

*Roger Horn*

## SCENES FROM A TRANSIENT HOME: FILMING TIME AND SPACE AT 18FPS (FRAMES PER SECOND)

Viewing *Scenes from a Transient Home* (Horn 2019) in the presence of colleagues at screenings such as the Biennial Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society 2019 time and space expand and collapse simultaneously. The film plays at a speed slightly altered from its original Super 8mm rendering of time at 18 fps (frames per second) in order to conform with digital video standards of 25 fps (frames per second) as I anxiously await feedback and questions. Seated in Helsinki, yet appearing on screen in numerous cities throughout Zimbabwe and my former home in Cape Town, South Africa, films' multi-sensory characteristics

are incited. I smell and taste the salty Atlantic Ocean air, feel the extreme heat of Kadoma in December, the bone-chilling nights of Harare in July, the sensory deprivation of pitch black late-night power outages throughout Zimbabwe, and become emotionally overcome with joy seeing Christmas day celebrations which I can only minimally recall due to excessive consumption of alcohol with the son and nephews of one of my long-time interlocutors, Masline 'Masie' Chachona. Years of research, filming, sound recording, and editing among Zimbabwean migrant women in Cape Town, South Africa pass in a mere thirteen minutes and nine seconds.



*Christmas Day in Epworth, Zimbabwe 2017*

Since gaining independence in 1980 Zimbabwe has faced many challenges due in large part to poor economic and political decisions carried out by former President Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF political party. These lamentable decisions were amplified by international sanctions and corruption, forcing approximately 3 million people to leave the country, amounting to roughly 25% of the total population. Multiple reports reveal that an estimated 90% of these migrants remitted to family members in Zimbabwe who were in turn dependent upon these remittances for survival (von Burgsdorff 2012: 15). Jonathan Crush and Daniel Tevera (2010) present an additional thought-provoking interpretation stating, 'every Zimbabwean working in South Africa supports an average of five people at home', thus the continued presence of migrants in South Africa essentially stems a greater number of migrants, a paradox of Zimbabwe's recent migration history (3).

With my initial research seeking to contribute to an understanding of the role material culture and memories serve in the lives of migrant women I produced a split-screen film, *These Objects, Those Memories* (Horn 2015). Upon taking into consideration feedback received regarding, *These Objects, Those Memories* (Horn 2015) from colleagues and film festival screenings my continued research and engagement with unconventional visual research methods culminated in the production of five additional films. These films found me employing multiple additional forms of representation including working with informal archives such as found 8mm and Super 8mm home movies, YouTube videos, contemporary Super 8mm filmmaking, and iPhone filmmaking.

The fourth completed film, *Scenes from a Transient Home* (Horn 2019), incorporates

contemporary Super 8mm film with accompanying asynchronous audio. My methodology was greatly influenced by the shock and dismay I had upon purchasing and viewing hundreds of reels of 8mm and Super 8mm home movies from apartheid era South Africa and colonial Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) that almost completely excluded representations of domestic moments in the lives of black Southern Africans. In order to marginally atone for these filmic absences I mimicked the handheld, shaky, and sometimes out of focus visuals seen in home movies or 'film souvenirs' (Sobchack 1999) when filming among my interlocutors while at the same time, 'allowing the aesthetic and sensorial dimensions of the lived experience of informants/film-subjects to directly shape the fieldwork/filmmaking process' (Sniadecki 2014: 27). Inevitably nostalgic feelings will be generated due to the quality of Super 8mm film and the 'amateur' filming techniques I utilized, but I find it more compelling to note the ways this form of filming and recording of audio forced me to think differently about reoccurring themes in my work such as time, space, and the sensorial (Heuson and Allen 2014:123). This strategy follows from Jennifer L. Heuson and Kevin T. Allen (2014), Super 8mm filmmakers who comment in Chapter 7 of *Experimental Film and Anthropology* that, 'through the use of such asynchronous tools, ethnographers, subjects, sites, and audiences will engage in sensory relations 'made strange' through form and uncertainty' (116). *Scenes from a Transient Home* (2019), seeks to disrupt the 'spectators' corporeal, spatial and temporal orientation' (Köhn 2016: 15) through the presentation of a fractured portrait of life for Zimbabwean migrant women when they return home to visit family and friends.



*'Masie' and her sister clearing weeds at the base of her under construction 'Big House'—Harare, Zimbabwe 2017*

Audio for *Scenes from a Transient Home* (2019) was primarily recorded directly prior to or subsequent to filming images and was gathered with multiple devices ranging from professional audio gear to my cell phone. In the recording and final edit I sought to benefit from what Colette Piault referring to the ethno-fictions of Jean Rouch describes as the effectiveness of asynchronous audio as it, 'introduces a gap between the image and the word' (Piault 2007: 39). Highlighting how synchronicity in film fails to acknowledge and engage with the fissures and misunderstandings of daily life Nathaniel Dorsky states:

Life is full of gaps. We try to make the whole thing seem continuous and solid, but it's actually more intermittent than we often want to admit. In a sense, for a film

to be true, it has to trust this intermittence (...) If a film fills in too much, it violates our experience. (Heuson and Allen 2014: 120)

The exception to the above-mentioned process of audio collection is located in the middle of the film and marks a temporary shift in the implementation of the research audio and footage as the voices of multiple Zimbabwean women comment directly on the images displayed on the screen. This audio was drawn from four-years of informal, structured, and unstructured interviews and video-elicitation sessions in Cape Town, South Africa, with the accompanying footage supplied from one trip I made to Victoria Falls (Mosi-oa-Tunya), Zimbabwe in mid-2017.

Through my research and Super 8mm filming among Zimbabweans I sought to reveal



*Gift giving and laughter in Harare, Zimbabwe 2017*

what Francis Nyamnjoh (2013) describes as, 'the complexities, contradictions and messiness of their everyday realities' (653) in order to offer 'a better understanding of migration as a complex social process rather than as a problem to be solved', in opposition to many prevailing myths and mass media representations (Berriane and de Haas 2012: 14). Caterina Pasqualino and Arnd Schneider state that working with film in opposition to digital media is, 'a deliberate working through, and resisting (against the *grain*) of a dominant and hegemonic digital culture' (Pasqualino and Schneider 2014: 18), providing some 'material proof or evidence of that passed time' (Pasqualino and Schneider 2014: 13). *Scenes from a Transient Home* (2019) in presented in a manner which, 'gives the impression not of the complete but of the

ongoing, a world in process of taking place' (Gilberto Perez 1998: 337) in an attempt to refrain from locking my interlocutors 'in a timeless realm' (Fabian 1982, cited in Köhn 2016: 9).

In order to achieve my diverse objectives for the film I employed numerous underutilized representational strategies including a slightly non-traditional narrative structure, an inconclusive or open ending, and the explicit inclusion of present-day surroundings in a, 'wide variety of black-and-white and color tonalities with different degrees of fading and emulsions' in order to point to 'different places in time' (Camporesi and Censi 2014, cited in Russell 2018: 114). The varying tonalities were achieved through the processing of assorted film stocks consisting of new Kodak 50D and 200T color

film, several cartridges of decade old expired black-and-white film, and almost fifty-year expired Kodachrome II film.

Martino Nicoletti adds an additional point of note that I considered as he states of films' relationship to the 'time' dimension as one that counters the 'quickness' and 'instantaneity' of digital video production (Nicoletti 2014: 167–168). The slowness of analogue filmmaking was further prolonged in my situation as I resided in South Africa where there are currently no film processing laboratories. This lack of facilities left me with no choice but to mail my film stock to Boston, Massachusetts for processing and digitization before being returned: a task that took upwards of three months. The delay in viewing my footage was not perceived as a hinderance on my behalf as this prolonged undertaking afforded me the opportunity to engage my memories of what was on the film, memories which were never entirely accurate despite often writing down the time of day, location, and names of appearing interlocutors in a footage log.

In conclusion, the previously mentioned ethno-fictions of Jean Rouch, especially *Jaguar* (Rouch 1967) and *Moi, Un Noir* (Rouch 1958) explored the many possibilities for asynchronous sound and the revelation of multiple dimensions of migrants' daily lived lives. These traditions have been sustained and elaborated on by a handful of contemporary filmmakers including myself as we research and film at the crossroads of experimental film and visual anthropology. With the widespread availability of secondhand Super 8mm film equipment and the continued manufacturing of film stocks anthropologists are more than capable of further investigating the promise of asynchronous filmmaking and alternative presentations of time in contemporary research.

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