Making Unusual suspects - girls in gangs: a critical reflections on the ethics of cross-cultural filmmaking

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Abstract

This research explores questions of ethics in cross-cultural documentary filmmaking in relation to making of the film "Unusual suspects: girls in gangs". The film depicts the lived experiences of three women who are or were involved in gangs and follows a police unit commander in her duties in fighting gang-related crime. The making of the film was characterised by cultural differences because I, the film maker, am a foreigner entering an arguably less privileged field with participants who could be considered vulnerable - both in terms of their socio-economic status and their safety. The mode of the documentary is observational, with elements of the participatory, based on encounters with the 'Other' and rooted in a desire to shine a light on a largely hidden issue that affects a lot of women in South Africa, and the Cape Flats specifically. The film's production prompted continual engagement with ethical questions. In this explication, which accompanies the film, I analyse my own practises and offer a set of suggestions based on my experience for making a documentary film with the intent of acknowledging one's positionality and overtly addressing issues of power differentials between the filmmaker and the people she represents.

Key words: Positionality, reflexivity, representation, voyeurism, co-authorship, ethics, documentary film

This research is a companion to a documentary film about women in gangs on the Cape Flats outside Cape Town in South Africa titled unusual suspects: girls in gangs. In the film three women who have been or are currently in gangs speak about why they joined, what they experience(d) while in the gang and what their relationships to the core business of Cape Flats gangs, namely smuggling and selling drugs, are. I also follow a female police officer on a raid where concealed drugs are found and confiscated. Like all types of mediation, documentary is about representations. And with representations comes questions of power (Hall, 1999; Spivak, 1995). In this paper I try to address this issue of power differentials between me (the filmmaker) and participants (the people I filmed) in the making of the film.

Because I am so different from the women who appear in my film, I decided to use the explication as an opportunity to reflect on my production process, in particular the working relationship I fostered with the women and the strategies I followed to always endeavour to treat them in an ethical and responsible way. One of the few 'traits of identity' that I share with my participants is gender. I'm a 24-year-old foreign white woman from Europe and my film features only women of colour, and the few men (who are also of colour) who appear are secondary characters. Given my position vis-à-vis the participants in this film, they become the 'Other' in academic and theoretical terms, and I use my own experience as a case study to reflect on ethical practises, dilemmas, and potential areas of improvement that I was faced with throughout the making of this film.

Though the research is not directly about 'women in gangs', this topic can't be ignored in my narrative enquiry of my process, as the women's relationships to gangs, gang members and gang activities forms the basis of the very aspect of their lived experience and identity that comes to the fore in the film, even in the case of the police officer. My awareness of this also coloured many of my considerations in filming them, deciding what to include in and exclude from the film, and how the way that I edited the material influences how they are represented. I was aware throughout the process - from planning through filming and into post-production as well as considering where and how the film will be seen by audiences - of my own and their safety, the risk of criminal liability and the potential impact on their

reputation of publicly disseminating their views and actions in the form of a documentary film.

I acknowledge that this positionality is problematic, but I argue that cross-cultural encounters can be engaged in a non-extractive and ethical way if differences, risks, benefits and impacts are directly addressed, and consciously and openly discussed between all participants. I also realise that this was my first experience in making a (cross-cultural) film and that it was a work in progress, both in terms of consulting with participants throughout the process but also in terms of trying new things, making mistakes, and correcting them. Hence why this paper is a critical reflection and leaves some questions unanswered at times.

I would argue that my lack of experience had a benefit: I was open to learning about and from the women I filmed throughout the process. Both I and they were open to asking each other how they felt about the other's position. This included, for example, me asking my participants how they felt about a white person being in their space and filming them, and them asking me about why a white person would be interested in doing this. It is also something I addressed with academic mentors and my supervisor prior to and during the making of the film. I embraced that my inexperience forced me to be more open to others' perceptions of the fundamental and undeniable differences between us, which I seek to document in this explication. I borrowed from Participatory Action Research (PAR), which is the practice concerned with making sure "community members are involved throughout the research process to produce data that are authentic to community experience and action (e.g. intervention) that is appropriate and has meaning" (Herganrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardoshi, & Pula, 2009, p. 687). A similar concept/practice is that of 'photovoice' (Wang and Burris, 1994). Photovoice is based around the idea of creating content with participants at the heart of the creative process. It originated when the authors were working on a photo project in rural China and decided to ask the participants what they thought was important to portray and how it should be done. This in turn served to empower local populations and the project had a larger social impact. This method does not take away the power differential completely and some argue that there is a risk it might compromise more long term and in-depth ethnographic work (Gubrium and Harper, 2013), but I argue it is a necessary step in making films about communities that are different from the author.

Methodologies

For this qualitative research I will use three distinct but interrelated methodologies. The production of the film can be seen as a form of research and what I learnt about developing ethical approaches to documentary production is informed by my own experience, which is documented within the body of the documentary. Given that this explication is aimed at reflecting on my own practises in the field, I will offer an overview of the existing literature and studies that have guided my initial approach and process in making this film, as opposed to offering a compilation about the topic of women in gangs. In this creative research and narrative inquiry, I will also look at some very 'palpable' an 'visible' element such as reflexive devices used, semiotics, and overall narrative. I will also use an 'auto-ethnographic' approach where I reflect on a lot of 'behind the scenes' elements and practises that led up to creating the film (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Throughout the making of the film, I documented my experience in a production journal which will be used as a form of data to reflect on my experience which I will use as a case study for this explication.

In terms of the methodologies, I followed to make the film, I used an NGO as a "stringer" - a local person or group of people who would be able to give me insights into the local dynamics at play and connect me with participants. Given my outsider status, this was vital in the initial stages of research especially. I worked closely with Ceasefire (organisation working with former gangsters to curb gang violence) who would connect me with female active or formerly active in gangs. My main 'stringer' was Jeremy (introducing me to participants) and my main 'intel' was Charmaine (giving me insights into the topic, as she was the only female worker at Ceasefire and carried her own personal experience as a former gang member). Regarding the methodology in terms of the way the film was shot: the style of this documentary is observational, all the filming was done with light enough camera equipment, no artificial lighting or sound recording and with no crew, just myself and my camera.

The aim of this explanation is to document my process of making a film as an outsider entering a foreign field. This explication will seek to address issues of positionality, filmmaker-participant relationship (particularly one that is characterised by social and economic imbalances) and managing the 'duty of care' that comes with filmmaking and protecting one's sources. In this research I start by laying out the theoretical groundwork for issues of positionality and journalistic ethics. I show how my own qualitative research is situated in and informed by the existing debate about cross-cultural filmmaking, documentary ethics and co-creative practises. Having made a film with participants who are very different from me in terms of nationality, social class, skin colour, age, and lived experiences, I then offer a critical reflection on my own experience and practises in trying my best to mitigate the power differentials that were undeniable in the making of Unusual suspects: girls in gangs. Finally, I propose a set of guidelines - grounded in my own experience - for production and post-production practises aimed at ethical filmmaking, or at least filmmaking that is self-aware in its intent.

I am currently working as a foreign correspondent for France 24 and have found myself in a situation more than once where I am asked to report with very little notice, about a region I had never gone to or an event that I knew little about. It is likely that the format and pace of the news production environment encourages practises that may lead to superficial coverage and even misinformation. Through taking a different approach in making Unusual suspects I strove to address this issue through my own practice. It is one of the reasons I decided to make a documentary, rather than a series of news reports. This form allowed me to take time to investigate the context, build trust with my participants and continually communicate openly with them. And it is why I am committed to reflecting on the process in this explanation.

Literature review

The "West studying the rest"

This literature review provides a compilation of the texts that have influenced my approach and mindset in entering the field in a non-extractive and ethical, at least in its intent. It starts by establishing the issues associated with my positionality and the simple act of crossing that cultural barrier, notably fascination with the 'Other', voyeurism, power imbalances between filmmaker and subject (Said, 2003; Sontag, 2019) and objectification (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1995). It then offers a review of existing practises aimed at resisting such extractive forms of journalism.

Problematic and abusive tendencies of international journalism

International journalists have long been criticised for entering a space they know little about, extracting the images they need to fly back to their comfort zone and pocket the rewards. This is known as 'parachute journalism' (Wizda, 1997). I argue that one of the main issues of a white western privileged person entering a space that is different to them is that this desire can be/is fuelled, even unconsciously, by some form of fetishism. The relationship between Orient and Occident or the "West vs. the rest" is one of power and domination cultivated through discourse, and notably through the media. This works through what Gamsci has coined hegemony – a subtle form of domination based on consent. Similarly to Said's famous idea of Orientalism, Hall argues that we are perversely fascinated with difference and the 'other', which he traces back to colonialism (1997). This is what Ahmed (2000) calls 'stranger fetishism'. She draws a parallel between the Marxist concept of commodity fetishism and argues that social relations are displaced onto the "Other", who becomes objectified. bell hook's notion of 'eating the other' (2015) illustrates what Ahmed argues about turning the other into a commodity: hooks argues that difference is commodified to benefit capitalist profit- it is celebrated as a way to 'spice up' white culture. They are only included in the white dominant culture if they do not threaten its supremacy and reinforce it.

Spivak, another central author in postcolonial theory, deconstructs the concept of representation. She argues it can have two meanings: speaking for, similarly to political representation or literally re-presenting (present again) something or someone (1995). As representation is an act of taking something and seeking to make it intelligible, the 'truth' is modified in the process. Therefore, all forms of

representation (in the sense of re-presenting) are tainted and incorporate some kind of (often unconscious) bias. They essentially create a substitute for reality. Representing in the first sense of 'speaking for', implies a power relation where the subject is under the representative's authority and tutelage because they are unable to speak for themselves and make their voice heard. Spivak argues that the subaltern – historically marginalised groups – is always spoken about but never able to speak for themselves and their identity resides in the fact they are different. In other words, their "voice becomes ventriloquized" (Moore-Gilbert, 2005, p.453). Similarly to Mohanty's idea that Western feminist discourse produces an image of '3rd World' women as "monolithic object", international journalism has the tendency to create such a subject through objectification by "specifying the context after the fact" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 56).

Nonetheless, it can be argued that there is a moral responsibility to 'bear witness' to injustices. Research around bearing witness has centred mostly around conflict reporting but can be applied to cross-cultural encounters in a broader sense. It argues that journalists have an ethical responsibility to show suffering, in order to try to put a stop to it (Azoulay, 2008; Tait, 2003), because it acts as a form of "communicative assistance" (Furman & Stupart, 2019) and because in some contexts silence can be considered a form of violence (Ahmed, 2000). This view is linked to Chouliaraki's view that the media can be a moral educator (2008). This links back to Winston's idea of "the audience's right to know" (2000), another central pillar of journalism ethics. This can nonetheless be criticised as carrying some 'white saviour' undertones, justifying the intrusion of a foreigner into a space as necessary and as positive, when it could easily be a destructive one if done in an extractive way. The concept behind documentary filmmaking, and this study, is not to "give them a voice" but rather to recognize the "Other's" agency and knowledge-power to represent themselves, through the use of some co-creative practises and ethnographic approaches outlined below. The case study section which reflects upon the implementation of these practises in the field.

Ways of resisting parachute journalism, objectification and fascination

Borum-Chattoo argues that documentary filmmaking is about "humanising the headlines" (2020, p. 117). Documentaries often deal with the same topics that are covered by the mainstream media but, unlike news, this form can delve deeper into the personal, individual and emotional realms of the participants in order to touch viewers and elicit responses from them. This in turn - and particularly if coupled with a so-called 'impact campaign' (a researched distribution plan to reach both the people on the ground who could benefit from watching the film and those who should be held accountable as power agents) - can create tangible change and even alleviate the suffering of those portrayed. I believe that it can also allow more agency for the people who are filmed to tell their own story, even when that story is still mitigated by a filmmaker or crew. In that sense, documentary film departs from the sensationalising penchant of news and offers a more human, relatable, and authentic version of the story, to create positive change through opening people's eyes about an issue and (potentially) mobilising communities in some way.

Kennedy argues that "dismantlement of Western modes of domination requires the deconstruction of Western structures of knowledge" (1996, p. 347). In terms of international journalism, this is done through the hegemonic value of 'objectivity' (arguably problematic and unachievable in itself) and depoliticization of the researcher. Post-colonial theorists calls for a re-politicalization of locality, which means acknowledging the historical legacies both of the place and the 'subject' (Spivak, 1995. Mohanty, 2003). In practical terms, this resembles more an ethnographic-style reporting. For Cliford and Marcus, ethnographic-style work is inherently "enmeshed in a world of enduring power inequalities (...) but its functions within these relationships in complex, often ambivalent and potentially counter-hegemonic" (p. 9, 1986). Therefore, I argue that using film, and especially documentary film, to convey the subjective perspectives and represent the lived experiences of others in a cross-cultural setting can be very effective, especially for topics and voices that are not usually represented or heard in the mainstream media (MacDougall, 2005; Pink and Leder, 2012; Cox et al., 2014). Ruby argues that 'reflexive' practises - ones drawing attention to the positionality of the filmmaker and construction of the film - are important if not necessary in ethical filmmaking (2000, p. 196). There are some reflexive elements in my film, but they are aimed more at calling attention to the constructed nature of documentary filmmaking than calling attention to the positionality of the filmmaker. The effect is that it makes the film easier to consume, as

there is someone to mediate the information the participants share, to ask questions when clarification is needed for the intended audience. This could be considered problematic. Reception studies are out of the scope of this explication, but it is important to acknowledge that my awareness of the intended audience did influence the style and mode that this documentary follows, which is mostly observational (Nichols, 1991).

One major piece of literature that guided my initial mindset when shooting is the study "Honest Truths: Documentary Filmmakers on Ethical Challenges in Their Work" done by the Centre for Media and Social Impact (Aufderheide, 2009). This study conducted through interviews with forty filmmakers offers practical guidelines for ethical documentary filmmaking and the challenges faced by filmmakers in the field. One of the first "strategies" is a pillar of journalism: "do not harm". They also offer some strategies to "empower" participants through the making of the film, notably being transparent about the intent, sharing decision making, offering participants an opportunity to veto elements of the final cut of the film and paying participants for their time, knowledge, and contribution to the creation of the film. Another study on the practises of co-creation done by Massachusetts Institute of Technology points out that following these guidelines and practises can sometimes be harder than expected (Cizek et al., 2019). They identify several drawbacks to co-creation: threat to overall vision and integrity of the story, difficulty of collaborating in terms of organisational constraints and different levels of commitment between parties, risk of marginalising co-created works in the sense that they are often relegated to "community media", and the still existing power imbalances within co-creative spaces. They nonetheless offer guidance as to how to make co-creation ethical: creating safe spaces for sharing, asking and listening, stating one's intention from the get-go, making binding agreements, in writing, regarding the process of filmmaking between participants and film-maker, and taking all of this into account in the budget to enable more ethical co-creation. These are all concepts that I have encountered and will reflect upon in the case study section of this paper.

Case study - Findings from my own experience

Not all findings are generalisable as contexts are so different, and it's impossible to suggest an exhaustive set of guidelines for ethical engagement with the people we film and represent on screen. I do, however, believe that it is of value to describe my experiences, analyse the decisions I made in conversation/collaboration with the people I filmed and to create a list of guidelines for filming in this context as these insights could benefit other field makers faced with similar challenges and questions. These guidelines should not be seen as the conclusion of my practical and academic inquiry, but rather as the beginning of a living document that can continue to evolve as I and other journalists and filmmakers work with communities who are different in terms of social, economic, and cultural background, or who face trauma and conflict. The findings will cover reflections regarding the normative values of journalism, some practises in the field, and some ethical considerations in the post-production stage.

Positionality

Post-colonial feminist theory argues that cross-cultural encounters are problematic (as explained in the literature review) but that they should still happen. Borrowing from bell hooks and her idea of global sisterhood (1986), one needs to acknowledge and embrace their positionality as opposed to shy away from it. In terms of filmmaking, Ruby argues, "once it is acknowledged that no one can speak for or represent a culture but only his or her relationship to it, then a multiplicity of viewpoints are welcome" (1991, p. 31). Sobchack calls this "the address of the eye" (1992, p. 9) and how each filmmaker brings their own vision to the topic they focus on. This nonetheless needs to be conducted with this positionality in mind and following some protocols such as consultation, trust, and honesty.

The genesis of the project

Positionality entails questioning representation by whom? But the question of representation also entails asking: representation to whom? In the context of my film, not only is the filmmaker different from the participants, the majority of the audience is also different from the participants. The target audience is predominantly, though not exclusively, an international one. My awareness of the intended audience influenced the way the film was shot and the amount of 'explanation' that was included, compared to if it

was made for a local audience. A very basic example is the introduction of the film. My aim in the first thirty seconds was to establish what 'The Americans' is, because feedback from foreign viewers I showed early cuts to make clear that they were clueless about the local dynamics and names of gangs, while this is something that is common knowledge in Cape Town. My film was designed for a 'universal' or international audience because I cannot claim to speak about local issues to local people, given my lack of insights and outsider status. It should be noted that this does nonetheless add to the extractive aspect of my process as the characters could be seen to become "entertainment" for an outside audience to consume. On the other hand, as a foreigner who had spent little time in Cape Town, I did not feel I could make a film that spoke to people in Hanover Park directly, as this would also re-iterate the idea of white saviourism and someone coming in to an community that is outside of their own to teach them something about themselves, which is something. I therefore aspired to fitting somewhere in the middle of these two.

Self-questioning/self-reflexion

An interesting question that also guided my process was: what would a local filmmaker do differently? A local filmmaker can make a film about gangsterism, but I do wonder if their first instinct would be to make it about women in gangs specifically? I do think it is an important and valuable research topic, but this begs the question: is this belief informed by pre-established hegemonic approaches - the idea of popular feminism and that it can be applied in every context? Would a local filmmaker not put more emphasis on a different type of story? How to make a film in following a feminist ethos/methodology or is it 'white washed' so to speak? These are the types of questions I asked myself while discovering Hanover Park and speaking to different women about their experiences before starting to film them. I noticed a pattern when speaking to women in the research phase. There were three steps: the first was that they would speak about gangsterism and talk about men. The second was me explaining I wanted to focus on women and them saying it was strange and either that no-one would want to participate or be interested in this topic. For example, Charmaine told me "I promise you, you'll be the first, because women are not as open minded. For women to sit and tell you about their life in a gang it's going to be hard, we've never done a documentary with females, if you get it right, you'll be the first!" (personal communication). The third was a sort of realisation where, after having shared their story, they expressed the injustice they felt

that this does not get more attention and would offer to help develop this project. In retrospect, explaining the dynamic in that way makes me feel uncomfortable because it implies a white saviour complex, a form of superiority that the outsider could tell them and make them realise this issue was important. In this specific case, I think they were very much aware but that the mainstream media is so biased towards the sensationalistic and traditionally male narrative that it came as a surprise that someone would inquire into their experiences.

Recognizing one's positionality and embracing the affordances that come with it.

I also argue that the theoretical debate regarding positionality sometimes brushes over some realities in the field. Being an outsider in this space allowed me to move around more freely than someone from the community - Pastor Engel from Ceasefire explained that gangsters and women in particular take risks when they cross "enemy lines" - they are usually bound to their own territory. He commented jokingly that being French was the ideal nationality in my context because in the gang world the French are the 'neutral' ones, in the triangular rivalry with the Americans and the British gangs. In this context, I think being an outsider to the community worked to my advantage in terms of safety (to some extent) because a local Hanover Park film maker might not have the same access, or gain "enemies'" trust in the same way.

Between a journalistic and almost ethnographic in style kind of method

I started out by doing an interview with Shanaaz, which I framed more as a recorded conversation to get to know her and understand what she had been through. I met her once when Ceasefire took me to her house, and we talked briefly. They wanted me to do the interview on the spot and probably never go back again but decided against it and rather I spoke to her and arranged to meet again. That first interview was set-up and relatively formal, semi-structured in its form, which Nichols would describe a "form of hierarchical discourse […] with an unequal distribution of power" (1991, p. 47). In the context and process it was fairly unstructured and informal, with Charmaine (Ceasefire worker) sitting in and having conversation with us at times. With Shanaaz and the sisters I would usually go about filming by asking

them what they felt was important to share as opposed to telling them what to do or talk about. From there, I was able to select the relevant parts to curate a 26-minute film that focuses on one single issue: women in gangs. Shooting with the police felt more ethnographic in the traditional observational sense because I had little say or power in controlling the situation. I was simply embedded with the special operations team for three days and had to myself judge what I felt was important or not to film. I did conduct one semi-structured interview which I included in the film as a way to better structure the narrative.

Following normative values of journalism My background is more of a journalistic one than an artistic or filmmaking one, and I really grew as a journalist and a filmmaker through this project. I experienced an evolution in the way I think and create content that is supposed to 'represent' others. One reason why I embraced documentary is because it allows for space, time, and aesthetics to tell stories and show characters with more depth and background than other forms of media (especially news) do. As much as I wanted to detach from my journalistic background in terms of the extractive characteristics of news reporting, I embraced the ethical and normative values that come with it. As Butchard argues, journalism and documentary are deeply intertwined: "it is the ethics of journalism that shape public expectations about integrity, fairness, and good taste in documentary" (2006, p. 428). And vis-versa, documentary allows journalism to develop beyond the constraints of extractive and sensational news form.

Consultation with people on the ground, embracing the power of epistemology

One of the universal aspects of journalism is background research and preparation. Some mainstream journalists can nonetheless be criticised for coming into the field with preconceived ideas, getting the images they wanted without them necessarily reflecting the realities on the ground, and flying back to their comfort zones (parachute journalism). The way I tried to tackle this was to first speak to as many experts as possible. Women in gangs is a sub-topic that not much has been published on but after doing some investigating and speaking to different people, I managed to find people who had done extensive field research into this specific topic and was able to discuss my project and their findings in depth. I spoke extensively with researchers from UCT (Dariusz Dziewanski) and Stellenbosch (Immanuela Muller) about their own research about women in gangs and their findings, as a way to

understand some of the established and published opinions and data about this topic. These studies were conducted by academics and cannot fully reflect the lived realities on the ground but they served to give me a basic understanding of the topic. I was also in touch with a field worker from The Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime and another one from the NGO Safer Spaces. The other step that happened in conjunction was to speak to people on the ground themselves and ask them about their vision of the issue and their relationships to it. They became my most valued experts. This is linked to epistemology and the power of lived experiences, which refers to the idea that a 'marginalised' group would inherently have a better understanding and vantage point in understanding marginalisation than the oppressive class (Narayan, 2004). In this context, gangsters and people who grew up in this environment have a much better understanding of the gang world than I ever could claim, which I recognized and welcomed.

Relationship with stringers and need for independence

Another value of journalism that I took into the field was the need for editorial independence, which I coupled with co-creative practises. The 'need for independence' was related to the 'stringers' I was working with initially - notably the Ceasefire team. They introduced me to participants but in a very formal and what felt like an extractive manner: they would bring me to somebody's house, and basically set up an interview for me with them, expect that I would give them money, then leave and never go back. The Ceasefire team would get frustrated if I were to make contact with people without consulting them prior. I can recall one 'incident' where I met a woman who was formerly involved in gangs while I was at a Ceasefire event, and we made plans to get coffee and talk a few days later. When Jeremy (the person who acted as my main connecting point with potential participants) found out he seemed to get angry and flustered. Maybe one of the concerns was security as they felt responsible for my safety while I was in Hanover Park but this felt overbearing and unnecessary to me.

Paying participants

Another issue was that Ceasefire had established a pattern throughout the community through their previous dealings of paying participants. One of the participants I met through them, Nabo, I had to

give her twenty rand at the end of the interview. During the interview she told me that she was just waiting for that money to go buy her next hit. She agreed to do an interview but was obviously very uncomfortable during the process. She had signed the consent forms paper and told me I could use her image. The idea of paying participants is often listed as an ethical practice, especially in a context when there is a 'poverty' gap, but in this context, it was unappealing to me because it worked to pressure her into agreeing to participate. As such her consent was coerced, and I did not want to participate in her drug abuse, which she told me she was trying to escape.

There was a similar incident with another woman I met, there I said that I wouldn't give money, but I brought her a bag of groceries - and then had a discussion with Ceasefire people about it. I spoke about this with Glen, one of the Ceasefire workers who introduced me to her. We conducted the interview, I gave her the food, and when we left Glen asked me again for money, I said no and he gave her 20 rand from his pocket. We had a conversation after that and I said I felt uncomfortable with the idea that she would use that money to go buy drugs. He said "at the beginning of the interview you never talked about money, but because she sees a white person, she thinks yes there is something coming". He also told me that this was the way things worked here in South Africa, the Cape Flats and specifically Hanover Park, and that I as a foreigner should adapt to their ways of doing. It was an interesting point that I have been pondering but did settle on the idea of paying participants with food, goods, or small gifts as opposed to cash hand-outs. I was reluctant to do so especially on a once-off basis, as it felt very transactional to me. In a longer form collaboration, I would be and am still open to compensation but on a more budgeted and consultative basis between filmmaker and participant. One thing that I am considering doing but that was not discussed with my participants is sharing any profit that might result from the film. If it wins a prize in a festival with monetary value, then I would share some part of it with the participants, though not the police, as a way to compensate them from their time and valued contributions to the film.

Following my instincts and detaching myself

Because of these issues, I decided to detach myself from Ceasefire, and went about shooting the film by myself. In detaching myself I tried to reach out to other organisations notably Global Initiative for

Organized Crime and one of their field workers Lyndsay who had plans to link me up with a lot of people and help me film great sequences, but these things never panned out, so after months of trying I decided to go about it myself. This course of action did nonetheless leave me with unresolved answers such as the problematic aspects of a foreigner deciding to dismiss their main source of information and access to then carry on with that research on their own. Especially coming from an outsider, and a white outsider, who might be following a form of internalised hegemonic and Western "principle" of independence. This also strengthened my resolve to reflect on some practises which seem natural in the field and in the heat of the moment but might be rooted in some deeply internalised supremacist beliefs. Some may say it was taking unnecessary risk, but I think I could not have made such connections with my participants in any other way. I went back to Shanaaz, who then introduced me to Rushana and her sister and their world, without having a middle person (man) creating a sense of distance. In the context of my own experience, I did try to initiate my research using NGOs, but their practises felt problematic to me and I believe that in making myself "vulnerable" in very practical terms, it also showed dedication to my participants who felt I wasn't just there to extract their stories. It should be noted that again, my privilege in this situation is palpable: I had a "choice" to make myself vulnerable or not. It doesn't necessarily resolve the issue of representing the other but it shows my commitment to doing so in a deeper level than a lot of documentaries about gangsterism where film-makers film from a moving car, or behind a police officer's shoulder.

Setting boundaries early on and being transparent about them

In terms of paying my participants, I actually had an amazing experience with my three main characters, because I started by telling them that I couldn't hand out money and they never expected it after that. Shanaaz did ask me if this was paid the first two times I saw her - and I said that it wasn't but could help out with food or other basic necessity and she simply said "no it's alright, I'm asking because I know Pastor Engel (founder of Ceasefire) usually pays the participants". I did my best to eliminate all elements that I identified as potential coercion factors, notably the transactional element of handing out cash in exchange for an interview. And this became more evident every time I came back and that we built a deeper relationship. With the other two participants, Rushana and Madeniyah, Shanaaz had told them before I even met them that there was no money involved and they said ok. Madeniyah asked me once or

twice if I had some spare change, a few rands she was missing for her next hit but didn't seem like she came to me specifically because of my positionality.

The ethics of consistency

Kulik argues that "in anthropology other people's secrets are valuable commodities". Ethnographic success is often measured, and anthropological careers often made, by the extent to which the anthropologist gets others to "open up"' (1995, p. 11). Documentary filmmaking is very similar in that way - the emotion that participants bring to the screen can make or break a film. How to record that emotion in a non-extractive way? One way for me to do that was to be as 'consistent' and transparent as possible. The first step was to explain the thought process and plans for the film, and ask them what they felt was important from their experience and perspective to mention. Butchard talks about "consistency" (2006, p. 442) as an ethics of truth - which refers to following through on a decision or ques. That is something that I think stems from the passion of filmmaking, personal implication into the topic, and connections made with participants. The concept of consistency is something I explored above in terms of building trust. I realized the value of consistency also in making a film more 'true' as the filmmaker's understanding of the topic is bound to increase the more time is spent with participants. As a filmmaker, I understood better daily life in the Cape Flats the more I spent time there, but also I was able to gain my participants' trust, which then opened a whole new realm of experiences they were willing to share with me. This must nonetheless be coupled with an open mind from the filmmaker and a real willingness to understand their perspective, not only gaining access to new content. As Nash (2011) argues, "trust depends on openness and a commitment to being responsive to the beliefs and values of the Other". I think that my acknowledging and talking about my outsider status and the issues it might entail ethically helped us pave a more open and honest relationship. Also consistency in terms of going out of my way to make this co-creation happen. A lot of the times my phone calls or messages would go unanswered, and I had to actively go to their home to talk to them. A lot of the time I would show up and they wouldn't be there, but if a filmmaker wants to keep to their word, they will sometimes need to be extra patient and make that extra effort to fulfil that commitment. I realise that this was possible because I was working by myself on this project and answered only to my supervisor who was also patient and committed to me going through

with a co-creative approach but recognize that it might be harder to achieve in a more professional setting and especially in making international documentary where one might not have such 'easy' access to the participants over time.

Building a mutual relationship, building on each other's skills

I had a very different relationship with each of the participants but I do realise that they all felt a duty of care towards me, especially because I was working by myself in this relatively unsafe environment, driving in Hanover Park on a deteriorated scooter with my camera. It felt like people didn't see me as a threat and almost more like someone who needed to be protected. So Rushana and Shanaaz told me a number of times that if anyone tried to mess with me they would hurt them, and that no one would even think of messing with me because I was "one of their people". Every time we walked around they would tell people I am her friend and that I am with her, implying that I was under their protection. For this I am very grateful and consider myself lucky. It made me even more intentional in including them in the filmmaking process. It can be argued that this is problematic because it implies some form of 'deservingness' but I think this stems from the fact that trust flowed from both ways and me making myself vulnerable allowed for the power dynamics to shift slightly. The first two times I went to see Rushana and Madenyiah I would usually go through Shanaaz first who would take me there. On the third time I went directly there by myself and I felt that it created a shift in the two sister's (mostly Rushana who I became closer to) mindset, it felt like she saw that I trusted her, and that created space for her to trust me also. It felt like we became a team making this film together where they provided the skills that they had, notably status, access and protection while I provided the filmmaking, camera and storytelling skills. This project would not have been able to come to fruition without the convergence of these two. This could also be seen as a strategy on the part of the film-maker or a laziness in securing their own means of protection and getting free labour from participants who not only provide content but also security around Hanover Park. To me, this was a sign of transcending the filmmaker and participants relationship to reach a more personal and trusting relationship.

Do no harm - The relational dimension of care

As much as my participants felt a duty of care towards me, I also felt and still feel one towards them. Winston (2000) argues, without setting some legal prescriptions in stone, that filmmakers should protect their sources, especially when filming deviant behaviour. Filmmakers should keep in mind that their work can potentially expose participants who put their guard down, welcome the filmmaker into their lives and share intimate details about themselves. Pryluck argues that "A simple human principle can be invoked here: Those least able to protect themselves require the greatest protection. In the extreme, utter helplessness demands utter protection" (1976, p. 28). It felt like a double standard at times, but I was more aware of the need to 'protect' the gang members and represent them in a way that they were comfortable with than I was with the police. Hamington's idea that "Care ethics is a relational approach to morality predicated on the connected, social nature of human existence that values contextual and affective knowledge" (2012, p. 175) also adds another dimension to this issue which relates to the point before: it is relational, and as much as the gang members were "utterly helpless" in representing themselves in the mainstream media, I was "utterly helpless" when walking around Hanover Park by myself. As such, this duty of care was reciprocal and that formed the basis of the co-creation of the film.

The camera as a potentially harmful and trigger inducing process

One of the aspects of the 'do no harm' imperative also applies to the making of the film. Notably how to talk about difficult and traumatic past experiences without causing harm to the participant. The Murad Code, a set of established best practises for reporting on gender-based violence, which informed my process. The film is not about gender-based violence but themes of abuse were recurrent throughout the shoots. Having a woman in the room is one of the rules of the Murad code but I do argue this is a bullet-proof solution to abuse as gender does not guarantee ethical and safe behaviour. I therefore think it is important to reflect on the practises that guided my process of handling stories of abuse and other traumatic events that participants delved into. One way for me to avoid causing further harm is that I would never ask them directly about their abuse or their traumatic experiences and would let them bring it up only if they were comfortable with it. For example, Shanaaz talking about her abusive husband came

after she was telling me about shooting a gun once. She then instinctively showed me her scars. I then asked her if she was comfortable with me taking close ups, but I would not have done so if she hadn't shown them to me prior. For Madenyiah, speaking about the death of her son, came after I asked her how she started taking drugs. She then also offered to show me pictures of him, and share a file where she keeps all her fondest memories from him.

The rule I set myself was to create a 'safe space' where participants would be free to share whatever story they felt was important to explain how and why they got to where they are now. I also checked in with them throughout interviews and discussions if I hadn't crossed any lines. I made it a standard to let them know prior to shooting that they were not bound to answer all my questions and that if they were uncomfortable with any of the topics we explored, we could move on from it at any time. And I made sure I would check in with that consent throughout discussing emotional topics by asking them if they were alright, if they were comfortable sharing etc. I did my best to not pressure them into sharing any traumatic experience. In the post-production phase I also followed Murad code's principle to "add value of don't do it" (2022). This was notably a question I pondered when thinking of including the scene where Shanaaz talks about shooting her husband as a result of his abusive behaviour towards her. I did include it in the first cut because I felt it was important to show women stand up their abusers, but after second thought I took it out because I felt that the overall message the viewer was left with in this sequence was the fact that she was abused, because it was illustrated with scars whereas the self-defence story could hardly be illustrated, making it a less visually striking. It did not 'add value' as such and would in a way reinforce her 'subalternity' (Spivak, 1995), therefore I replaced it with an 'empowering story' of how she managed to exit the gangs.

The camera as a potentially healing tool

One theme that emerged and that really stuck with me throughout the making of this film is the idea of the camera acting as a facilitator in the healing process. The very first interview was with Charmaine, a social worker in the Ceasefire program - the only woman working there - who was the most insightful person who could tell me about women in gangs. She made it clear that she didn't like being on

TV or participating in film projects, but she agreed to do the interview as a sort of 'expert' and nothing else, which is one of the reasons why I ultimately did not include her in the film. Towards the end of the interview, when we spoke about her personal past in gangs, she became emotional, started crying and said "I don't like doing those interviews because I always get emotional. Telling this story, it's like reliving that time in my life". Thus, we spoke briefly about how it's normal to become emotional and then Alfred, another Ceasefire worker, was making coffee in the next room and overheard, came in and said: "with the use of the camera you have the opportunity to counsel yourself through listening to yourself because what the camera does is that it becomes a soundboard for you, because whatever you speak to the camera is bounced back to you". I feel like this was quite a powerful moment in making me also realise both the responsibility of a filmmaker in dealing with hard pasts but also the caution that needs to be taken when dealing with these topics. Being a novice both at filmmaking and 'counselling', I had to take every interview with an open mind and tried to speak to participants more as a person opening up to another person about their experiences as opposed to a journalist documenting a story. I argue that it is important to be humane and stick around after they've opened up this much, talk to them, smoke a cigarette or drink some tea and create an opportunity for them if they want to talk about it and share how it made them feel. If faced with a similar experience in the future, I think I would seek guidance from a mentor or editor in terms of the best practises in dealing with past trauma, but overall informal conversation and continued collaboration with the participants made me feel like these exchanges impacted them positively overall.

Prevent harm to participants after production

In the post-production phase, my duty of care towards them was mostly about protecting them from any negative repercussions my film might have on the people I filmed. I was initially going to write this paper mostly about the concept of 'do no harm' and negotiating consent with participants who are depicted in the film doing criminal activities. Notably the extract of the film where Rushana talks about smuggling drugs into prison. But after further thought, I realised that in my mind there wasn't much ambiguity in the matter: my participant's protection was my first concern, and I would work the film around that as opposed to asking them to wrap their heads around what they might be comfortable to share even if it was putting them at risk. Showing Rushana a final cut of the film was a priority for me for both

reasons: because she was somewhat invested in the making, but also because she is the one most exposed to potential repercussions once/if this film broadcasts. I was also dedicated to showing the film to Madenyiah who shares intimate reflections about her son's death, and really made herself vulnerable in the making of the film.

My main concern was that she would not want me to share the first sequence of her where she has black eyes after her partner beat her the night before. I did warn her I included this sequence as it could have been potentially triggering, and it is not the most flattering vision of oneself. I was committed to changing anything that they felt was not acceptable, but this would have been a very difficult thing to do in this case. She was not concerned about that and told me she really enjoyed this part because it showed the reality of her life, and she willingly shared these aspects with me initially. The second was showing her conducting illegal activities, and she said she wanted me to show her face, even after explaining the potential repercussions. In this case I decided to take an executive decision that the film would remain confidential between myself, the examiner and the participants in Hanover Park. A lot of consideration went into anonymizing this scene of Rushana. The first is obviously the aesthetic of the film, which takes a blow in the anonymous version. The second one is character development, which I delve into later in this paper. Another concern was also that Madenyiah might not like seeing herself in such a vulnerable position in the film (talking about her son's death and showing pictures of him). I showed the film to Rushana and Madenyiah at the same time because they are sisters and live together. The three of us cried during that sequence, and they said it was really hard to watch as it makes them very emotional, but they were also happy that this sequence was included in the film because it represents such a turning-point in their lives.

Informed consent

Nash (2012) argues that giving participants veto power over the final cut is an essential part of ethical documentary filmmaking. In a sense, it all relates back to informed consent - a highly debated topic among academics (Pryluck, 1976; Winston, 2000). All consent must of course be given by someone who is aware and not under any threat, coercion, or under the influence. In the context of this film, because

drugs were an everyday occurrence, the idea of informed consent could have sometimes been tainted. The way I handled that was by going back often, early during the day when they would be less likely to be under the influence. For example, one time I had made plans with Rushana to come to her house and show her the film, but when I arrived, she was taking drugs and I decided against showing her, and rather came back in the morning when she was less likely to be under the influence. I also decided to talk about the film and explain to my participants which parts I included in the draft edit or not from the last shoot. I told them about my vision for the film and the progress, how I was hoping to move forward as a way to keep them updated and get their informed consent throughout (Mackenzie et al., 2007) as well as showing them a final cut of the film as soon as I could. This process was informed by the belief that consent cannot be given once and then lasts forever, it must constantly be re-negotiated. As such, keeping them up to date with the plans and developments was a priority. We discussed the fact, initially, that this film would not be broadcasted on South Africa television but would likely be uploaded on the internet - Youtube or similar - which is streamable from anywhere. There was a little wariness on Rushana's part the second time I went to film - that day the atmosphere at home was a little tense, her partner had just been sent to jail, she was feeling sick, she was in a bad mood and told me she wasn't so sure about showing the film on internet. I explained more extensively my project and where I was hoping to display it, my commitment to keeping her safe and including her in the decision-making process, and she became more interested and open. Here our discussion resulted in a compromise on my part (which I very happy to make) to commit to only uploading the film on password protected platforms and check in with her about other forms of distribution. We built a trusting relationship and after that, she completely changed her mindset regarding the film. She started calling me to tell me about the things that were happening in her life, that I might be interested in filming, and sending me some videos of random things like parties or funny things happening around Hanover Park. She was also more interested and eager to show me new aspects of her life every time I went back and introduced me to more of her friends. Even after this project was done, we are still collaborating, and she is still introducing me to new aspects of her life for a longer form character-led documentary based around her.

Truth and representation - Documentary and creative affordances

Brian Winston proposes that documentary film-making ethics sits at the intersection between journalistic ethics and the "amorality" of creativity (2000, p. 132). The way I understand it is in relation to the concept of truth and 'actual truth'. Idea of truth as a matter of perspective and not universal. One moment when the concept of truth and ethics of "doing right" by the truth that came up during the shooting of Unusual suspects is when Rushana was telling me about smuggling drugs to her husband in prison. Because documentary is more about showing than telling, I asked her if she could show me how she did it. Showing and witnessing illegal activities is a moral grey-zone that I had to grapple with. Initially, she was planning on buying drugs, packing them up - regardless of the presence of the camera - and was going to let me know so that I could film her doing it. I was careful not to pressure her in any way to do so, as I did not want to be complicit in illegal activity or push the participant to conduct illegal activity. When I was supposed to shoot this sequence, Rushana told me she had not acquired the material but that she could simulate the act of packing up drugs using bath salts. We did shoot the sequences, but I did not include it in the final cut because of the ethical implications in terms of representing the 'truth'.

In a larger sense, this relates to 'actuality' vs. 'representation' of truth. The aim of this sequence was to illustrate a larger truth than simply handling drugs. They wanted to show me how they did it and I made an executive decision to not show it the way they wanted. Many considerations came into play: first I was worried about putting my participants at risk if law enforcement personnel saw the film - showing them handling drugs is a punishable offence. Using footage of them doing so that was 'fake' (made using bath salts) would be just as risky for them if I didn't indicate that it was fake. Therefore, I felt like I had a responsibility to make it clear to the audience that this scene was manufactured, and I was reluctant to do so. The observational mode is inspired by 'cinema verité' which is aimed at showing the "truth" as it is. Not making it explicit that these were fake drugs would have felt like manufactured dramatization. And mentioning that they were fake would have taken away the dramatic effect. In all fairness, this decision might have been driven by traditional film-making practises, and maybe a covert willingness to be more sensationalistic. Overall, now that I reflect on it, I feel like I violated the concept of co-creation. If faced with a similar situation in the future, I would try to think through these issues prior to the shoot and shoot in a way that would make explicit the need to manufacture this scene (ie. because it's an illegal activity).

This decision was also motivated by concerns in terms of protecting sources: if they tell me this is how they usually do with real drugs, and then show me with fake drugs, isn't that just as incriminating? I think I would film any scene with demonstration of illegal activity while making sure the people I film are anonymous, whether real or fake.

There are some other incriminating parts in the film, but it felt extrapolative to show this 'thrilling scene' and imply to people that it was real when it wasn't. Another consideration was that of double standards: there is a scene in the film where the police uncover illegal narcotics - if they had planted them and recreated this scene for the camera, I would definitely not have included it in the film, or even filmed it. The two situations might not be comparable because one party literally has power over the other, and because the police finding drugs would make them look 'good' whereas the gangsters having drugs might put them at risk.

Film as advocacy - Post production/semiotics

One of the most important things I have learnt in the process of editing this film is about the editing of documentary film-making. As Butchard argues, "perception (making sense) is always mediated by expression (signifying sense) and vice versa" (2006, p. 435). Editing is very intentional. I've come to realise that a filmmaker doesn't (or at least should not) use any shot lightly. Every shot, every sentence spoken, every sequence conveys a message. One of my fears in making this film was to fall into a 'poverty porn' trap (exploiting imagery of poverty for sensationalistic purposes). Filming in a space that is "underprivileged" and that almost exclusively appears in the mainstream media as a homogeneous body of violence and poverty means that a filmmaker should be conscious of the effects that the images and narrative produced will have in that media landscape. As a filmmaker I tried to be aware of stereotypes and challenge (or at least not confirming) them.

In search of a counter-narrative

I recognize that this film is not necessarily a radical counter-narrative to the mainstream narrative, but I did try to focus less on the flashy parts of plotting against a rival gang and get more at the everyday lived realities. It is hard to get deeply personal in a twenty-six-minute documentary with three to four characters, but I tried to address different aspects and "moments" of life of women in gangs. Shanaaz, a reformed gangster, offers insights into the empowering aspects of joining a gang, departing from the usually "broken home" narrative. She also gives us a glimpse into the hardship of quitting. Rushana brings in the "active gangster" element, where she is both a victim and a villain in a way - victim of her abusive partner, but also taking on these violent traditionally male characteristics in her actions and words. She then grows as a character to take over her partner's business and becomes the mastermind in smuggling drugs into prison. Again, this departs from the stereotypical idea that gangsters smuggle drugs in back alleys and offers a glimpse into gang life that is not focused on violence. Spt. Marree remains fairly conventional in her depiction of police, but she also embodies a strong persona and a leader in the fight against gangsterism which we rarely see in a woman, especially a woman of colour. Madeniyah is less present throughout the film, but she brings the more down-to-earth harsh reality of why people live that way, why they become addicted to drugs and struggle to escape it, which is hardly heard of in mainstream media.

I tried to make a film about gangsterism that delves deeper into the emotional and lived experiences of gang members that what we find in the mainstream media. The film is relatively sensational given the subject matter, and the theme of violence is recurrent in the film but, I think, it comes out through the stories and experiences people share as opposed to a deliberate focus on violent acts in the film. Another way I tried to detach the story line from the mainstream narratives through character development. Especially with Rushana who we see at the beginning with black eyes, and then we end with an image of her getting rich because her abusive boyfriend is in jail. That was one of my biggest concerns in concealing her identity for protection (as she is shown handling drugs, as discussed prior in this paper). Anonymizing her would lose that character development and her embodiment of the idea that gangsterism can empower women - that they are not only oppressed in that space. Most of the films I've seen about gangsterism are about men and are sensation-driven or about someone turning their life around, after gangsterism. Here I wanted to appreciate someone who is living the gangster life, at times oppressed and at times empowered

by it. In retrospect, I wish I had made a more character-led documentary about her where I would delve into more nuanced and complex aspects of her personality and back-story, a project I am now pursuing. There are nonetheless some limitations particularly in terms of exploring the notion of what constitutes a gangster. My research could have delved deeper into what it represented to them, and how that measured up to mainstream narratives.

Self reflexivity

One thing that I felt was very important and that I also enjoy in other documentaries is when the filmmaker signals their own presence throughout the film. I think it is important especially in the observational mode, which still carries to some extent the cinema vérité legacy of 'detachment' and 'objectivity'. Butchart (2006) argues that one way to make a documentary while following an 'ethics of truth' is through "doubling' - through calling attention back to the filmmaker and to the layout of the documentary. The way I did that is by using three "doubling techniques", notably including my voice at times in the film. I did not make use of this extensively, but I did try to include one question from myself, the filmmaker, for each character. I also intentionally included a scene where participants speak to me outside of a real shooting moment, either interview or other. The sequence where we enter the 'Americans's headquarter room, we hear Raeez (one of the secondary characters) talking to me, asking me if I remember Shanaaz, and pointing out that this man sitting next to us is her ex-husband. I think this moment is quite valuable because it draws attention to a lot of aspects that are outside the scope of what the camera can capture: we hear Shanaaz comment, but never see her in that scene, reminding the viewer that the camera can only capture a fraction of what is really happening in that room. Another form of doubling that is much more common throughout the film, is when participants explain something to the filmmaker directly. Rushana's speech for example is often punctuated by phrases like 'you understand?'. Again, this draws back to the 'person behind the camera' and might signal a cultural difference, as she is often checking if I actually do understand some part of Afrikaans slang etc. Because the film was shot with one single camera at the time, which I held myself while asking questions, some parts of explanation, like the scene where Rushana is holding up a packet of heroin and explaining the price outside vs. inside prison. This scene looks almost like she is talking directly to the camera (explaining to me behind the

camera), drawing attention back to it.

Mental and emotional labour of doing this work

The emotional aspect of journalists' work is often associated with alienation, fatigue and anxiety (Hochschild, 1983; Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Dworznik, 2006) – emotional labour in terms of journalists experiencing vicarious trauma and often suppressing their emotions, as to not let it 'affect their work'. As I've mentioned before, this is my first experience in making a 'cross-cultural' film and I had never been faced before (in such a close way) with the type of violence that characterises gang life, and it sometimes did get to me and caused me anxiety and unease, especially in the context of Cape Town where inequality and injustice are so glaring and in close proximity. And I think if filmmakers witness these types of experiences and do not feel touched by them, they should really self-reflect about their intentions and morals in dealing with such topics.

Making this film was an emotional rollercoaster, between enjoying my experiences, making incredible connections, and witnessing people going through traumatic events. In my own experience, the camera was definitely a sort of emotional shield. I think I realised a lot about the weight of these moments in the editing stages, where I was reliving the moment in a way - but this time focusing more on the actual content that on the technical aspects of shooting, interview and making sure participants felt safe. I obviously felt emotional when filming Scarlett's funeral, the four-year-old girl who died in the crossfire of gang-related violence (used as the closing sequence of the film), when Shanaaz told me about her abusive husband and showed me the resulting scars all over her body (not included in the film), or Madenyiah sharing her experience with her child who died. I would always check in with the participants a few days after putting themselves in such a vulnerable position, because as explained prior, going through these moments was probably even more traumatic for them. This could be an informal visit, call or text message asking if they were feeling alright after, genuinely asking how they were doing.

The main element I feel like I was lacking is preparation. If faced with a similar experience in the future, I hope and think I will be more prepared and aware of the possibility of vicarious trauma happening.

Preparation in terms of knowing people's stories before going to shoot - in this case I was mostly discovering while I was shooting, and I believe that with proper preparation, themes of violence should not come as a surprise. Nonetheless, anticipating the fact that themes of violence could surface does not prevent the emotional response it might elicit. Therefore, I think my lack of preparation resides mainly in terms of support and setting up feedback sessions with a mentor or editor after a potentially emotionally heavy shoot, even if just a five minute conversation to breath and take in the emotional weight of these moments. One thing that felt very strange and uncomfortable was to go from a 'historically underprivileged' space where people share some emotionally heavy stories, or witnessing a funeral, and driving back about fifteen to twenty minute to the luxurious, safer city centre. One thing I did systematically was to stop halfway on my way home, sit in a coffee shop or park and journal about my experience, thoughts, and ideas. This small break worked as a "decompression bubble" for me and journaling is something I did to keep a record of events - to use as data for this explication - but I would recommend to other filmmakers to do so, especially when working alone.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I learnt so much not only from making the film but also from talking about it with academic mentors and from reflecting on the process. I argue that cross-cultural encounters are indeed problematic and that the best way to address the issues associated with it is by coming into the process with an awareness that one can learn from it, and an open-mind. This paper, based on my own practises and reflections in making Unusual suspects - girls in gangs, focused on themes of positionality, normative journalistic values, ethics of consistency, ethics of truth, protecting sources, questions regarding truth and the creative affordances of documentary, and post-production considerations in making a film that challenges the mainstream narrative. In terms of positionality, the main contribution this paper can make is to show the need and power of reflecting one's position vis-à-vis their participants, acknowledging it and addressing it with participants. Beyond seeing the problematic aspect of it, one should also embrace the affordances that such a position might confer them. Embracing affordances does not mean taking advantage of that privilege but rather using it in a conscious and considerate way, while acknowledging the limits of it. I also argue that journalistic values such as integrity, rigour, fairness, truth - however

problematic and contested these might be - should serve as a basis for engagement with cultures different to their filmmaker. Consulting with participants, researchers and getting as many viewpoints as possible about the issue was important to me before going into the field. I argue a filmmaker should be aware of stereotypes and seek to challenge them. In the spirit of journalistic values, one should always remain critical and not necessarily accept local practises as truth-claims. In my experience notably this refers to compensating participants - which I argue should be done but not in a transnational way - and building real connections with participants. Building these connections with participants was a turning point in the film, where transparency, consistency and honesty created space for co-creation. Co-creation in this context took place more as an appreciation of mutually exclusive skills sets, as opposed to collaboration in terms of editing and cinematography skills. Mutual trust and relational care were central to making this film happen, and would not have been possible without the voluntary efforts and commitment from the participants. The idea of duty of care and 'do no harm' took many dimensions: the very conscious efforts made to not inflict further harm or re-traumatize participants who opened up and put themselves in a vulnerable position during the shoot. It was also a central concern in the post-production and distribution phase when the priority was to protect participants from any legal repercussions they could face. Thinking through ways to improve the filmmaker's mental health in creating a documentary with emotionally heavy content is also something that filmmakers would benefit from taking into consideration in their preparation. This explication also highlighted some shortcomings on my part and prompted me to pose some questions that remain unanswered, especially regarding the concept of 'truth', and the sensationalistic tendencies that potentially overshadowed some decision-making in the editing process. Because of that, I think going through the process of reflecting on one's process in the field is very insightful. Every experience is highly location- and context-dependent and one's behaviour and practises should always adapt to these specificities, but it does help to come into a new environment with some pre-established rules and intentions, and I hope this explanation can help offer some guidance.

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