

Editorial

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This issue of JAF presents five films from Greece, India, Guinea Bissau, and Cameroon. The films vary in approach and style from the sensorial *Stereotype*, Arjang Omrani's meditation on racial and gender judgment, to Roger Canal's *Chasing Shadows*, a classic observational study of an indigenous prophetic religious movement. The realities of survival migration for a teenage refugee from Afghanistan in Nikos Katsos and Christos Stefanou's film *...In Between...*, and Trond Waage's *The World Has Not Changed*, about the loss of cultural identity and the power of radio to revitalize it, are stories told through a defined protagonist. Five films with five different story-telling strategies that illustrate the breadth and diversity of anthropological filmmaking today.

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...In Between... A film by Nikos Katsos and Christos Stefanou, 21 minutes

Filmmakers Nikos Katsos and Christos Stefanou create a rare personal portrait of the crisis of migration as they enter the life of Omid, an optimistic, energetic 15 year old from Afghanistan. His dreams are not unlike most teenaged boys. He yearns to study, listen to music, have a girlfriend and be a doctor like his father. But unlike most boys his age, Omid is a refugee from violence and persecution in Afghanistan. After his father was murdered for treating Westerners at the Kandahar hospital, Omid, together with his mother and sister began their arduous escape to Western Europe. They managed to reach Greece just as the borders closed. In a refugee camp they await an official decision on reunification with family already in Europe – a decision that could take years. But life doesn't stop and Omid can't just sit and wait for his future to arrive. As he engages with the world around him the film poses questions about the personal realities of survival migration, measured against Western society's often impersonal view of an expanding migration crisis.

Stereotype, a film by Arjang Omrani, 6 minutes

Stereotype experiments with personal narratives about ethnic, gender and racial judgments as a transnational phenomenon without borders or cultural boundaries. By juxtaposing sensory images with the voices of the narratives, *Stereotype* reveals the distance between

the subjectivity of prejudices and the object of judgment. Filmmaker Arjang Omrani writes, “All our stories are imprinted on our bodies, the words of those who drove us away or welcomed us, are all signs on our path”. Omrani is engaged with audio-visual, sensorial, and performative modes of storytelling, most notably about the transcultural condition and the personal “face” of migration.

Kashi Labh, a film by Rajat Nayyar, 43 minutes

For many Hindus, dying in Varanasi (also known as Banaras and Kashi) is believed to secure liberation from the endless cycle of rebirth and death, thereby ensuring unity with the divine. The film follows a middle-aged son as he awaits and prepares for his elderly mother’s death. He has brought her to Varanasi all the way from Delhi - over 600 kilometers away, arranged for religious specialists to read scriptures in their rented room and for musicians to play devotional music. While waiting for his mother’s death, the son bathes in the Ganges to cleanse his sins. He phones his family with updates and instructions on where and how to feed sacred cows in the street. Inevitably, the mother passes and the camera follows her body as it is placed on the cremation pyre. As proscribed in ritual, the son encircles the pyre and sets it alight. There are dozens of cremation fires burning on the shore. As the pyre burns the son expresses his satisfaction at having fulfilled his duty. *Kashi Labh* rejects the sentimentality often found in portrayals of death and dying. This is a film about the intimacy of “a good death”, and a final act of love and respect between mother and son.

Chasing Shadows, a film by Roger Canals, 70 minutes

Based on original ethnographic research by Ramon Sarró and Marina Temundo, *Chasing Shadows*, explores the *Kyangyang* religious movement in Guinea-Bissau. *Kyangyang* refers to “the shadows”. Its members are part of a prophetic movement born in the 1980’s in Guinea-Bissau, among Blanta farmers. It was severely repressed by the State and entered a deep decline. The *Kyangyang* are seized by the spirits of their ancestors and under their influence followers heal the sick, predict the future and communicate through prophetic writing, glossolia (speaking in tongues) and ritual spirit possession. Filmmaker Roger Canals set out in 2017 to document former practitioners but discovered a resurgence of the movement, mostly from the population of young Blanta families. *Chasing Shadows* uses a traditional observational approach, juxtaposing actualities, scenes of rituals and contextualizing interviews to reveal layers of meaning in the *Kyangyan* belief system. The filmmaker states that the idea for the film came from the Prophetess Notombikte, who is said to be the creator of the religious movement.

The World Has Not Changed, a film by Trond Waage, 36 minutes

In Ngaoundéré, Cameroon, radio journalist Soumou interviews a local Pèrè elder. “Since childhood,” he asks, “do you think the world has changed?” The elder responds, “The world has not changed. It is we who have changed the world. When you sow millet, does maize grow? If you sow groundnuts and harvest maize, then you can say the world has changed.” The interview will be broadcast from radio station CRTV Adamaoua, in Northern Cameroon, where a team of dedicated journalists - the first to program in Pèrè languages - work to give voice to a widely dispersed people, revitalize traditions and keep the language alive. The Pèrè people are an ethnic minority divided by national borders,

religious ideology and a rural/urban divide. Filmmaker / anthropologist Trond Waage closely observes journalist and collaborator Soumou as he interviews elders and broadcasts their knowledge to eager listeners across the Pere Plains. *The World Has Not Changed* is about both a marginalized ethnic minority being rapidly absorbed into the dominant Islamic society, and the power of radio and journalism to revitalize Pèrè identity and create dialogue across barriers of ideology, language and culture.