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Portraying Migrants' Experiences in Irish Documentary Film

'Immigrants are people who have arrived ... they are not just a part of the economy, but they are a part of society' (Bruce Morrison, former US Congressman, *Here to Stay* [Alan Grossman & Áine O'Brien, 2010])

There has been a widely acclaimed boom in Irish documentary filmmaking, with many feature length 'creative' documentaries gaining both critical and financial success in the country and beyond. Although in the classical, Griersonian sense, all documentaries are 'creative treatments of actuality,' signalling the unavoidably constructed, if you like, fabricated nature of documentary representation, there has been a shift lately in using the term 'creative' in relation to documentary film. This is largely due to the proliferation of the cookie-cutter, standard expository-mode factual programming tradition for television, which many filmmakers have grown to attest, or at least disavow as a part of documentary filmmaking practice. In this sense, creative documentary has become a type of counter-culture to the practices of factual television production, at least in Ireland. Gideon Koppel gives a very thorough explanation of this divide when talking about his film, *Sleep Furiously* (2008):

I think because the word documentary has been taken over by the world of television, so you have the conflation between factual programme-making and documentary filmmaking and as a filmmaker I'm not interested in factual programme-making, because that is, at its base, a form of journalism, which just isn't my thing ... so when I talk about documentary film, for me, it's documentary cinema and cinema is very particular for me, because cinema is about – and again this is a very personal thing – a sense of spectacle; it's about images that are super-large on the screen and that seem to fill a dark space. You have a certain intensity in watching it (Lacey 2008, p.125).

In this sense, strategies of funding, exhibition, and distribution of creative documentaries suppose similar trajectories than in feature fiction, with an emphasis on high cinematic value. As David Rane explains, the tradition of *auteur* cinema is another point of reference for the practice of creative documentary.

They tend to be more cinematic, more ambitious in style and content, personal essays, experimental pieces and films that possess a definite authorial or directorial 'voice'. In a nutshell they are documentaries that aspire to festival or theatrical release ... [t]hese are the Irish films that should be seen at IDFA, FID, SIDF and others... (Rane, 2004, p.24).

A number of creative documentaries have been made during this decade, which reflect on the social and cultural changes that Ireland has undergone due to immigration and which critique the state for its strategies of 'managing migration'¹. In this sense, they tend to subvert hegemonic official ideologies by offering an alternative point of view. *Here to Stay* (2006, Grossman & O'Brien), *Promise and Unrest* (2010, Grossman & O'Brien), *Seaview* (2008, Gogan & Rowley), and *Saviours* (2006, Nolan & Whitaker) are all documentaries that tell real-life stories of immigration in Ireland. Having received some form of funding from the Irish Film Board, they all share a similar approach of combining issue-based social engagement with an emphasis on high production value. My point of enquiry in this paper is twofold. Firstly I explore what specific aspects of the immigrant experience are addressed in the aforementioned films. Secondly, I examine what particular formal elements convey the notion of *documentary cinema* (as opposed to documentary film), in portraying stories of in-migration in Ireland.

A common trait of these Irish 'migration films' is their success of grasping immigration in its human dimension. They are personal stories, giving sensitive accounts of how individual economic migrants experience the implications of such legal and political categories, as 'EEA vs. non-EEA national', 'work permit vs. green card system', 'irregular migrant', 'low-skilled vs. high-skilled work', etc., in the case of *Here to Stay* and *Promise and Unrest*. The other two films, *Seaview* and *Saviours* exemplify how cinema can counter asylum seekers' negative mass media portrayal by providing asylum seekers a platform to share their subjective point of view.

Representations of economic migration in *Here to Stay* and *Promise and Unrest*

The government and policy makers largely encouraged large-scale economic migration into the Republic of Ireland between the 1990s and the mid-2000s². The booming years of Celtic Tiger economy resulted in a significant increase in labour demand, which could not be satisfied by previously unemployed Irish nationals and returning Irish migrants (Fanning 2010, p.25). A report commissioned by the

¹ The term derives from a 2006 report by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC): *Managing Migration in Ireland: A Social and Economic Analysis*.

² According to the latest Census figures, 544 357 non-Irish nationals are living in Ireland, which makes up 12% of the overall population of the country.

(<http://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2011reports/census2011profile6migrationanddiversity-aprofileofdiversityinireland/>)

International Organisation on Migration 'strongly advocated ongoing immigration as a means of sustaining economic growth' in the country (ibid.). Bryan Fanning refers to Irish immigration policy of the time as a part of the country's 'developmental nation building' (2010, p.22), defined by a 'shifting ideological, psychological and ontological *mentalité*' in search of reinventing Ireland as a modern state, and 'a growing EU convergence of integration policy,' whereby 'labour migration was presented as a "permanent, even desirable feature of European societies," necessary to counter demographic decline and to preserve European competitiveness' (2010, p.28).

The Irish health care sector was one of the areas that expressed a large labour demand, with the State recruiting domestic carers and nurses from abroad through various employment agencies. *Here to Stay* and *Promise and Unrest* address issues of migrant labour in the Irish health sector. Both films focus on a single sending country, the Philippines, which has a long history and culture of producing migrant labour - especially in the domestic and health sector - to Western and Middle Eastern countries in demand. In fact, these two films have grown out of a single project: *South Circular* (Grossman and O'Brien 2006). While researching for the film, the filmmakers realised their material was too rich to include in one film; therefore, they opted for three (the third project, *Union, Ink, and Paper*, is still under production). The motif behind the *South Circular* project was the lack of feature-length documentary cinema engagement 'with the labour conditions, civic/political participation, impact of remittance payments, and daily rhythms and cultural practices of migrant subjects' (production notes). As such, the films are a type of sequel to each other, resulting in the 'juxtaposition of two Filipino subjects ... revealing fundamental gender, class, and social mobility differences within the Filipino migrant community' where tangible and divisive distinctions prevail between holders of temporary work permits (domestic labour) and green cards (nursing)' (ibid.). While in *Here to Stay* the portrayal of the political agency of the migrant subject emerges as the central theme, in *Promise and Unrest* the specific contexts of the Filipino migratory experience surface.

The observational camera in *Here to Stay* depicts a vibrant Filipino ethnic community based in Dublin. It also conveys a comprehensive picture of immigration through gaining access to portray both the personal and public dimensions of the

main social actor, Fidel Tanguinod's migratory experience. Fidel is a highly educated, exceptionally articulate young Filipino nurse, who, at the time, manages to complete his postgraduate study at UCD, while working full time as the Acting Clinical Manager II of his ward in Mater hospital. It becomes obvious from the film that he is used to, and enjoys, the responsibilities that come with a superior position at work. He is a social activist full of energy, believing one should not wait for change, but should go out and make change. He is the President of the Overseas Nurses Section of the Irish Nurses Organisation (INO), advocating overseas nurses rights and interests even in front of the press; having recognised that overseas nurses – regardless of their country of origin – face similar obstacles and challenges in their workplaces and therefore should unite to secure their rights. He explains, at one point during his migratory experience he realised that instead of waiting for people making policy changes, he should personally get involved in advocating change - as he wittily calls out to his community peers in the film, '*don't just moan!*' He is also a gay diva, and the organiser of the Ms. Alternative Philippines competition in Dublin. He possesses something called 'leadership quality' and is not afraid of practicing these skills even in a foreign environment.

The idea of what Fidel labels '*ethnic glass ceiling*' during a European Council meeting, in which he presents a paper, emerges as one of the central motives in *Here to Stay*. At about twenty minutes into the film, we follow Fidel to the inaugural meeting of the Overseas Nurses Section of INO, which grew out of the League of Filipino Nurses, founded by Fidel himself. In a lively debate they all share their frustration over the lack of opportunity for overseas nurses to practice their skills in high-responsibility posts. That this is a general migrants' rights issue in Ireland is affirmed by Fanning, who states, '...immigrants encounter specific barriers to employment and occupational status that equate their levels of education and human capital' (2010, p.61). A motion is drafted collectively during this meeting and then submitted as policy proposal to the inaugural INO Convention, where it is eventually passed as a new INO policy. However, the film questions its *de facto* observance: Fidel unsuccessfully applies for a managerial post, for which he is undoubtedly qualified.

In *Here to Stay*, the cinematic element emerges best in the scenes that depict Fidel in his personal settings. A beautifully shot scene, reminiscent of the style of direct cinema, portrays Fidel visiting a beauty saloon to get his eyebrows done for his upcoming graduation. Straight and gay Filipino customers and staff, mothers carrying their small babies, happily congregate at the parlour. This scene not only locates homosexuality as a socially acceptable way of life, but also provides a quiet, unpronounced picture of the life of an ethnic community living in Dublin. None of the characters are directly addressed, nevertheless, their faces and never-ending chatter gives a successful visual account of Filipino community life in Dublin. Likewise, the scenes where Fidel and John relax at home watching TV, quarrel about nothing, or prepare for the graduation ceremony, are able to pull through the intimacy and commitment present in their relationship. The story of Fidel nicely exemplifies the intersecting layers of discrimination that cause every member of any subordinated group to experience discrimination in a unique way.

In *Here to Stay* and *Promise and Unrest*, the method of narration and the use of voiceover warrant the element of cinematic spectacle. Bill Nichols associates voiceover with the expository mode of documentary film, where a non-diegetic, usually male, voice of an 'expert' used to serve 'an informing logic carried by the spoken word' (2010, p.167) in order to organize the filmic images and to 'make sense of them' (2010, p.168). Stella Bruzzi explains that in recent years the voiceover has progressed as a result of critical reflections on filmmaking by feminist and postcolonial cultural theorists: 'the classic voice-over has been modified and its rules transgressed through the insertion of ironic detachment between image and sound, the reflexive treatment of the narration tradition and the subversion of the archetypal solid male narrator in a documentary...' (2010, p. 47).

In both films, voiceover is also used in a subversive way. In the former it is a cinematic tool to anchor the political representation of the immigrant subject. It is the most overt channel through which the immigrant subject is given voice. In *Here to Stay* Fidel's voiceover is edited over images of travelling vehicles in two occasions. In these sequences, Fidel reflects on his personal experience of migrating to Ireland. The use of Fidel's monologues as the non-synchronous voiceover breaks the 'voice of God' tradition on various grounds. First of all, the voice-over is used to express

accounts of personal experience and (often rather critical) individual thoughts, rather than universal conclusions that are drawn from the filmic footage in order to explain their meaning. Secondly, the accented voice of Fidel also means that the oppressed, peripheral voice of the migrant figure is moved into the centre and into the foreground. In the latter film, *Promise and Unrest*, the use of voice-over is an integral part of the film's epistolary narrative technique that best exemplifies its creative approach to documentary film practice.

Promise and Unrest is an observational documentary film depicting the transnational story of Noemi Barredo, a migrant Filipino domestic worker living in Ireland. The film, shot for the duration of five years in Dublin and in Babatngon in the Philippines, documents various dimensions of Noemi's life: it portrays the challenges she must face as a migrant domestic worker restricted in movement and scope by the work permit system in the country; it depicts her desire to maintain a strong bond with her home and to provide for her entire family back in the Philippines through remittance money; and it documents her desire to reconstruct her experience of motherhood regardless of distance boundaries, reuniting with her younger child in Dublin via the family reunification program.

Transnational motherhood and family ties are the two most prominent themes in *Promise and Unrest*. Noemi Barredo is a single mother of two, working a few thousand miles away from her home in the Philippines. Never letting go of her transnational ties, she leads and manages family affairs from a distance, securing a comfortable lifestyle for her entire family. Her screen presence is subtle and withdrawn; yet her often silent, somewhat forlorn character betrays exceptional strength and determination: there is no minute of self-pity even under such difficult circumstances. Living in a tiny bedsit in Ranelagh, Noemi (and flatmate/compatriot Elvie) work 12-hour shifts of intense care-giving for the Irish elderly, while never letting loose for a minute. The motivation behind Noemi's migration far exceeds wishes of self-fulfilment and growth. She has endeavoured in international migration in order to provide for her entire family. It is Noemi who manages family affairs even from a distance. Whenever she returns home, she sees to her daughter's education, actively participating in school celebrations; she is active in the religious life of her

town community; she arranges her family home to be renovated – all from the money she has earned in Ireland.

Noemi, migrating abroad to secure her family's well-being, left two children behind in the Philippines. Her daughter, Gracelle, was only 7 months old when they separated. Transnational parenting is an involuntary side effect of gendered migration, and, while *Promise and Unrest* so sensitively depicts, it is indescribably challenging. However, as an Immigrant Council of Ireland report indicates, sometimes the end results recover the damage made: 'there is some evidence to show that international migration can have a positive impact on children: for example, remittances can lift children out of poverty, provide access to education, and improve well being' (Pillinger 2007, p.45). From a child's perspective, winning a school competition with her mother's financial contribution from abroad, or getting uniform pants for herself and her friends for a school performance can be just as important as receiving continuous financial support in the form of remittance money for the adult members of the family. Needless to elaborate on the sacrifice Noemi has made in leaving her children behind to the care of her parents and sister, she is making every effort possible to stay in close contact with them. The effects of this transnational arrangement on the children are ambiguous. While Gracelle is admittedly happy living in the Philippines with her grandparents, sister, and the extended family, she is also lucky enough to join Noemi in Ireland to rekindle their mother-daughter relationship. Who seems to be lost is Noemi's son, Noy-noy, the '*ghost of the house*'. While Noemi explains that she is unable to bring him over to Ireland due to immigration policy restrictions, the film does not reveal how transnational parenting has affected him on the long run.

Border crossing and journeying is another key element in this documentary. Through parallel editing the viewer is constantly transported back and forth between the two locations, just as Noemi herself seems to be on a constant move to maintain a simultaneous presence in both of her homes. Perhaps due to the equal amount of footage and focus on both her Irish and Filipino presence, it sometimes even feels as if Noemi is in a way 'juggling with' continents, in an attempt to coordinate professional and personal interests and responsibilities. Although Hamid Naficy lists categories of journeying as 'home-seeking'; 'homecoming'; and journeys of

'homelessness,'(2001, p.222) I would argue that *Promise & Unrest* portrays another, equally valid and increasingly relevant sort of journey: that of 'transnational commuting'. Transnational commuters do not differ much from their suburban peers, only operate within a broader time/space axis. Yet, as the story of Noemi Barredo exemplifies, they strive to maintain a sense of constant presence in both locations. The transnational commuter, although unable to physically duplicate, tries to eradicate distance in any other way possible: through constant travelling and online communication.

As Noemi's story reveals, family reunification is of crucial importance especially for women migrants. *Promise and Unrest* succeeds in portraying the emotional restraints Noemi is under due to being separated from her family. One of the most climactic scenes in the film is the one where Noemi sends her family reunification application to the Irish Embassy in Manila. The excitement and relief on her face as she immediately calls her sister to tell the news is one of the best moments of the film. It is one in the morning in Dublin, Noemi seems quite tired from wandering around hunting for a fax machine that will work, she is finally able to send over the documents, thanks the shop assistant three times and exits the shop. She calls her sister in the Philippines, where it is already daytime, Gracelle is in school, and not only is her joy tangible, but through the phone conversation, distances and time zones suddenly collapse for a moment. What we are left with is the overwhelming presence of strong family ties and a sense of (transnational) care.

The depiction of distance (from home) and absence (of family, friends, home) are defining characteristics of the narrative technique of *Promise and Unrest*. Naficy describes 'accented cinema' as a body of work which is characterised by the interstitial positionality of the exiled/migrant film and production practice and is shaped by the personal exilic and diasporic experience of the filmmaker. According to Naficy, this accented style is apparent in the "fragmented, multilingual, epistolary, self-reflexive, and critically juxtaposed narrative structure ... [and] subject matter and themes that involve journeying, historicity, identity, and displacement" (2001, p.4). Epistolarity seems to be a self-evident narrative technique to engage with in *Promise and Unrest*. Its 'film-letter' format also enables the filmmakers to grant a subjective voice to the social actors. As Naficy argues, '[t]hrough these letters,

readers gain direct access to the characters subjective viewpoints and emotional states and are affected by the intimacy, immediacy, and intensity of their interiority' (2001, p.102). In *Promise & Unrest*, Noemi's subjective presence is conveyed through the epistolary passages of a personal voiceover narration, in which she addresses various family members. First and foremost, the film-letter voiceover channels an emotional bond and love towards her daughter. Due to the physical distance between parents and children, epistolarity operates both as a sign of presence and absence across borders and continents. Secondly, it is through letters that Noemi instructs her mother how to budget the remittance money she sends home. Finally, the epistolary form is used to explain Noemi's decision to apply for family reunification for Gracelle (and why she has to leave her son behind).

Grossman claims that traditional European expectations of immigrant representation require that 'the immigrant has to suffer basically, and that the suffering has to be public, it has to be confessional' (Interview 12 March 2010). In both films, the immigrant social actors are far away from such victimised depiction – in fact, they defy any type of victimisation. What really singles these two documentaries out is the sense of agency both Fidel and Noemi possess: they are never passive sufferers of a fate they cannot control; on the contrary, both individuals exemplify thousands of 'typical' migrant labourers who are creators of their own fate, proactively forming their lives. While Fidel's agency is obvious through his very vigorous social and political activism and excellence in performance (both political and personal), Noemi's is more complex, as it appears in a much more covert way. As Áine O'Brien explains, 'from a feminist perspective, agency is many different things. It's quiet, it's often invisible, but it's all very determined ... often doing work behind the scenes' (ibid.). While Noemi is often portrayed silently collapsed into her thoughts, no question remains about her strength and determination, as one follows her everyday life of constant work and self-restraint. In the sense of depicting manifestations of agency in migrants' lives – usually marginalized and victimized in mainstream representation – *Here to Stay* and *Promise and Unrest* are exemplary cases amongst the Irish cases of migration films.

Two stories of asylum seekers' experiences in Ireland: *Seaview* and *Saviours*

In addition to relying on an ethos of what Fanning (2010) calls 'developmental nation building', immigration policy in Ireland has been formulated by an 'influential governance security' point of view. As Fanning explains, a securocrat policy system was meant to deter and control migrants, and to maintain the presence of a perceived homogenous 'existing bounded citizenry' (2010, p. 45). The motif of 'ethno-racial' and 'cultural preferencing' (Loyal 2011, p. 175) behind the hierarchisation of EU and non-EU migrant workers, and the ostracisation of asylum seekers as an immigrant group in political and media discourse, was only slightly concealed in the drafting of Irish immigration policy. Requirements in having to adhere to EU regulations, such as the 1999 Common European Asylum System and other, intra-national border agreements, such as the Common Travel Area (between Ireland and the UK) also encouraged security governance perspective. In building 'Fortress Europe', a supranational bounded community was also based on developing systematic processes of exclusion (and inclusion for member states). Asylum policy in Ireland has been formed in such a hostile, exclusionary environment; restrictive policy measures were heated by the sensationalist and accusatory rhetoric employed by politicians and journalists across the state.

Asylum seekers constitute a relatively small portion of migrants arriving and living in Ireland³. Nevertheless, the fact that their arrival preceded other forms of migration (i.e. labour, for example) and that the number of applications rose significantly at the height of the Celtic Tiger years, early immigration policy debates 'were primarily centred on asylum-seekers and refugees,' and the concepts of 'immigrant' and 'asylum seeker' were often equated in general discourse (Loyal 2011, p.81). The 'semantic correlation of immigrants with non-white, welfare-dependent asylum-seekers,' proposed and fuelled by the unfounded and biased media

³ It the beginning of the 21st century, there were less than 10,000 asylum seekers in Ireland, out of a migrant population of 400,000 (Fanning 2010, p.43). By the end of the decade, the number of new asylum applications decreased to 2689 in 2009 (Loyal 2011, p.85). Less than 10 % of all non-EU migrants that came to Ireland between 1995 and 2000 were asylum seekers (ibid.). In 2000, one of the peak years of asylum applications in Ireland, 10938 applications were registered – according to Loyal, this was the lowest number received amongst EU member states, a mere 2.4% of the total amount (yet it accounted for the 5th highest number per capita) (ibid.)

discourse⁴, was one of the driving forces behind the securocrat perspective; and it largely made unviable asylum seekers' social cohesion and integration (ibid.).

Saviours and *Seaview* both challenge such negative notions of the asylum seeker. *Saviours* depicts a crucial process in the asylum seeker experience: that of the application procedure. The linear narrative structure and observational camera of the film records Abdul Hassan's struggle with the authorities to gain refugee status in Ireland. The competition-based narrative positions Abdul as a 'fighter'; the parallel editing technique constructs a metaphoric relationship between Abdul the boxer and Abdul the asylum seeker. The film also suggests that sport is a channel of social integration, providing local community support for the migrant. *Seaview*, on the other hand, opts for a mosaic-like structure, depicting a state rather than a series of actions. The physical and mental space of the asylum seeker living under direct provision is represented through sequences of time images combined with more traditional interview footage, a documentary mode that Bill Nichols characterises as 'performative' (2010, p.199). Some issues, such as the inability to work and mental health, emerge as common themes in the two films.

Saviours is a documentary film about boxing – at first glance. However, it quickly becomes evident that Liam Nolan and Ross Whitaker's film is much more eager to explore the out-of-the-ring lives of its three main protagonists, as well as to introduce a little sanctuary amidst the rough city life of north inner city Dublin. Relying on interviews and an observational camera style that patiently follows the characters and events within the duration of 18 months, we are quickly subdued by the triumphs and hardships of Darren, Dean, and Abdul; as well as the entire St. Saviours Boxing Club community.

Saviours is clearly influenced by a 'competition-based' sports narrative prominent in the sports film genre⁵ (O'Brien 2010, p. 251). The excitement and anticipation that builds up during the preparation of the event – in this case, the

⁴ See pp. 43-44 in Fanning (2010) and p.84 in Loyal (2011).

⁵ For example, *Saviours* recalls a now classic American documentary sports film, *Hoop Dreams* (1994, Steve James) both in its theme and narrative form. *Hoop Dreams* is a longitudinal observational documentary following the educational and athletic career to two African American basketball players, trying to make it to the NBA. The film goes beyond highlighting the two young men's sports achievements onto providing a vivid picture of race relations in the USA. The narrative structure of the film (as repeated in *Saviours*) builds on a shifting focus between the two characters, centring attention on either, depending on the success of their athletic performance (Bruzzi 2006, p. 88).

National Senior Championships (a stepping stone towards the Olympics) – culminates in the all-or-nothing final match. The strength and success of *Saviours'* s competition-based dramatic build-up lies in the fact that while in the first part of the film the sports action focuses on the slow rise of Dean's and the somewhat surprising halt in Darren's boxing career, the tables turn in the second part of the story. Now it is Dean whose fall and eventual disappearance we witness, while Darren re-enters the picture with a vengeance. While Dean and Darren alternate as central focal points in the film, Abdul's struggle with the Irish immigration system is an organic string in the entire movie. His storyline is more static in the sense that the dramatic rise towards a climactic point happens more gradually and the emphasis on his sporting performance is more de-centred. In his case, the competition-based dramaturgy is gradually replaced by a focus on the application procedure, with the plot culminating in Abdul receiving a decision on his application by the Office of Refugee Applications Commissioner.

The importance of local community ties is an integral feature of *Saviours*. The film positions St. Saviours as a site where the formation of (g)local identities is welcomed and encouraged. The transnationality of personal life histories is intertwined with a strong sense of local belonging, which is immediately anchored by the cinematography in the establishing shots, depicting the urban space of north inner city Dublin. In this microcosmic setting, the politics of 'race' seems to be acknowledged, in order to be deferred. The opening sequence of *Saviours* introduces a game of 'horseplay' between Abdul and the coaches, reflecting on his ethnic Otherness, to which Darren, proving peer solidarity, wittily replies: '*He's more Irish than you are!*' Another conversation between the same actors takes this process of 'playful racialization' a step further:

Pat:- '*So you're going back next week?*

Abdul: - '*Where?*

Pat:- '*Ghana! Isn't that where you're from?*

Abdul: - '*No, I'm from Galway*

Pat:- '*Oh, so you're a culchie!*

This is an interesting dialogue with Abdul not only claiming his Irish roots and identity, but the coach also playing along, replacing one stereotype with another,

between city and country folk this time. Later on another 'joking incident' is played out between Tony, Darren's (Black) Caribbean father and an older boxer, Billy. Tony makes a joke about Billy's complexion (and shared baldness):

Tony:- *'Billy, where d'you get your complexion from?*

Billy:- *'I'm going like you, Tony. I wanna be like you, and him [pointing to Darren]!*

It seems joking around with skin colour and cultural difference is an integral part of exercising masculinity and communal solidarity in the boxing club. While all performers are operating in a testosterone-bomb environment, they are quick to channel their solidarity and sympathy towards each other. The film depicts St. Saviours as a site where 'race', although identified as a source of difference, seems to be either joked away as irrelevant, or used as a source of unity among club members. In this world, the lad from next door and the boy seeking a new home acquire equal status based on their sports performance. However, the scene in which a referee unfairly scores against Abdul in one of his decisive matches, casts a shadow over the idyllic imagery of a colour-blind sporting scene in Ireland.

In *Seaview*, the highly composed sound and visual imagery conveys hidden details and atmosphere of the location. A sensory engagement becomes a way to reflect the psychological state of the film's subjects. The location is Mosney, a former Butlin's holiday camp. Not so long ago, it was full of laughter and excitement, as thousands of Irish and British families went there to rest and relax. Nowadays it is still a camp, but of different sorts. Fear and anxiety about an uncertain future shadows every day, as current resident asylum seekers await the results of their application process. Through juxtaposing the past and present of Mosney, and through exploring different aspects of the asylum seeker's experience, directors Nicky Gogan and Paul Rowley capture life in one of Ireland's direct provision systems and introduce the various emotional strains different stages in the application process put on the asylum seekers. *Seaview* approaches documentary filmmaking from a unique perspective: the recorded material is a result of a 3-year-long collaboration between Mosney residents and the filmmakers; the final artefact reflects the filmmakers' interest in avantgarde cinema and an emphasis on cinematic form.

Through the recurring use of voiceover in *Seaview*, the separation of image and sound is simultaneously used to limit and enable the representation of displacement and exile. As Marks argues, "image and sound tracks [can be] used to undermine each other, to show the limit of what each is able to represent" (2000, p.30). Asylum seekers are highly vulnerable people, who very often choose to remain invisible for different reasons. Therefore, representation itself becomes a question that the filmmakers need to address. There are three main scenes in the film that separate image and sound completely in order to convey testimonies of the asylum seeker. The voiceover sound of the subject channels a verbal account of the experience, while the atmospheric images underscore visually both the content of the speech and the mood of the scene. These three voiceovers stand as three structural pillars in the film. The first and the last provide a frame to the story: both voiceovers are of the same Nigerian woman whose performance provides an opening and closure to the narrative; the second one is located almost exactly in the middle, and it is one of the most disturbing (and climactic) scenes in the film.

In the first voiceover the camera is placed within the closed circuits of a room, looking outside through a window. The vision is however highly impaired as a translucent curtain veils the window, disabling any clear sight outwards – we only see the shadowed outlines of the figures walking outside. The interior shots are equally distorted by the blurry focus and by using compositions where half of the frame is blocked by a wall or where extreme close-ups of neatly arranged material objects, such as pans, cups, and plastic spoons fill up the space. Through these visual sequences, in a highly articulate and engaging voice, a Nigerian woman gives an account of the difficulties of living under direct provision. As she explains, she is afraid to show her face in front of the camera, as her words might be used against her in her asylum case. The scene very successfully conveys the complexity of asylum seekers' experience of invisibility. Asylum seekers are invisible due to their situation of living under direct provision, unable to work or participate in civic life. The threat and "flood" of asylum seekers – often labelled as bogus – have been a major topic in the Irish written press, especially the tabloids; the emphasis on their invisibility in this and following scenes in *Seaview* contrasts the falsehood of the sensationalism of these news reports.

The second, highly engaging scene combining cinematic formalism with social criticism involves a male asylum seeker talking about his journey from Africa to Europe as a trafficked refugee in the voiceover audio. As he describes the cramped, unsanitary conditions of a devastating journey, the image of quickly moving water is projected on the screen. The close focus and the motion created by the waves creates an atmosphere where the viewer can almost feel water on their skin; the movement of the water creates dizziness, and its overwhelming closeness, filling up almost the entire frame, evokes thoughts of claustrophobia and drowning. These images do not only illustrate the words of the speaker; they physically evoke his emotions and physical experience of the journey. As the camera zooms back to reveal a shabby underwater room interior, one gets the feeling of the belly of a ship in the water.

The closing scene of *Seaview* returns to the voice of the Nigerian woman and this time her testimony is underlined by tracking shots of empty spaces, peeling walls, rows of decade-old blankets and pillows, torn carpets; and the slow, dramatic score. She says, '*we lack words to express how we feel.*' Perhaps it is impossible to fully understand her experience. Yet, *Seaview* succeeds in translating what she feels, to colours, sounds, sizes, smells, and textures, so that the viewer is encouraged to reconstruct a similar psychological state of mind. *Seaview's* main innovation lies in provoking 'uncinematic' senses, such as touch, in a way that Marks (2000) defines as a quality of 'intercultural cinema' and which is closely connected with the representation of migrant experiences, such as loss and longing.

In *Seaview*, the strict geometrical compositions, the quiet still-lives and landscapes, the ambient sounds and images, and the haunting voiceovers of hidden figures compose an aesthetic of elegy, constructed through sequences of optical images. These images problematise classical representations of reality and build upon the Deleuzian notion, i.e. 'experience cannot be represented directly and in its entirety, but only approached partially by the orders of the discursive and the visible' (Marks 30). By representing the passing of time, the filmmakers draw attention to asylum seekers' haunting experience of constant waiting. The camerawork, editing and the soundtrack dictate a pace to the film that 'encourages contemplation' and

'suggests an underlying unease, a state of long-term waiting' (Gogan and Rowley 2008).

Reaching out to audiences that may not be familiar with or interested in the topic of immigration in Ireland – and with an eye on festival presence – the films in this article share the common tendency of aiming to make entertaining and aesthetically pleasing cinema, and a commitment to make use of documentary film's function to 'persuade or promote' (Renov 1993, p. 22), as a way to engender social change through film. All four films agree in representing human stories with a universal appeal, rather than simply traversing issues of migration from a sociological perspective. Indeed, it would be a bit of a stretch to label *Saviours* as a 'migration film,' especially due to its multiple-protagonist storyline. Nevertheless, its accentuated focus on 'race' and social integration allow the film to be analysed together with more unequivocal works, such as the other three documentaries in this paper. Through the engagement with creative documentary practice, *Here to Stay*, *Promise and Unrest*, *Saviours*, and *Seaview* provide a well-rounded and sensitive portrayal of the immigrant experience in Ireland.

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