. Based on this research, film has shown the capacity to produce new, unique, visual and audible, transferable and impactful knowledge in ways that connect people, spheres and different understandings of research. It nevertheless also retains its own challenges and limitations.

#### **6.4 Filmmaking’s limitations**

While clearly this research depicts filmmaking through its strengths, I do not wish to ignore its limitations. Filmmaking, like any research method is subject to restrictions. As already mentioned, challenges in filmmaking variously include: the subjectivity of the filmmaker; the ambiguities of interpretation; the sensitivity to aesthetics; the music; risks of *aestheticization*; and, the fact that the audiences of such documentaries are often made up of already informed demographics with a pre-existing interest in the question. When used within social science research, film poses its first challenge in entering the field. The camera complexifies interactions with the informants and holds them accountable not only orally but also visually. The rapid and widespread diffusion of information through film to wider spheres can also stand as a threat, creating strong public political statements which can put both the filmmaking team

and informants in complex situations. These considerations can be a drawback for informants, making them more resistant and sceptical of delivering information and trusting the researchers. In the world of research, as stated previously, there is a general scepticism towards mixing both the arts and human sciences: doubting the capacity of film to produce knowledge for research and focusing on its ambiguities. The idea that the world of research and filmmaking are distinct and serve different purposes thus persists, making the building blocks to bridge both sometimes shaky and unsteady. Overall, in this project, the risk of diffusing only four stories, thereby normalising experiences through a single perspective, could reinforce damaging visibility strategies failing to take into consideration WSCP and intersectionality. Finally, power relations within filmmaking should not be overlooked, as it can perpetuate destructive social dynamics inhibiting social transformative change. While it is crucial to call attention to these limitations when weighing filmmaking's potential within research, they should not discount the validity of filmmaking's advantages, but to rather highlight their contingency.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Anthropological filmmaking within social science research continues to be a contested terrain, and the steps towards bridging both are constantly weakened under the barrage of diverse views and challenges. As Pink (2003, 4-5) argues, we should start:

“rejecting the idea that the written word is essentially a superior medium of ethnographic representation. While images should not necessarily replace words as the dominant mode of research or representation, they should be regarded as an equally meaningful element of ethnographic work.”

It is through this research that, as a researcher and a filmmaker, I was able to personally experience the potential of filmmaking as both my method and the subject of my research. This tool has thus allowed me to engage with multiple dynamics of visibilities and invisibilities through the stories of four ‘undocumented’ women in Geneva, placing self-representation, agency and resistance as significantly interconnected in the making of this documentary film.

As stated by Salter and Mutlu (2013), the goal of the film is not “about giving migrants voice; they have voices. The question is whether or not they are heard”. Holding the double role of researcher and filmmaker, I learnt to embrace the relational aspect of research, and have become a ‘friend’ on some levels to some of the participants. As argue Salter and Multu (2013) in their research, I am myself entirely part of this project, I have shaped the film and my research not only through my subjectivities – who I am as a person, as a woman, as a researcher and as a filmmaker – but also through my interactions. My emotional reactions to the sometimes heavy and moving stories, my doubts, vision and decisions have all shaped my

final data and product. Embracing those dynamics should not discredit research, but rather bring it back to a human level; one that repositions the human dimension of research as central in the production of relationships and thus, of knowledge.

This research has explored how visibilisation of ‘undocumented’ migrants through political action or filmmaking can be a double-edged sword. While visibility seems to be the ultimate goal to reach, it can also entrench a deeper polarity within political debates leading to further stigmatisation and legal repercussions. Similarly, while invisibility tends to create conditions which encourage denial of humanity, abuse and exploitation, we have seen that it can also become a powerful *grey zone* of resistance, challenging harmful gaze regimes and power dynamics. During The Operation Papyrus in Geneva between 2017-2018, the visibilisation of ‘undocumented’ migrants has resulted in many diverse outcomes. On the one hand it has enabled the regularisation and recognition of almost 3,000 ‘undocumented’ workers, while on the other, it seems to have further perpetuated the commodification of workers’ bodies and of care work. Despite the underlying political negotiations and interests that have informed the execution of this Operation, as Michel Gagnon stated, it remains “quelque chose de magnifique” and has allowed, to a certain level, ‘undocumented’ unacknowledged bodies to become ‘visible’, voices to be heard, and levels of humanity to be recognised.

Through the analysis of this documentary film about the lived realities of four ‘undocumented’ women living in Geneva, I have argued that the audience is confronted by the emotive power of images and voices, as well as its potential to mobilise the *grey zone* and the gaze for agency and resistance (Hochberg 2015), thus shifting the interpretative frames of *grievability* (Butler 2009), allowing humanity and other forms of citizenship to be restored (Azoulay 2008). Through this film, I do not wish to re-inscribe the victim paradigm too-often imposed upon ‘undocumented’ women, nor to appear as if my double position as the researcher and the filmmaker stands as a representation of the white saviour. On the contrary, this film speaks to the power of the medium and the subjects to reassert their presence through the strength of their stories. Highlighted within the analysed sequence of R., these women have used their agency to negotiate the ambiguities between the visible and the invisible, through the *grey zone* within their experience in Geneva as well as within the film. When they asked to stop, halt or change the recordings and continue in their own terms, when they spoke up at the cinema screening in front of the audience, they reclaimed the rights to their representation, image and gaze. By resisting the fear of the police, deportation, abusive employers and complex personal and family situations, they have reclaimed the rights to their agency, power and humanity. Overall, this film works as a visual testimony to the power of images and voice, and when observed carefully, it can play a role in the recognition of ‘undocumented’ migrants by re-establishing humanity upon the invisible or criminalised face of ‘undocumented’ migration. Simultaneously, this research has also highlighted the need to

create new forms of gaze for people that cannot be fully depicted visually, re-inscribing the power of oral narratives within filmmaking. Overall this project is demonstrative of the potential to bridge the gap between social sciences and the visual realm of arts and filmmaking in order to rethink the terms and politics of the (in)visibilities that surround us.

As researchers in social sciences, we often provide contributions and produce knowledge that are not only important on a conceptual or theoretical level in our discipline, but which can also be relevant to policy and can affectively prompt collective awareness. In a country with a direct democracy system, such as Switzerland, the visual framing of social subjects such as migration is determinant in the modelling of its policies. Geneva's current modes of visual representation of 'undocumented' migrants should thus be challenged by resistive imagery, that calls forth the power of real human stories. Thus, understanding of migration through a different, more human lens, could contribute to social and political transformative change. While not trying to idealise the power of film or images, I do believe that qualitative research through anthropological documentary filmmaking has the capacity to move the audience (Sontag 1977) visually, aesthetically, intellectually and emotionally by seeing and hearing those that generally are not. While policy changes through social science research and visibility might be a slow and reluctant process, I hope that this project will at least be a call to rethink the way we interact with our own cleaners, carers and strangers on the bus. The 'mundane' is in fact extremely political, and every act and word counts in the making and remaking of social dynamics. By allowing recognition of the humanity of the subject on personal levels and to a wider audience, collective rethinking of social phenomena that surround us – such as the (in)visible – can trigger change.

This project has thus shown the immense potential for the merging of social science research and filmmaking in creating political and social awareness about a topic that remained mostly absent from Geneva's visual field. This is a concrete attestation to the power of the medium, and stands as a clear demand to political decision makers to be accountable towards the knowledge that we produce. I hereby hope that this project has, for some people, contributed to "see[ing] one's own blindness and render[ing] visible one's failure to see" (Hochberg 2015, 3). Certainly, this research has made me engage with not only the politics of visibility and invisibility, but those of listening and seeing, making me question my own blindness as a researcher and a filmmaker.

*« En train de raconter mon histoire, c'est magnifique. Vivre ce n'est pas évident, mais raconter... Imagine combien de personnes qui ont vécu la même chose que moi ... »*

Re. 2021

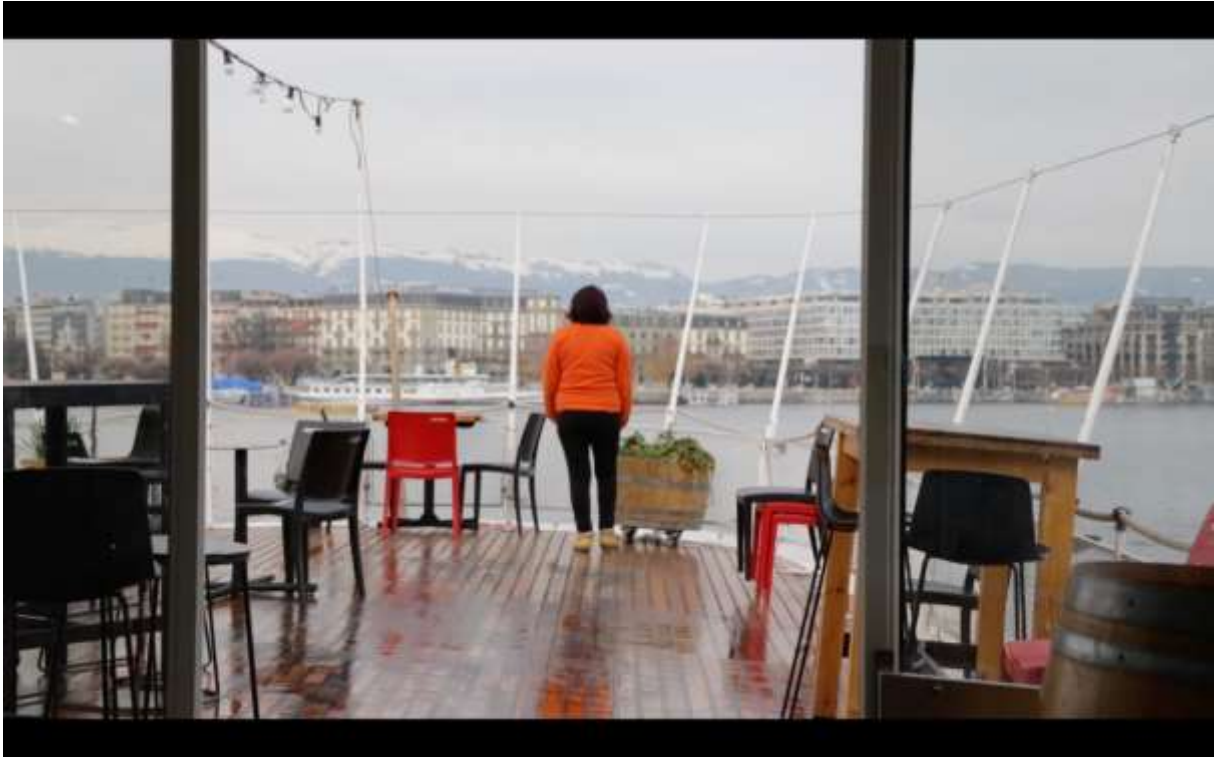


Figure 11: Screenshot of one of the final scenes in the documentary (personal footage)

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