

IMISCOE Workshop “Using images in migration research: a mutual exchange between scholars and artists”, Prague 30 June – 2 July 2016

Title: Storytelling in the film “No child’s play. Consequences of war, flight and persecution on the second generation of refugees in Switzerland.” (2016)

Proposal of an academic paper by Face Migration (Martina Kamm, Dana Pedemonte, Anna Weber, Bülent Kaya)

1. Background

In Switzerland, until recently practically no data or knowledge has existed on the traumatic consequences of war, flight and persecution in the daily lives of refugees living in the country. Until the 1990s, this topic was practically unknown not only in academic research, but also amongst the public and professionals working with traumatized refugees, such as therapists, social workers and doctors. This unsatisfactory situation changed when the Swiss Red Cross commissioned a broad study on the topic in 1991 under the title: “Die Sprache der extremen Gewalt” (“The language of extreme violence”) conducted by former Professor for Ethnology at the University of Berne, Hans-Rudolf Wicker. The results of the study clearly proved how much the refugees living in Switzerland were still suffering from the consequences of the violence they had experienced before their arrival. Based on the study’s results the first national therapy centre for victims of torture, today called “Ambulatorium für Folter- und Kriegsoffer AFK” (“Ambulatory for victims of torture and war”), was set up in Berne in 1995. Its inauguration has been followed by an ever-increasing number of clients asking for support or on-site assistance. Since then, four further Ambulatories for victims of torture and war have opened their doors in the cities of Zurich, Geneva, Lausanne and most recently St. Gallen. All together, they now form the national network, “Support for Torture Victims.”

For about three years the Ambulatory of the Red Cross in Berne has offered support and therapy for adults but also for children and younger refugees. This has become more important as in recent years there has been an increase in the number of young children and minors – some of them unaccompanied – coming into Switzerland as refugees. They need immediate support and it is extremely important that institutions such as schools, asylum organisations, medical practitioners and therapists are well informed and prepared. That is one of the reasons why members of the mentioned network, led by the Red Cross, very recently founded a platform that reunites experts of different institutions, authorities and NGOs with the overall aim of coming together in order to discuss further measures in this relatively new field (see list of background literature below).

While the situation has gradually shifted towards a better understanding of the effects of traumatic experiences on the first generation of refugees since 2000, there has been less emphasis on the plight of second generation refugees suffering the traumatizing consequences of war, torture and persecution. This was precisely the reason why we decided to approach that new field with filmed stories and a publication based on extended interviews with four young adults belonging to this second generation of refugees. The fact that they have spent a major part of their life in Switzerland or, in some cases, were born there, gives them the chance to witness their life stories with a certain distance to their parents’ and/or their own traumatic experience without the presence of

an interpreter. This was a clear advantage to the project as it allowed us not only to identify coping styles and resources of the second generation but also to use an unusual methodological approach for the project, as we will see below.

2. Project aims and research questions

The project “No child’s play. Consequences of war, flight and persecution on the second generation of refugees in Switzerland”, which we concluded in 2016, aims to fill the existing gap of knowledge by means of a film and a publication. It aims to question how young refugees who were born in Switzerland or arrived here at a very young age cope with traumatic consequences of persecution, war or flight. More specifically, we asked them, in which manner their parents’ and their own past touches their daily routines and different areas of life (family life, school, spare time, work, etc.) with the aim to identify their experienced difficulties, different coping strategies and resources.

The project is a follow-up to an exhibition named “Mit der schwierigen Erinnerung in der sicheren Fremde” (“Living with incriminating memories in a safe country”), which was realised by a part of our team between 2007 and 2011. This preceding project aimed to explore the consequences of war and persecution on the first generation of refugees and consisted of illustrated life stories (photo and text) of 16 refugees living in Switzerland. ‘No Child’s Play’ follows the story of four young adults, three of which belong to the families that had already participated in the preceding project. The four protagonists of ‘No Child’s Play’ originally come from Turkey, Afghanistan, Vietnam and Kosovo respectively, and live with their families in the German and French speaking parts of Switzerland. The project was realised in cooperation with the five “Ambulatories for victims of torture and war” in Berne, Zurich, St. Gallen, Lausanne und Geneva mentioned above. Some of their experts answered the questions of our protagonists in the publication and provided background information for young adults with traumatic experiences as well as guidelines to recognize and deal with their symptoms.

In order to get answers to our research questions, we accompanied our four protagonists and their families through their daily life for a couple of days, and conducted semi-directive interviews on film, both in the family setting and with the protagonists on their own. For the interviews we developed an extensive questionnaire, which was structured around different themes with the overall aim to get a multifaceted portrait of our four protagonists and to identify their strategies and resources to cope with their traumatic experiences.

The first questions focused on the protagonists’ self-description and the way their family sees and perceives them (mirror effect). Then we approached their life story with questions about their childhood and adolescence, especially marking good and bad experiences as well as their daily routines. In order to get a systemic perspective of the dynamics of the young people’s daily family-life we further asked them about the different roles and responsibilities in the domestic setting, the role of language and religion, as well as about their different networks and transnational activities. Then we went into more detail and asked them about the reasons for their emigration, how they experienced their flight and journey as well as their arrival in Switzerland and to what extent traumatic experiences played a role at arrival, in early youth or today.

In a second part, we questioned the role of memories and their influence on the migrants’ daily lives (e.g. In which situations do they remember their past? What are their strategies to deal with the traumatic experiences their parents or they themselves went through? Do they talk about it in the family setting or with others? How do their migration background and the delicate memories strengthen or weaken them?). Furthermore, we wanted to know the perception of their current and former health condition and how it is or was influenced by their own or their parents traumat-

ic experience. We also asked them about their health literacy and their strategies of well-being (e.g. How do they look after themselves? Where do they search for help if they don't feel well? Etc.). The last part of our questionnaire dealt with the protagonists' work life and spare time, their special needs as well as their personal and professional wishes and visions for the future. This vast collection of research questions builds the framework for the filmed interviews and the ensuing documentary film whose methodology we will discuss in the following section.

3. Methodological reflections: Storytelling in social sciences and communication design.

Confidence building between the families, the two social scientists and the filmmaker conducting the interviews was a main pre-condition for filming and asking questions in this sensitive domain. Due to the long-term nature of the project and the fact that most of the interviewed persons had already been familiar with some of the team members, there has been a basis of trust we were able to build on. Additionally, we decided to begin our interviews with a photographer making a family portrait of the whole family – leaving them room to decide by themselves, where and how they want to be seated and thus enabling us an informal beginning and setting. The interviews were conducted and filmed in the first place to find out about our protagonists' different stories and coping strategies. Beside that we accompanied them for a couple of days to grab situations of their daily routines. As a result, we obtained a great amount of footage, which was later spotted and transcribed and allowed, in a further step, the identification of different significant themes.

The relevance of the topic which was pointed out in our questionnaire, as well as in the fact that the interviews were filmed, gave our protagonists the confidence to reveal stories and feelings, which might not have emerged under other circumstances. This fact placed great responsibility on the filmmakers in selecting and editing different shots, images and statements for the resulting film. While emphasizing some aspects of the protagonists' stories it was crucial not to change their overall content. In order to be sure that none of the stories that our protagonists told were misunderstood or modified, we offered them the possibility to intervene at any time while we were editing the film.

In the process of the data analysis and the definition of the main themes, it became clear that the family plays a crucial role in the development of different measures adopted by our protagonists to cope with their own and their parents' traumatic experiences. The presence and cohesion of the family seems to be a very important resource to handle their past, while other areas of life appear to play rather a secondary role. The stories we were told were very personal, impressive and often overwhelming and the most significant statements were made in the context of the protagonists' home and family setting. That is why during the process of editing we started to gradually select excerpts of interview situations in the family setting rather than the ones showing our protagonists in their surroundings at work or at leisure time. On the image level, we decided to focus on the proximity that goes along with close-up images, the expressions on our protagonists' faces or the interactions between them and their family members and, as a consequence, to show the subjectivity and individuality of their stories.

By overlapping cuts between stories, sound and image, we underlined the similarity of the topics discussed by our protagonists and their families but also highlighted the differences in statements made on these topics. This allowed us to show a bigger picture of these topics without trying to make an overall objective statement - giving a condensed impression of the consequences of war, flight and persecution on 'our' second generation of refugees in Switzerland.

It was crucial, to find a balance between the spoken content and the images, that is, the stories, which we found impressive but also hard to follow, and the images, which might help to illustrate

those stories, but also create some space between those stories and the viewer. Therefore, we asked our protagonists, to send us footage of different topics which they recorded using their own cell phone such as recorded images or of objects or situations they were feeling comfortable with.

The footage we received indicated a certain focus, which we had already found highly recurrent: During war times our protagonists had been children protected by their parents. They had perceived war as a game, they even believed their parents when they told them about fireworks in front of their buildings, which in reality were bombs.

This focus led us to choose a visual counterpart: The «children's play». We included footage of children's toys originating from all over the world, which we filmed in a puppet museum. This footage allowed us to structure the film by dividing it into different thematic blocks and giving the viewers room to process the stories. They are the only images in the film that try to transport a certain objectivity, admitting a big range of associations and placing our topic into a broader context.

The film "No child's play. Consequences of war, flight and persecution on the second generation of refugees in Switzerland" ends with a shot of a toy recorded by one of our protagonists using her cell phone – telling a very personal story and illustrating the connection between content and image in the film.

4. *Participation and the transfer of knowledge*

Participation and exchange play an essential role in the project. From the beginning, our protagonists were actively involved in the project and had the opportunity to participate in the different steps of the creation process.

The four young adults played a particularly important part in the publication as they delivered questions concerning their own history and the second generation's strategies to cope with traumatic experience. In a participatory process, we wanted to give them a vivid tool to express themselves and address their worries and questions to experts from the different "Ambulatories for victims of torture and war". In a synthesising process we edited the different questions of our participants and the answers of the experts in French and German and created a tool that is comprehensive for a broader public, addressing this sensitive topic publicly for the first time in its complexity. The publication itself does not only provide background information for young adults with traumatic experiences or guidelines to recognize and deal with their symptoms but is also a tool of mutual exchange and dialogue. Additionally, the publication delivers information and contact addresses of specific medical and social centres specialised in this certain topic.

We decided to use the medium of film because we regard it as an excellent and easily accessible tool to provide professionals and the broader public with a first insight into the complex and multifaceted aspects of a new and highly relevant topic. The film, together with the publication, serves as a sensitizing instrument that increases the presence and participation of refugees in social life and sensitizes public institutions as well as the broad public to a delicate topic that still remains a taboo. In the long run, the project aims to strengthen the resources of the young participants as well as their families and to improve their medical support. It gives them a voice to talk about their needs and favours their visibility in society.

In the coming year, the publication will be distributed to different medical and social institutions and stakeholders (e.g. drop-in centres, general practitioners, public schools, etc.) which are in direct contact with traumatised children and young adults. Furthermore, various public conferences are planned to present the highly topical subject to a broader public. Discussion forums will follow the screenings of the film with different stakeholders from public services, politics and the medical sector as well as representatives from the first and second generation of refugees such as our pro-

tagonists and their families. The results from the different forums will allow us to identify the needs of the second generation of refugees living in Switzerland as well as those of new arrivals, and allow us to develop recommendations for institutions in the medical and social sector providing services for this target group. Last but not least, our film and the publication serve as a basis for further research and an exhibition we are currently planning as a follow-up project, with the aim to further make this delicate topic visible and generate additional knowledge about this still quite unexplored field of research.

5. Team and contact details

Martina Kamm (lead)

The sociologist is founder and director of the interdisciplinary platform Face Migration ([www.face-migration](http://www.face-migration.ch)). From 2001 – 2009 she held the position as Researcher at the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies SFM at the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Since 2009, she works as a freelance migration expert in Zurich, Switzerland, and specializes on intercultural projects, migration and literature, irregular migration and health of migrants.

Dana Pedemonte (partner)

The Communication Designer and Master of Research on the Arts works in the fields of Design-Research, Cultural Probes as well as Social and Visual Communication. The focus of her work lies in the fields of migration and intercultural communication. She teaches at the University of Arts in Berne and works in different research-projects as well as a graphic designer in her own studio.

Anna Weber (partner)

The psychologist and social anthropologist worked in different positions in the psychiatric sector before moving to Paris in 2010, where she was the project coordinator for family and children's affairs at the *Centre Socioculturel Belleville*. Since March 2013, Anna Weber works as a scientific collaborator at the Institute of Sociological Research (IRS) of the University of Geneva in the fields of public health, migration and diversity, urban sociology and social innovation.

Bülent Kaya (partner)

Bülent Kaya is political scientist and senior researcher. He has a broad experience in researching vulnerable groups in the field of migration and health. He has worked extensively on incorporation policies for migrants, discrimination on the labour market, on cultural and linguistic diversity.

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