



**LUND UNIVERSITY**

Department of Sociology

**FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES IN PRACTICE:  
A case of community filmmaking in Sweden**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the intersections between social science and filmmaking practice through engaging with community filmmaking practice in Sweden. The main area of interest is to explore how feminist theory and methodology in social science can inform discussions in documentary filmmaking practice, both aiming to transform the oppressive narratives and empower voices from marginalized and minority communities. It employs feminist standpoint theory, feminist postcolonial theory, theory of reflexivity, and feminist ethics of care to investigate the ways some of the concepts and values expressed in these theories are reflected in the community filmmaking practice. In order to examine the argument that feminist methodology can contribute to re-imagining documentary filmmaking practice this thesis first discusses the ways filmmakers understand and engage with concepts of reflexivity, politics of location, and ethics in relation to the filmmaking process. Furthermore, the thesis discusses concrete practices employed by filmmakers as examples of successful application principles of feminist methodologies in the filmmaking process. Finally, it is concluded that emancipatory filmmaking practices outlined in this thesis can be a valuable contribution to attempts to decolonize filmmaking practices and contribute to a more equal and just documentary filmmaking landscape.

**Keywords:** Feminist methodology; Community filmmaking; Reflexivity; Politics of Location; Ethics.

## **Popular science summary**

The urgency for transforming the problematic aspects of documentary film is mirrored in contemporary film discussions, as demonstrated at the latest, and most influential documentary film festivals and conferences. The Berlinale- Berlin film festival continuously includes discussions on decolonization, inclusivity, and equality in their festival program(Berlinale-Berlin International Film Festival, 2021). IDA – International documentary association also highlights topics of intersectionality and filmmaking, re-imagining documentary interviewing through feminist and post-colonial lenses, and emphasizes the importance of location and positionality in documentary filmmaking(International Documentary Association – IDA, 2020). In a general sense, decolonizing cinema means finding new ways of making films, including filmmakers from diverse backgrounds within the filmmaking landscape, which also means that different themes, from diverse perspectives, are included in filmmaking. The importance of positionality and location in filmmaking means that it is necessary for filmmakers and other film professionals to understand that whatever films are made, are unique perspectives influenced by particular filmmakers’ experience and biography, and are not representative of everybody’s experience. This also means that filmmakers, especially documentary filmmakers, need to be careful when they decide to tell stories that are not a part of their experience because they might not be able to understand the story well enough to represent it through film.

All of these topics that are discussed within cinema have also been of interest to social science for decades. For example, feminist theory and practice have offered some solutions to the same problems within social science. In this thesis, it is argued that some of these solutions in feminist methodology can be applied to documentary filmmaking practice, and help make documentary films more inclusive and equal. Some of the concepts already mentioned, like intersectionality and de-colonialization are the same concepts started or developed by feminist theorists and scholars. Through interviews conducted with documentary filmmakers in Sweden, this thesis demonstrates several different ways through which feminist principles and solutions can be successfully applied in practice. For example, as one of the solutions, it is suggested that it is useful for filmmakers to include the participants of the films in the filmmaking process so that they can be involved in telling their own stories.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In 1922., early documentarist Robert J. Flaherty captured the life of the indigenous Inuit community in the Canadian Arctic, showing the everyday struggles of a man called Nanook and his family. The title of the film was “Nanook of the North” and it was at first celebrated as pioneering and groundbreaking work in documentary filmmaking. The film claimed to show the actual life of the indigenous peoples in the Arctic, but has, later on, proved to be staged and that many sequences in the film were not at all true to the everyday experiences of these peoples. As it turned out, the names of the characters were made up, they were encouraged by Flaherty to behave in ways that were not characteristic of the contemporary mode of living in this community, and other interventions by the author (Aufderheide, 2008). The truth behind the production of the “Nanook of the North” became the foundation of the criticism against the truth claims of documentary filmmaking, as well as the case against the ethnographic, scientific portrayal of indigenous communities. The documentary film is exposed as narrative, even fictional, and becomes a topic of critical textual as well as structural analysis of the form.

By claiming law-like, truth claims in documentary film, this form have historically been used as a means of propaganda and social control. For example, after World War I, governments all over the world saw and used film as a powerful propaganda tool. The Nazi party in Germany, after rising to power in 1933, took control over all film production and has issued several propaganda films, including one of the most infamous films of all time *Triumph of the Will* in 1935. (Aufderheide, 2008, p.32). Furthermore, ethnographic, observational, and realist traditions in documentary filmmaking had their share in problematic knowledge production with its truth claims about the world, often coming from privileged, white, western perspectives. Scientific and observational, the ethnographic film relies on the colonial heritage and an ideal of total knowledge, based on rational ideals of the west(Shankar, 2020). The ethnographic film promises that it gives the audiences from outside a culture a glimpse inside it. This practice raises serious questions of power relations and knowledge production, including those of who tells stories and for whom (Aufderheide, 2008). The ethnographic film has been constrained by the imperial ideologies of the early documentary filmmakers(Shunkar, 2020). The format is contested based on post-colonial arguments against anthropological practice, where the western (usually) man goes into the “exotic”, “primitive” culture and chronicles their lives by living with them for a short period. This is the legacy of Robert Flaherty’s “Nanook of the north” which inspired not only the filmmaking

practice of the time but also the contemporary documentary. For example, "The Story of the Weeping Camel" (2003) features a family in the Gobi desert, showing a ritual where the family sings to a rejected camel calf and saves its life. This entire narrative was staged by the directors, who represented life in the Gobi desert as it would be generations ago, not the way these people live. The directors later admitted that they were inspired by Flaherty's films (Aufderheide, 2008.). The transformation of ethnographic tendencies of the documentary film seems to be impossible without decolonizing interventions made by non-white, non-western filmmakers and without engaging in feminist, post-colonial theory and practice.

Although documentary filmmakers do not claim to be doing science, they do claim to, directly or indirectly, truthfully represent reality, and engage in knowledge production as well as engage in communicative and symbolic aspects of social production. For this reason, and many others, the topic of cinema and the production of images and meaning has been of interest to sociologists and other social scientists. The very first sociological study on cinema dates all the way to 1913, when economist and sociologist Emilie Kiep-Altenloh wrote an essay about cinema as an institution, concerning the communicative aspect of cinema: cinema producers and cinema-goers. Later on, cinema became interesting to sociologists as an empirical tool, used to uncover ideological aspects of communication through the use of the image (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz, 2020). The danger of taking images for granted has been underlined by the Frankfurt school and other later critical theorists and post-structuralists, arguing that images very often do not reflect the truth, but are used to manipulate and obscure truth, and control the masses (Callahan, 2020). Early Critical theorists, Adorno and Horkheimer criticized mass culture and its hegemonic tendencies, rendering mass culture, art, and technology as means of achieving complete delusion of the masses. To Adorno and Horkheimer, as well as other critical theorists like Habermas, the culture industry is compliant in the technological, democratic society of late capitalism, and inherently market-compliant. They do not by any means draw the line of this criticism as "pure art" which is, according to them, preexisting to the culture industry as a mere commodity (Brunkhorst, 2019, p.55). Walter Benjamin was also interested in film and image, understanding the practice of the image as an experience in modernity. In his writings about the use of the image, Benjamin is not concerned with the ways image is used as means of manipulation in modernity, image as "constituting a site of betrayal" (Abbas, 1989, p.47). Another sociological aspect of Benjamin's writings on image and film is his understanding of changes in the technology of the image, from photography to cinema as directly responding to significant social changes (Gasche, 2008). Later on, in the 1960s and 70s, a period considered "to be a golden era for the

empirical sociology of film and cinema worldwide” feminist scholars and theorists turn their attention to the study of cinema(Wejbert-Wąsiewicz, 2020, p. 92).

This is where feminist criticism of the objective observer and the questioning of who is producing knowledge and what questions are asked in scientific inquiry becomes relevant.

The early feminist interventions in the philosophy of science influenced film production, and in the 1960s and 1970s, began the wave of storytelling from “below” - producing films from the point of view of the marginalized. This new movement opened up a space for experiences of women, Persons Of Color, LGBTIQ persons, and other marginalized and minority people (Nichols, 2001, p. 152-153). Feminist movement and theory, experimental film, and emancipatory film practices from the 60s and 70s also influenced the establishment of feminist film theory, albeit in a more Lacanian, psycho-analyst manner, rather than materialist, critical-realism traditions of the above-mentioned authors (Mayne, 1985). From the outset, Feminist film theory seems to be focused on the narrative and cultural aspect of cinema, determined to uncover the false Hollywood representation of women and femininity (ibid.). Feminist film theorists draw upon the semiotic traditions, for whom the film is to be understood as series of organized oppositions, just like in language. Those inspired by Marxist tradition focused on the function of cinema in ideology and those influenced by psychoanalytic traditions, namely Lacan, focused on point of view, mostly the male gaze in cinema. All of these approaches in Feminist film theory did have a common objective, not only to uncover the social codes embedded in cinema but to also transform them (ibid.). In this sense, feminist film theorists did not only focus on criticism but have participated actively in this transformation.

This essay is inspired by wider discussions in sociology concerning film, media, and cultural production. More specifically, it is focusing on intersections between social science and filmmaking practice. The main area of interest is to explore how feminist theory and methodology in social science can inform discussions in documentary filmmaking practice, both aiming to transform the oppressive narratives and empower voices from marginalized and minority communities.

## 1.1. Purpose and research questions

This project is a comprehensive case study examining the ways and benefits of applying feminist methodologies and approaches to knowledge production to documentary filmmaking practice. This research engages with community filmmakers in Sweden, exploring the potential community-centered documentary filmmaking and other forms of participatory cinema to engage with communities and issues of representation, positionality, ethics, and inclusion. The main objective of this project is to examine how, on the one hand, reflexivity, positionality, and ethics is understood by community filmmakers, and what practices did they develop to engage with these concepts on the other.

This research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do community filmmakers interpret and engage with feminist methodologies through concepts of reflexivity, politics of location, and ethics?
2. What are the concrete filmmaking practices that filmmakers engage with that reflect feminist methodological concepts?

The purpose of this study is twofold. On the one hand, the purpose is to contribute to the conversations and initiatives aiming to transform dominant discriminatory narratives in documentary filmmaking. On the other, the purpose is to showcase the ways feminist methodologies, as well as feminist post-colonial theory, can empower and amplify the minority and marginalized voices across different disciplines. To explore the ways feminist methodologies have been applied in community filmmaking practices, I begin with defining the community filmmaking practice demonstrating different terms, numerous modes and levels of production, and different fields around which this filmmaking practice centers. I continue with an overview of literature exploring the connections between academia, social science, and community filmmaking. Next, I provide a theoretical framework exploring Feminist modes of knowing, the main concepts and principles in feminist epistemology, and methodology. I continue with an overview of some significant feminist interventions in the philosophy of science, including discussions on ethics of care and the relational subject, feminist postcolonial theory and the transformation of the ethnographic narrative, and the role of reflexivity in re-thinking knowledge production. Then, I will give an overview of the methods and methodology used in this project. Finally, I give a presentation of two main themes that came up in the analysis of the empirical material and intersection with feminist

theory and methodology. The themes presented in this project are as follows: Community filmmaker, positionality and politics of location, exploring the ways filmmakers engage with concepts of reflexivity, responsibility and location, and Key strategies and Practices: showcasing three main strategies filmmakers employ in their practice based on ideas participatory knowledge and knowledge exchange, practices based on care and building relationships, and activism.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Defining the community filmmaking practice**

Literature review shows numerous articles on theory and practice of what can be referred to as community or minor cinema - an umbrella term referring to the filmmaking practice of the minority and marginalized communities. Minor cinema referred to women's cinema, queer cinema, postcolonial cinema, and exilic cinema, to name a few. The term minor cinema emphasizes the distinction between the center and periphery, the major and minor (Andersson & Sundholm, 2019). The survey of previous research shows that minor cinema is referred to in many different terms, includes numerous modes and levels of production, and is centered around different, but not opposing, values and purposes. Community filmmaking is understood as a wide concept with diverse modes of production and understanding. On the one hand, it is viewed as a filmmaking practice that includes communities in every aspect of production, while on the other side of the spectrum, it is understood as filmmaking practice about certain communities without involving them in participatory ways (Malik, Chapain & Comunian, 2019). Research on minor and community cinema envelops a whole spectrum of fields including public health research, development studies, community, gender and race studies, anthropology, and environmental studies, and sociology.

### **2.2. Minor and community cinema: between academia and art**

This literature review is focusing on research engaging with what is referred to as community and participatory filmmaking and the ways that these filmmaking practices interact and intersect with social scientific inquiry. There seems to be a rising interest in minor cinema as an audio-visual research tool or a research method complementary to community and participatory research processes within the field of social science. Within this group of research, minor filmmaking is also referred to as community-based filmmaking, participatory

filmmaking, participatory documentary, collaborative filmmaking, indigenous media, ethnographic film/cinema, and participatory video (Baumann E., Lhaki, Burke G., 2020; Bell, 2018; Canella, 2017; Gruber, 2016; Orbach, Rain, & Contreras, 2015; Stern, 2011; Wiebe, 2016). It is important to note that a clear distinction is made between the above-mentioned filmmaking styles and “The expositional style” of filmmaking, usually seen in TV documentaries, which in its themes and production styles reproduce colonial narratives of “otherness”, and in which an authoritative figure is constructed, usually, through narration, and a clear distinction is made between those behind and those in front of the camera (Catalán Eraso, 2006). All of these research papers (with slight deviations) emphasize the re-appropriation of ethnographic film, as well as a classical documentary film, contested for its problematic representation and emphasis of “otherness”, romanization and the fetishization of non-European cultures, and eurocentrism. Rather, these forms of filmmaking are described as reflexive and participatory, designed and conducted in collaboration with participants, allowing for gathering specific and detailed data, as well as analyzing that data together with the participants (Baumann E., Lhaki, Burke G., 2020). This approach is celebrated for challenging Eurocentric, male-centered systems of knowledge production by removing the researcher/filmmaker from the position of power and instead focusing on embodied knowledge and lived experience of participants. Other groups of research and academic papers focus on the impact minor cinema had on European (and World) cinema, reflect on concepts of multiculturalism, diversity, diaspora, and migration through dynamics in cinematic production, as well as “issues of space, place and displacement, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, the hybridization of musical, stylistic and genre templates, and media reflexivity” (Berghahn & Sternberg, 2010, p.6). Here, minor cinema is additionally referred to as ascended cinema - “which considers works of different filmmakers who share a ‘liminal subjectivity and interstitial location in society and the film industry’” (Limón-Serrano & Moya-Jorge, 2020, p.200), as well as minor immigrant filmmaking, and migrant and diasporic film, and transnational cinema, all three of these engaging with the ways transnational migration has influenced and transformed European societies and European cultural identity. Berghahn & Sternberg (2010), describing the premise of their work on migrant and diasporic cinema, argue: “Migrant and diasporic cinema addresses questions of identity formation, challenges national and ethnocentric myths, and revisits and revises traditional historical narratives (Berghahn & Sternberg, 2010, p.2 ).

### 2.3. Themes, concepts, and modes of analysis

The concept and practice of reflexivity on the part of the researcher/filmmaker take a central place in community-based, participatory filmmaking. Reports show a high level of reflexivity shown by researchers regarding this, acknowledging and re-examining their role in the filmmaking process. In a case study article discussing intersections of race and space through documentary filmmaking informed by collaborative ethnography, the researcher/filmmaker reflects on dynamics created by a “white filmmaker entering a predominantly black space” and asks: “Can and should a white film director make a film reflecting the ‘black’ experience?”, while at the same time acknowledging that these reflections were directly informed by early discussions within the community (Bell, 2018, p.21-22).

In some other cases the researcher/filmmaker is a part of the community but nevertheless reflects on their role and power they hold as “experts” rather than participants in the project: “Regular and thoughtful attention to my role as a filmmaker concerning my subjects allowed me to produce projects as a citizen-activist and engage in media-making practices that were respectful for both director and interviewees” (Canella, 2017, p.28). Although focusing on minority communities, and taking control over telling one's own story, the entire production process often seems to be initiated by researchers, filmmakers, or institutions like Universities or research centers (Baumann E., Lhaki, Burke G., 2020; Stern, 2011). Consequently, the professional filmmaker/researcher has become a channel of communication between those making films for their own political or social purposes and institutions and financiers (Catalán Eraso, 2006). Malik et al. (2017) found that filmmakers often reflect on the ethical position they find themselves in while trying to balance the responsibilities and relationship they have with the community and the requirements of funders when community films are made for purposes of lobbying, pedagogic or marketing purposes. Films are often screened within the community and distributed online for no profit, and most often used as means of advocacy or social change, rather than profit (Baumann E., Lhaki, Burke G., 2020; Bell, 2018; Gruber, 2016; Orbach et al., 2015; Stern, 2011; Wiebe, 2016). Emphasis is also on the concept of interculturalism - a continuous dialog and exchange between social subjects, that goes beyond multicultural policies and encourages an approach to seeking common ground, without eliminating difference, and participatory democracy, social organizing in a way where all decisions are made and controlled by those

who are affected by them. Both these concepts applied to filmmaking allow active creative participation through the democratic process (Canella, 2017; Catalán Eraso, 2006; Wiebe, 2016). Research has shown that community cinema participation can vary between projects, manifesting differently from filmmaker to filmmaker. Communities can be involved with the production in different levels of engagement, from informal engagement, joint decision making, to knowledge exchange. (Malik, Chapain, & Comunian, 2017). The production process described in several case studies is constantly blurring the lines between different production roles, demonstrating changing different roles, or holding several roles at the same time. Often, it proved impossible to move forward with the project without the community by being actively involved through setting boundaries as well as by being “the gatekeepers”: making decisions about sharing knowledge that would otherwise be unavailable to outsiders. Several case study reports showcase the orientation meetings or workshops with participants from the community as a first production phase of a community filmmaking project. This is where main topics are established, schedules are made, and production roles are assigned. Roles are, however, often interchangeable. Researchers and professional filmmakers refer to themselves as co-producers, and even line producers in the filmmaking process, but often interchanging these roles with other participants (Baumann et al. 2016; Gruber, 2016; Orbach et al., 2015; Stern, 2011). The production process is often informed by the “communicative codes” of the specific community, and by the rhythms of rituals and customs. Interviews are not structured but knowledge emerges from the conversations between community members, and even the pace of the editing is influenced by the cultural codes of the community (Orbach et al., 2015).

In a case study about the production process of a documentary “A life worth living”, a film narrating the lives of three Sami families at the beginning of the twentieth century, Sverrisson, Jonsson-Walin, and Mattson (2012) describe a somewhat informal community engagement. Participation in this project is mediated through archival material provided by the communities in the forms of photographs, texts, sound recordings, and short film cuts. Following the tradition of community filmmaking, this project did not have a pre-structured screenplay or story, completely relying on collected visuals, sounds, music, text fragments and attempting to connect them to different networks and events. Although the project began as a grounded analysis of visuals, the next phase included visiting and interviewing a number of Sami people, while continuing to collect music and images and ending up being centered around stories of three different Sami families. The bulk of the audio-visual material was by

Sami photographers Nils Thomasson and Robert Lundgren, and also included materials from private collections and publications. The soundtrack of the film was also strongly influenced by the analysis of images: authors expected to find traces of traditional Sami music, namely yoik, but have instead found images of guitars, accordions, violins, and other unexpected instruments, which pointed out to mainstreamed and integrated music culture. This meant that the soundtrack for the film would include much more than traditional yoik music. As demonstrated in this example, the participation of the community was not direct but was active in the sense that all of the visual materials were provided by the community, and were made from the point of view of the community members. The authors assert: “As we went through these photographs, we could observe these and other aspects from the vantage point of the photographers. It could be said that we took on their documenting and ethnographic roles and learned them as we submerged ourselves in their image collections”(Sverrisson, Jonsson-Wallin, & Mattson, 2012, p.7).

On the other hand, participation of the community can be more direct and involved in all aspects of the production. In a case study of community filmmaking practice of Mapuche Indigenous communities in southern Chile, Orbach et al.(2015) describe a participatory filmmaking practice that actively involves members of a community from beginning to end of production. The production is a part of the Mapuche School of Filmmaking and communication and is an annual filmmaking workshop that provides young people from the community with skills in digital filmmaking. During one month the participants are equipped with technical filmmaking skills, as well as learning the basics of scriptwriting and development, camera work, interviewing, and editing. During this process, they are mentored by a Mapuche filmmaker. The group works together on all aspects of the film, making decisions by consensus, and interchanging production roles between each other. At the end of the entire process, they would have produced a short film that is shown at a public screening with the community.

#### **2.4. Decolonizing knowledge production**

Adding audio-visual techniques and language allows for the reimagining of what the research process is, and going beyond gathering and analyzing data in traditional academia, taking research both to the individual as well as community level(Orbach et al., 2015). Wiebe (2016) refers to this shift in academia as “engaged scholarship”, within which core values are equal participation, focus on the community, and research-oriented towards change and

activism. Research also shows strong intersections between community-based filmmaking and attempts to decolonize social research and as well as the emphasis on shifting power relations and knowledge production, taking the power away from the “research expert”(Wiebe, 2016; Baumann E. et al. 2020; Orbach et al., 2015; Catalán Eraso, 2006). The reasoning behind using filmmaking as a tool to aid in this transformation of approaching data collection and ultimately, knowledge production, is grounded in art’s potential to encourage emotional involvement, empathy, increase awareness and allow for uncovering subtle details of lived experiences,” critical for understanding behaviors and beliefs”(Baumann E. et al., 2020, p.2249). The film is also seen as a tool that allows for marginalized communities to speak for themselves, and go beyond just a tool for data collection, but also visual material from the research process is shown to be used as means of social change and activism. Several research reports describe film screening within communities and for the general public to be integral to the process, inspiring the continuation of discussion and a platform for advocacy(Baumann E. et al., 2020; Wiebe, 2016; Bell, 2018; Orbach et al., 2015). It is also highlighted that using film as a medium is powerful for its ability to contribute to community empowerment, in that it builds communal capacities to identify different issues and develop solutions, and develops skills to use technology creatively(Orbach et al., 2015). Furthermore, by being a visual medium, the film is described as a way of sharing knowledge within a “communicative model” - a way of communicating participants’ words based on communities’ unique communication codes and protocols, rather than pre-established research codes and concepts(Orbach et al., 2015). This approach proved particularly appropriate in research within indigenous communities, where it showed crucial that research was informed by local experts who were familiar with local customs, religion, and forms of communication. (Baumann E. et al., 2020).

## **2.5. Conditions of production**

Previous research shows that minor and community cinema differ from project to project in terms of level and value of production. Research focusing on community-based, participatory cinema mostly describes a very low-budget production, with no intentions of accumulating financial gain from distribution. Most community-based film projects distinguish themselves from the mainstream by being more focused on the process, rather than the product. Generally, filmmakers are not formally educated and have come across filmmaking through workshops, or other above-mentioned filmmaking programs and as far as finances are

concerned, financial gain is, for the most part, not a driving force of the project (Malik, Chapain, & Comunian, 2017). However, the issues of funding and distribution show up within discussions around minor cinema and mainstream film sectors, and the way that the film sector supports diversity. Malik et al.(2017) argue that state policy interventions to diversify the film industry is normally through a “top-down” approach, focusing on already established filmmakers and the mainstream, while other filmmaking practices, “bottom-up” productions, such as community-based filmmaking practices are overlooked by these policies. Some research on minor cinema, especially that of migrant and diasporic communities is somewhat concerned with projects that have had some commercial success. In “The Cultural Practice of Immigrant Filmmaking”, Andersson and Sundholm(2019) go beyond the interpretation of individual films and focus more on production culture and context. They offer a sort of genealogical approach to writing about minor cinema discussing five different initiatives of minor immigrant filmmaking in Sweden, from the early fifties to the late eighties of the twentieth century, as well as the changes in Swedish film policies and general cinematic landscape from the seventies forward. The initiatives mentioned include the Stockholm Film Workshop (1973–2001) and Kaleidoscope (1981–88) which enabled some of the filmmakers to get access to mainstream cinema, but those were few. The role of the initiatives was mostly to facilitate production, and later more the promotion of experimental film culture. Generally, the films produced were short experimental and most of them were considered by Swedish critics to be “filled with clichés and stereotypes, and characterized by an immature filmic language”(p.39). Andersson and Sundholm(2019) go on to map out several important milestones for Swedish minor cinema that also marked the transformation of Swedish mainstream cinema. The first was the implementation of the first state-run cultural policy in 1974, pushing forward the idea that people, rather than professionals, are the producers of culture, which marked a sort of ‘cultural democracy’ discourse. This made it easier for non-commercial projects to get financial support, although the funds were(and are) still controlled by state bodies like SFI and SVT. Another important milestone for Swedish minor cinema is the commercial success of immigrant films in early 2000, which, according to Swedish mainstream media, marked the birth of a new wave of Swedish cinema.

### 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1. Feminist standpoint theory: feminist modes of knowing

„Feminists don't need a doctrine of objectivity that promises transcendence, a story that loses track of its mediations just where someone might be held responsible for something, and unlimited instrumental power. We don't want a theory of innocent powers to represent the world, where language and bodies both fall into the bliss of organic symbiosis. We also don't want to theorize the world, much less act within it, within it, in terms of Global wide network of connections, translate knowledges among very different and power-differentiated communities. We need the power of modern critical theories of how bodies and meanings get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life.,, Donna Haraway(1988, p.579-580)

Feminist standpoint theory offers a unique view in feminist epistemology since it incorporates both realist and constructivist accounts of “reality”. It explains different levels of reality, by both explaining what is on the surface, but also uncovered the underlying powers that distort that reality (Mussel, 2016). In this way, feminist standpoint theory argues that reality is not necessarily fixed, but that the idea of fixity of reality is reinforced and manipulated for purposes of sustaining power positions (ibid.). Because of this unconventional dualist position, FST differs from feminist projects grounded in post-modernist theory, and it can be viewed as a form of “constructionist materialism”(Harding, 2004, p. 38) or even “the new materialism” (Mussell,2016, p. 539). In this respect, FST corresponds or would even benefit from working alongside a critical realist position (Mussel, 2016). From a feminist point of view, we are ought to be skeptical of the so-called “view from nowhere”, arguing, not just that all science begins with assumptions, that are inherently grounded in some pre-existing values, but that those very values enable and sustain the “hegemony of privileged white men”(Sprague and Kobrynowicz, 2006, p. 26). This means that social research is constructed in a way that allows social domination and unequal power relations. Questions asked in positivist and neo-positivist traditions of arguing for an objective subject of science are, feminists like Sandra Harding argue, questions that come from those who discipline and manage people and not from “regular folks” (Sprague and Kobrynowicz, 2006,p. 35). So the issues of power and domination are inherently linked to

knowledge production and truth-seeking. In that way, rather than claiming to be apolitical, objective, and unbiased, the feminist perspective transforms social research by introducing a situated researcher, involved, and an active part of her field of study. By refusing the idea of an objective, value-free science, feminists argue for an emancipatory science, and argue for research that helps marginalized and oppressed groups, in helping them understand their oppression as well as fighting against oppression (Sprague and Kobryniewicz, 2006). So, instead of being general and all-transcending, objectivity through the feminist lenses turns out to be about the particular and about “a specific embodiment”. Feminist objectivity is all about location and situated knowledge, with no intention to transcend and antagonize the subject and the object, creating a framework to be able to see from the periphery (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). Helen Longino offers an innovative approach to the philosophy of science by introducing “contextual empiricism” where she argues that the impact of context on knowledge production is not only an epistemic problem but can be a solution if relinquishing the legitimacy ideal of traditional science. The solution is in accepting that backgrounds and social contexts influence scientific inquiry (Rolin, 2011). Based on this epistemological foundation, feminist approaches to methodology in social research are not only focused on the investigation of gender in society. Feminist approaches are distinguished by aiming to produce knowledge that will be useful for effective transformation of gendered, racial, class, and other injustices and subordination. The feminist methodology aims to amplify marginalized voices and critically looking at power relations, hierarchies, and institutionalized dominance (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). It is characterized by the incorporation of continuous reflexivity, grounding knowledge in marginalized voices and experiences, and practicing empathy, care, and relational principles in methods of data production.

### **3.2. Theory of reflexivity**

Reflexivity in social research refers to an awareness practice grounded in the idea that knowledge production cannot be separated from researchers’ previous experiences, social position and status, education, and other factors. The reflexive practice is inseparable from a scientific method that means to perceive and acknowledge the positions and prior own assumptions of a researcher, understanding the effects of the social structures in which social research is being carried out (Bourdieu, 1993). The aim of reflexivity is not to describe a research project as invalid because of the inevitable interventions of researchers’

preconceptions. The objective is to, by acknowledging these and attempting to minimize the gap between the researcher and the researched, as well as between the objective of the research and the researched role in the research, reduce the level of misunderstanding and misconceptions that might result from an interpretation of a researcher unconscious of the effects of their social position. Reflexivity in social science makes visible the unequal power positions between the researcher and the researched, understanding that the researcher's gaze has a significant effect on the trajectory that the research will be taking as well as impacting the communities in which the research is taking place. Reflexivity calls for re-examining the researchers' understanding of the world as universal. Bourdieu(1990) calls this “the scholastic point of view” - the academic or scholar assumptions that come as a result of academic experience in education, the scientific community, and research practices, but also quite often the bourgeois experience of distance and view from above. This very important realization that a researcher is more often than not a person who comes from a privileged background and constructs the research according to their worldview has opened up possibilities for inclusion and diversity of voices when it comes to knowledge production in social science. In reflexive practice, it is often ensured that the researcher is situated in the context or is in some way connected to the object of the research. The advantage of this approach is the ability of the researcher to develop a research project that is attuned to the research respondents and to develop questions that make sense to them. This approach also minimizes the possible threatening atmosphere of violent questions that often result in the objectification of the respondents (Bourdieu, 1993). By being herself a part of the community, the researcher shares the same risks of objectification as the respondent, thus enabling a safe space for the respondent to open up (ibid.).

### **3.3. Post-colonial theory and de-colonizing knowledge**

Post-colonial theory is a critical theoretical practice that brings into question the modes of knowledge production and location, as well as the ways the world has been perceived and defined. The basic premise of the critique is that the idea of the world is based on dominant discourse coming exclusively from the Western world, constructed by the voices of the privileged and the mainstream. This view of the world excludes all the experiences and knowledge by the non-western people and cultures and inherently undervalues these worldviews (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). The post-colonial theorists argue that the view of the world has been shaped through the eyes of the colonizer, and thrust the

production of knowledge in the western world is the systemic legitimization of oppression and marginalization of non-western cultures, influencing not only the perception of the non-western world but the economic and political conditions outside the western world (ibid.). The narratives of the non-western cultures were constructed through the view of the colonizer, whose quest to “civilize” inherently tinted the view of these cultures by understanding them first and foremost as “uncivilized” and as obstacles to their colonizing mission. The post-colonial theory has influenced the emancipatory feminist practice and theory, by racializing mainstream feminist theory, as well as being influenced by non-western feminists, who added to the post-colonial theory by incorporated gender within the discussion. The feminist post-colonial theory was born from the need to challenge the famous second-wave feminist dictum “Sisterhood is global”, by insisting on the recognition of the differences between western women and third-world women. Feminist post-colonial theorists draw attention to the racialized nature of gender, and the fact that the feminist movement has been built on the experiences and struggles of white, western middle-class women, and globalizing this struggle lead to silencing voices of Black women and third-world women( Lewis & Mills, 2013).

In her 1984 essay “Towards the Politics of location,” Adriene Rich abandoned the idea of the universality of women’s struggle, bringing into question the, until then, legendary feminist maxim coined by Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas* stating that: “as a woman, I have no country, as a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world”. However, a country, or geographical, social, and political location, became important when postcolonial feminists began insisting on recognizing the differences between western women and third-world women( Lewis & Mills, 2013). This was an important paradigm shift in feminist politics, pioneered by third-world feminists, but it was the western and white feminists who needed to rethink and take accountability for their privileged positions. In “Towards the Politics of Location”, Rich (2013) takes accountability by locating herself, not only in a woman's body but in the body of a white person, a Jewish person, a person living in the USA. By doing this, she acknowledges the layers of privilege that prevent her to claim the complete view from the center - where she locates herself, as well as bringing into question the knowledge produced by, namely, middle-class, white feminism in the name of “all women”:

“The politics of location. Even to begin with my body I have to say that from the outset that body had more than one identity. When I was

carried out of the hospital into the world, I was viewed and treated as female, but also viewed and treated as white by both Black and white people. I was located by color and sex as surely as a Black child was located by color and sex - though the implications of white identity were mystified by the presumption that the white people are the center of the universe. “ (Rich, 2003,p.215)

Understanding the politics of location means understanding one's position and inherent political and social implications that come with that position. In social research, and I would argue, in documentary filmmaking as well, reflecting on location is a crucial aspect of the reflexive production process, influencing decisions made power dynamic, and knowledge produced and constructed(Brooks, Riele, & Maguire, 2014).

### **3.4. Black Feminist interventions in (American)Sociology**

As the roots of American sociology are deeply grounded in the period of racial segregation in the country Black American scholars were the ones making sure that these ideas were contested in sociological inquiry, highlighting the roots of inequality in political, economical, and social conditions. This was the basis for developing a new analytical framework within sociology, which was referred to as intersectionality, which argues:”... for the need to recognize and address the new and different oppressions that manifest from the intersection of various identity claims” (Bhambra, 2015, p. 2318). According to Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016) intersectionality is a tool for understanding complexities in the world, claiming that the social and political aspects of society are not and can not be shaped by just one factor. In order to analyze and understand social inequality, one must understand that the unequal distribution of power in society is not created by a single “axis of social divisions, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves”(p.11). Hill Collins and Bilge(2016) present core ideas that appear and reappear when people use intersectionality as an analytic tool including relationality, the idea that refuses binary, either/or thinking, and, for example, does not explore race and gender as separate entities but looks for their interconnectedness. Another valuable idea within the intersectional analytical framework is the understanding of power, again looking at power relations of racism and sexism through “...interlocking, mutually constructing or intersecting systems of power”(p.28). Intersectionality also urges for continuous contextualization of social inquiry, arguing that social, intellectual, and political contexts always shape what we do or argue for(ibid.). In her essay “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological

Significance of Black Feminist Thought”(1986) Hill Collins emphasizes the importance of including Black female scholars within sociology, as they bring a creative and imaginative approach to the field due to their “marginality. She here refers to Black feminist scholars as “outsiders within” and argues that their unique positionality, determined by their marginal positions in relation to mainstream academia, can “promise to enrich contemporary sociological discourse”(p.15). In the same essay, Hill Collins(1986) writes about the importance of Black feminist thought in terms of Black women's self-definition and self-valuation. Self-definition through Black feminist thought means resisting stereotypical narratives about women, which are externally constructed and used as means of dehumanization and exploitation of Black women.

Similar to Hill Collins’ concepts of self-definition and self-valuation as ways of taking agency and resisting oppressive narratives in social inquiry, in her essay “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators” bell hooks(2014) writes about the gaze as means of both oppression and agency. In this essay, hooks describe the way the white gaze has been used as a way of oppression and control over Black people, by constructing images about Black people through racist white imagery. She also, however, locates the place of agency in the gaze through the politics of “looking back”. She uses the example of cinema as means of reproducing stereotypical imagery of Black people and thus reproducing white supremacy. As a response to this and as means of resisting this narrative through oppositional black gaze she mentions the development of independent Black cinema. hooks(2014) also see mainstream cinema and other forms of media representations as means of tracking political progress through images.

### **3.5. Ethics of care**

First of all, to make a case for ethics of care, feminist scholars revealed the dominant moral traditions as namely male-oriented and warned that in those theories the masculine traits were the ones treated as ethical. Second, ethics of care theorists introduced a possibility of a paradigm shift towards an understanding of morality and ethics based on the feminine, or to be more precise, on the labor of care which was (is?) delegated to women. As Alison Jaggar(2000) notices, western philosophy tends to interpret women as less rational than men and identifies women’s role in society as child-bearers and/or the role of pleasing and serving men. The aim was to uncover the specific masculine point of view in moral philosophy that, as they claim, excludes women’s experience and is a source of female subordination. This

view on moral philosophy is a radical turn from the view that moral transcends sex/gender and introduces the idea that moral philosophy as we know it just might be a male moral philosophy (Ruddick, 1987). In this logic, the public (male) is understood as impartial, and the private (female) is unreasonable, immoral. But more significantly, feminist scholars challenge Kant's dominant idea that autonomy is necessary for moral conduct. According to Kant, autonomy is the only way a person can avoid the influence of the pressure of the community or "natural influences", that would otherwise bring into question the morality of the deed (Skempton, 2013). Feminists especially critique Kantian concepts of autonomy, denoting them as morally inferior to the alternate concept of relational morality. According to Jaggar (2000), relational subject, as opposed to Kantian autonomous subject, regards "her own interests as inseparable from those of others" (p. 456). For example, Virginia Held (2000) underlines that "caring activities of mothers" have been almost completely left out of the traditional moral theory (p. 133). Held argues that autonomy, as understood in terms of traditional moral theory, encourages individualism and self-sufficiency, which is misleading and artificial because human beings are constantly in dependent relationships with other human beings, from childhood to periods of illness and old age. She argues that the liberal idealization of self-sufficiency paints the wrong picture when it comes to actual relationships of dependence and interdependence and masks the caring labor that takes place. Feminist relationality focuses on the importance of relationships in people's lives. In the context of an ethic of care, relational feminism is not just useful as an analytical tool but also urges for recognition of caretakers and caretaking activities. In her essay „A Relational Feminist Approach to Conflict of Laws“ Roxana Banu (2017) makes a case for relational feminism as a tool for transforming and redefining autonomy and law. She explains that autonomy, in the relational feminist view, is not an individual's characteristics that separate them from a collective, neither is it a glue that connects them to one. Autonomy depends on social context, and this view was particularly useful in rethinking and problematizing concepts of consent and choice as imagined in libertarian law. Banu (2017) gives an example of applying relational feminist views on legal issues surrounding surrogacy: „...a surrogate mother's consent to the surrogacy contract (as well as to the application of the law that validates it) are not presumed as autonomous acts when viewed from a relational feminist lens. The social context of autonomy, as demonstrated in the stark imbalance of power between the actors implicated in these relationships, as well as the vast economic disparities between the countries involved in the dispute, immediately challenge the presumption of consent present in Conflict of Laws discourse“ (p.22-23). In this view, consent cannot be implied simply

because of being a member of a community. Even though it may seem contra-intuitive, relational feminists problematize romanticizing communities, as they believe that law practiced in the communities only reflects and protects the structures of power within a community. This means that no one member of the entire community has the right to speak in the name of others (Banu, 2017).

## **4 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS**

### **4.1. Interviews**

The epistemological starting point of this research project is rooted in the feminist epistemological tradition stating that knowledge is contextual and situated. Feminist epistemology, through its various iterations, invites the possibility of feeling comfortable with the “impossibility of knowing”, which is, in fact, a political act of acknowledging the limits of our perceptions and “the complexity of objects or processes themselves” (Frost, 2011, p.79).

Situating this research within feminist epistemic tradition has influenced all stages of the project, from research design to analysis. It has inspired constant reflexivity throughout the process on my part as a researcher, as well as feeling comfortable and confident with the research methods as appropriate to the research aim and purpose. Therefore, as a primary method of data production, this research project has employed qualitative, semi-structured interviews. In this project, interviews are understood, first and foremost, as a form of social interaction, a dialogue between the „interviewer,, and „the interviewee“. The knowledge produced in this project is a result of conversational interaction between the two roles that at times interchange, and influence the dynamic of the interaction, as well as the knowledge produced in the process. This approach to interviewing has influenced the structure of the interviews, without the pressure to heavily structure the interview in an attempt to eradicate bias and legitimize the knowledge produced in the process. From the perspective of my epistemological standpoint, it is, either way, impossible to remove bias from the data. And as scholars like Mason (2002) explain, in the case of situating a research project within the traditions of epistemic contextualism, the way to go is to try to understand the context and complexities that come up in the interaction, „rather to pretend that key dimensions can be controlled for“ (ibid., p.65).

It was, therefore, an intuitive decision to use in-depth interviews in order to discover the various ways filmmakers have incorporated feminist methodologies and values into their practice. The interviews enabled access to information outside what I already knew, or to put

it more accurately, what I presumed to know about the topic, and I argue that this would not be possible in pre-set questions in surveys or questionnaires. Furthermore, drawing on Mason's(2002) justifications for using qualitative interviews as a method, the intention was not to generate any sort of generalities or to perform an analysis of data gathered from large numbers of people or understand surface patterns, for which one might use a more quantitative method of data production. Rather, the purpose was to achieve an in-depth understanding of people's experiences and practices within a specific context. Considering that the approach to interviewing was narrative and topic-centered, there was a set of particular topics I wanted to cover, but allowing the interview to diverge from those topics and create unexpected themes and stories. For this project an interview protocol was developed based on Mason's (2002) suggestions on how to loosely structure a qualitative interview, using index cards of general topics, rather than a structured set of interview questions. In this way, I have thoroughly prepared for each interview, but also taken into account the specificity of each interviewee and allowed space for impromptu follow-up questions. Interviews were conducted with a small number of independent filmmakers, collected through the combination of a non-probabilistic purposive sampling approach and "snowball" sampling methods. Since there is no comprehensive database for specifically community-based filmmakers in Sweden, filmmakers were initially chosen through previously established contacts, mostly members of local film organizations' networks. Through conversations with those filmmakers, more information was acquired including contact information, which enabled moving forward with the interviews. The limitation of this type of sampling is the high probability of only getting in contact with participants that belong to the same "social bubble". This may also lead to social and political homogeneity of the sample. Having this in mind I have attempted to select as diverse as possible samples of filmmakers. This was achieved by choosing filmmakers through extensive research, analyzing local film festival programs and other film screening events, and locating filmmakers that align with previously stated community filmmaking practice. The second step was to research films and other projects made by selected filmmakers, and finally researching contact information through networks in the local filmmaking community, or directly contacting festivals and film initiatives who have screened selected filmmakers' work. Finally, there were six interviews conducted with filmmakers from various social and professional backgrounds ranging from social activism to conceptual art and social anthropology. I believe that choosing filmmakers with such varied backgrounds and professional focuses has yielded

interesting and diverse accounts, and contributed to the quality and social relevance of the data and research project in general.

More detailed information on the personal and professional characteristics of the interviewees is excluded from this essay in order to protect their privacy. As their work is public, and the community of local filmmakers is small, it is easy to recognize the filmmaker in question. On that note, all filmmakers were asked to read and sign a consent form in order to give the interviewees as much control as possible over how the information they shared was being used. They were given the option to review the interview transcripts in case they felt they needed to clarify or retract some statements. For the reasons of protecting their identity, the interviewees are referred to through initials in the text. The empirical material collected through the interviews was audio recordings of the interviews and interviewers' notes. Next to transcribing the interviews, the interviewer's notes were taken into account, since being aware that a significant amount of information might be lost: while transcribing we don't have the access to the interviewer's observations, interpretations, experiences, and judgments (Mason, 2002). For example, participants were often asked to describe an experience or an ethical choice they made in the past, with which they may or may not resonate in the present. This was not always verbally expressed but was described in the notes as pauses in conversation, feelings of discomfort detected in facial expressions, nervous laughter, sarcasm, or self-deprecating jokes, for example. All of these were taken into account in analysis and mentioned in places where it was particularly relevant.

After conducting all of the interviews the data produced was analyzed thematically based on a phase process as described by Jessica Nina Lester, Yonjoo Cho, and Chad R. Lochmiller (2020) in their comprehensive article on qualitative data analysis. In this research project, some of these stages were merged into one or excluded altogether. For example, qualitative data analysis software was not used, so there was no need for particular preparation of the material, and transcribing and memoing the material were done simultaneously. Rather than coding the data, I have moved straight into categorizations of the themes, making sure to keep the connection between the themes, theoretical framework, and research questions.

#### **4.2. Personal narratives**

An important feature of the interviews was the personal narrative or the biographical character of the interviews. The interviewees were encouraged to share details about their personal and professional lives (within the bounds of what they felt was comfortable). In

general, biographical interviews are used to reveal particular ways of thinking or feeling about different topics or stages of life, and to inspire reflection on interviewees' own biographical accounts of their life in particular contexts. It is argued that narrative biographies in interviewing are valuable as they are „powerfully expressive“ and offer strong indicators of different concepts, themes, and contexts (Wengraf, 2001). In this case, the biographical narrative was situated at the beginning of the interviews and consisted of a single question designed to inspire both self-reflection and to inspire an expression of personal values or ideologies. The purpose was to attempt to locate these values and the impact of their personal lived experience in their filmmaking practice. In full transparency, there is a case to be made against the „validity „of this form of interviewing, mostly resting on the argument that when interviewees attempt to reconstruct the past events, they are likely to create the representation of what they would like to have been (as well as the person they would want to be in the future) rather than a reconstruction of the actual events protect the identity of the subject in question, an ontology of self, a mythology.’(Wengraf, 2001). However, this argument was not compelling enough to exclude narrative biography from these interviews. Firstly because the project is driven by feminist „contextual empiricism“ urging for relinquishment of the legitimacy ideal of traditional science, and seeking solutions for epistemic problems in simply accepting that backgrounds and social contexts inherently influence scientific inquiry and are not meant for delegitimizing scientific findings(Rolin, 2011). Furthermore, the purpose of biographical narrative in these interviews was not to offer accurate representations of the filmmakers' life paths, but rather as a means of inspiring continuous reflexivity between the filmmakers' own backgrounds and experiences and their choices and politics in their filmmaking practice.

### **4.3. Approach to the field and Case Selection**

While this research project did not include participant observations as a method of producing data, the connection to the field and the community of filmmakers was a crucial aspect of the project. I have been engaged within the community as a researcher through my work with FilmCentrum Syd, a regional office and meeting place for Filmmakers in Skåne. I have been working as a research intern there for several months, conducting interviews with around thirty independent filmmakers across the country. Through conversations with these filmmakers, and work in FilmCentrum Syd in general, I have become increasingly familiarized with the community itself, and different approaches to filmmaking within the

community. The fact that I already have experience in doing research in this context, and my geographical location at the time of conducting interviews for this project, connection, and access to the community have strongly influenced the choice to focus on the Swedish filmmaking community as a case study. The study is not limited to any specific region of the country, and while there are certain points of difference and several different economic, social, and political issues between the regions regarding cultural politics and financing (Dahlström & Hermelin, 2007), this study will not be specifically addressing those issues or differences. One other reason why the study is not limited to regions is the precarious nature of the work in the filmmaking community, which means that many of the participants would have worked or collaborated on projects across the country, and do not identify as working exclusively at one place. My connection to the field has also inspired reflexivity and constant revisiting of my positionality as a researcher. I would like to highlight that one of the main motivations for engaging with this topic is my personal experience as a documentary filmmaker and my struggles with ethical and productive aspects of my work. I have on several occasions found myself reflecting on the problematic choices I have made in my documentary filmmaking practice, which I believed did not reflect and align with my political and ethical principles. This finally inspired a more elaborate inquiry and exploration of the ways theory and politics can inform and influence the filmmaking practice.

#### **4.4. Methodological difficulties and Ethical aspects**

Some of the methodological issues were already addressed in the previous sections. However, it's important to reiterate and acknowledge that this project does not, nor does any social research for that matter, start from the position of social, intellectual, and political vacuum (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2011). I have understood through this entire process that the research design, theories, methods and production, selection, and grouping of the data have been influenced by my academic background and community, as well as personal experience. I believe that this understanding does not make the project weaker, but the opposite, it has made me constantly re-examine and question the choices made, opening up space for the concepts and ideas that have not been considered before. It was previously mentioned how my filmmaking background has influenced the project but would also like to note that I believe that it has also alleviated the power dynamics between myself as a researcher and project participants, as we were able to carry out interviews as conversations, more as peers, escaping the interviewer/interviewee power dynamics. As part of the feminist practice woven through this project, I would here like to acknowledge the importance of language in this

project (DeVault, 1990). First of all, the working language in this project was English which was the second language for all of the interviewees. Not all of them have an excellent command of the language and taking into account the difficulty of expressing oneself in a foreign language, I want to underline that some of the meaning and points made by the participants might have “been lost in translation”. Furthermore, although I have made efforts to use a more colloquial language, my background in academia and academic language have made a serious concern for me, in terms of being able to appropriately express the inquiry, and later on influence the analysis too. This issue was addressed by repeatedly asking and encouraging the participants to ask additional questions if they have not understood my meaning, or ask for any clarification they need. The language has also influenced who is able to participate in the project, meaning that participants who did not speak English were not considered for the interviews. It’s important to acknowledge that this might have affected the diversity in the participant selection. One other methodological aspect to be acknowledged is that the research project was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, which means that the interviews had to be conducted taking into account all of the restrictions and preventive measures put in place at the time. All of the interviews, except one, were conducted via the online conferencing platform Zoom. There are some suggestions by scholars concerning the challenges that arose due to the inability to have face-to-face interactions with interview participants (Moran and Caetano, 2021). The potential challenges to interviewing in circumstances such as these are connected to the inability to build meaningful relationships with participants and develop empathy and trust due to the inevitable separation and distance created by the use of technology in interviews. Furthermore, the authors underline that an important aspect of face-to-face interviewing is lost because it is not possible to observe the immediate surroundings, the complexity of participants' movements and gestures, often incorporated in data collection through the interviewer’s notes. The disruptions that happen due to loss of connection or lagging may have an impact on the flow of the conversations, and it is especially damaging if the participant is in the middle of sharing a vulnerable experience or emotion(ibid.). Considering that, in this research project, one of the interviews was conducted in person, and based on my previous experience, I can confirm that there were significant differences in the quality of interaction, both on the side of building trust and closeness and the flow of conversation without constraints of internet network quality. The interviews conducted online were often interrupted by other people being in the background, pets, or loss of connection. With one of the interviews, the person was not comfortable at that moment to share the video, so there was no way to detect any gestures or facial expressions

which could be used as cues or guidelines as to how the interview was going or if the participant felt uncomfortable with questions asked. On the other hand, as Moran and Caetano(2021) also noticed, the situation we were both in, created a different kind of closeness through „being in the same boat“ of isolation and dealing with difficult emotions. To remedy any miscommunication I have sent the interview transcripts to the participants who expressed that they would like to revisit what they've said, which enabled feedback and additional clarification in case something was misunderstood or misheard because of the quality of the connection or surrounding noises.

## **5 ANALYSIS**

### **5.1. Dimensions of reflexivity in community filmmaking practice**

The reflexive filmmaker is not concerned with speaking, or constructing a narrative about the world, but about how and what gets represented in that story. The value of reflexive practice in documentary filmmaking is the call to “see the documentary for what it is: a construct or representation” as it moves away from the ethnographic modalities of observational cinema and calls into question the camera gaze, and the power of the documentarist to represent or misrepresent others(Nichols, 2001, p. 125). Just as the reflexive practice in the scientific method means to perceive and acknowledge the positions and prior own assumptions of a researcher, and understand the effects of the social structures in which social research is being carried out (Bourdieu, 1993), the reflexive documentary aims to emphasize that the film is the product of the filmmaker's subjectivity, instead of being the representation of the real(Goodarzi & Tamjidi, 2014). Reflexivity in social science makes visible the unequal power positions between the researcher and the researched, understanding that the researcher's gaze has a significant effect on the trajectory that the research will be taking as well as impacting the communities in which the research is taking place. Similarly, reflexive documentary film is characterized by the revelation of the production process and the producer, codes impeded in the film through editing or scene sequencing that allows for calling the realism of the film into question, as well as some other filmmaking “devices” such as voice-overs (Goodarzi & Tamjidi, 2014; Maasdorp, 2011). These deliberate interventions serve the purpose of disturbing the “fourth wall” and leaving space for the audience to draw their conclusions and interpretations of what is shown in the film (Maasdorp, 2011). In its

most rigid form, the reflexive film must be able to disclose the entire process to the audience, including the producer and the product as subjective, and only if the producer consciously makes his interference public and discloses herself to the audience can the product be considered reflexive. Authors like Ruby(1977), however, argue that reflexivity in film can also be more “accidental” or only displaying some elements of reflexivity without intending to be reflexive or without considering the implications of that approach (Ruby, 1977).

Similarly, this essay is not particularly concerned with manifestations of reflexive codes in the documentary film itself, but about the way community filmmakers understand and express reflexivity and the way that reflexive practice informs their production decisions and their ethical choices. Reflexivity is one of the central concepts within the feminist methodology. In feminist research, reflexivity begins before entering the field. It is a self-critical, holistic action where a researcher acknowledges that her understanding of the world is inherently mediated by her own experiences and preconceptions of the world, as well as by the scientific community she finds herself to be a part of. This self-critical action is useful to the researcher because it helps to understand how these personal positions inform the choices of what topics are being engaged and their approach to studying them. Reflexivity is also a community process where the researcher and participants engage and foster sharing, participatory knowledge-building practices which contributes to more ethical and socially relevant research. An important aspect of reflexive practice is acknowledging the difference. Feminist reflexivity urges researchers to re-consider assuming commonality based on a single dimension of identity, and call for acknowledging that one’s position is complicated, a part of ever-shifting locations (Hesse-Bibber & Piatelli,2012).

The definition of reflexivity within which this essay operates allows for different kinds of reflexivity in documentary film production, including “accidental”, as well as “deliberate” types, instead of clinging to a definition in which a reflexive practice is only that depends on deliberateness and intentionality(Ruby, 1977). This essay also engages with an internal process of reflexivity, arguably typical for community and place-based filmmakers, that spills into and informs the production process. It is about the filmmaker's ability to be aware of her epistemology and how it affects the process of production. As demonstrated in the following section, the practice of reflexivity, whether deeply embedded in the process of filmmaking or not, influences and guides the entire process, as well as the way the filmmakers engage with future(or current) projects that they’re working on.

The following sections are the analysis of the empirical material I have collected, divided into two main parts. The focus of the discussion is the aspects of reflexive practices as expressed by community filmmakers, namely their understanding of reflexivity and the way it affects their work. The first part **“Community filmmaker, positionality and politics of location”** discusses how the filmmaker's understanding and awareness of location (social, political, and geographical) influences their filmmaking experience, production choices, and final product. In the second chapter **“Practices”**, I discuss some of the concrete filmmaking practices described by the community filmmakers that incorporate reflexive elements, and each in its way, through incorporating aspects of feminist methodology, offers an alternative to mainstream documentary practice.

## **5.2. Community filmmaker, positionality and politics of location**

### **“ I'm a white girl from Stockholm, you know”**

In the interviews I conducted with community filmmakers in Sweden, location and positionality have repeatedly come up when discussing their projects and the topics and issues they choose to engage with. Mentioning and acknowledging their location showed up as a reflective practice influencing their decision-making and even the legitimacy they (later) attributed to their projects. Following is the account of one of the filmmakers reflecting on her latest project:

“...and like, I have big doubts about my last big project, because I got asked by a production company to do something about young people from different ethnical groups in Malmö. And I was like, what, why should I do it? I'm a white girl from Stockholm, you know. And then, everyone was like yeah you should do it. And then one day I thought, okay what I really want to do is about love between the groups, like how you build bridges between the groups because they wanted to focus on conflict. But then I thought I will do it about love. And I did that, but then finally it got marked as something about honor issues, you know honor-related troubles. And of course, that became a part of it but my goal from the beginning was to show something different you know, the love between the people. “ (K.)

In this particular part of the interview, K. spoke with a hint of anxiety and even some regret about working on this project. When she says: “I'm a white girl from Stockholm, you know” she is not talking about her geographical location, she is revealing the layers of privilege she holds as a filmmaker, the availability of funds and connections, availability of education, and the power she wields as a white person deciding on how to represent one community's lived experiences and stories. Furthermore, this is a community on the margins of Swedish society, already dealing with stigmatization and exclusion, white cultural gaze through media and other visual representations. By acknowledging her location, acknowledging the body in which she inhabits that location, she is not pretending that she, or that documentary film as her medium, can transcend it, but instead, she is, in the words of Adriane Rich(2013), resisting “lofty and privileged abstraction” often accompanying documentary reports on inequality and minority and marginalized groups. Self-awareness on position and location, allows the filmmaker to see the harmful narrative surrounding the topic and gives her space to attempt to transform it from a narrative of hate and violence to a narrative of love. Whether or not it is possible to transform this narrative from her current location, is debatable, and further in the interview the filmmaker reflects on this precarious attempt:

“...And then finally, I still feel that this was a different view because in normal media when they talk about honor troubles, it's like, the dad is a monster and it highlights the horrible things, and mine is going deeper and giving a deeper understanding. But still, I feel like, what happened finally, yeah a white girl is exposing people of color. So I'm still not sure.”(K.)

Her reflexive toolkit allows her to detect the layers of hegemony in cultural production, but also to understand that she is inherently a part of it as a circumstance of her location. Based on this understanding she relinquishes the idea of the “view from nowhere”, and observes that the stories told about marginalized communities are told from the center, through the white, middle-class gaze. The product is a self-righteous, skewed and stereotypical image that only really serves to perpetuate the marginalization of the community in question. The understanding of this position is at the core of the attempt to transform the cultural narrative surrounding the media representations of marginalized communities. It is at the core of her production decisions and the story she puts in place, and the way she can problematize her work and the impact it has on the cultural representation of marginalized communities.

### 5.3. Insider/Outsider negotiations

The insider/outsider dynamics is a central topic in the discourse on reflexivity as well by problematizing the power relationship that occurs between the, in the case of social science, researcher and the researched, and calls for awareness about different forms of privilege that researchers may hold concerning their field of research or their research participants. There is a lot of debate surrounding the way a researcher can gain access to knowledge and spaces, and the legitimacy of that access. The relationship, or better yet, insider/outsider antagonism and the debate surrounding it, is one of the many threads of connection between documentary filmmaking practice and social science research, in both cases heavily discussed and contested. It remains, nevertheless, as one of the most important aspects of reflexive practice and a part of ethical considerations in both cases. The ethical, epistemic, and even aesthetic problems implicated by the unequal positions between the researcher and the researched are just as relevant for the documentary film if taken into consideration that the practice of documentary filmmaking is grounded in the western, middle-class, white need to explore and examine and understand the world (Ruby, 1977). The history of the documentary film plays out on a colonial backdrop normalizing the dynamics of “us” going into the world to explore “them”. The “them” in this case being the poor, disadvantage, non-white, and oppressed (ibid.). Consent was never really a solution for these problems in documentary filmmaking, turning out to be just as complex of an issue as in science since both depend on the collaboration of individuals who are not otherwise involved in the enterprise (Pryluck, 1976). Any ethical issues that arose regarding privacy, consent, or safety were justified, just as in scientific research, through claims of society's interest in advancing knowledge (ibid.). It is no surprise, therefore, that the insider/outsider issue came up in almost all of the interviews conducted with community documentary filmmakers in Sweden. In some way or another, all of them were grappling with the issues of their location in relation to the community they were filming and the implications of that relationship. The way the insider/outsider location is understood and negotiated by community filmmakers adds a rather fluid perspective to the “insider/outsider” discussions. The interviews suggest that filmmakers subscribe to an idea that neither one of these positions are necessarily fixed but are constantly shifting social locations, and can be differently experienced and expressed. Shifting of these locations is dependant on different “socially constructed distinctions” such as gender, race, or class (ibid., p. 84). The binary implied in the insider/outsider debates turns out to be less than real because

it seeks to freeze positionalities in place and assumes that being an insider or outsider is a fixed attribute.

In an interview with a community filmmaker/cultural anthropologist, this fluidity of insider/outsider locations becomes evident when she describes her negotiations with positionality when interacting and cooperating with a community where she is, at the same time, an “insider” and an “outsider”. Her account on making a documentary film on the embodiment of mother work in Black women communities in suburbs of [name of the city concealed for privacy purposes ]; she reflects on her own location in the community as a Black woman herself, but also how that location changes when adding other dimensions of her identities and positionality:

“...because I, I think initially, was thinking about different positionalities that might have some connection or relevance to the mothers, because it was mothers that I was interested in were Black women. Um, once I started doing the...going into the field or conducting fieldwork I realize how differently positioned I was how I was read, there, as someone not being from the suburb, became super important and superseded all the other categories that I thought would be relevant, um...so that was something I had to...there was a sense of mistrust towards researchers and also journalists based on the history of misrepresentation and violent representation, so there's also a careful kind of attitude or sentiment towards who is doing the representation, regardless of your class, background and your race or whatever that is. So that needed to be negotiated and it was..”(J.)

In this conversation, J. constantly shifts from her identity as an anthropologist and a filmmaker, her experiences and practices meeting at some points and diverging at others. She brings into her filmmaking practice the ethical considerations she has as an anthropologist, a “native” anthropologist one may argue. But, instead of claiming the legitimacy of her research and the image of this community she produced as a filmmaker, she argues against the fixity of distinctions between being “native” and “non-native”; realizing how the categories she thought would be crucial to her access to the community fade into irrelevance next to her identity as a researcher, filmmaker, and ultimately realizing that she was being read as belonging to the “University” rather to the community of Black women she was interacting with. Her identity as a “native anthropologist” was challenged and deconstructed by the community members who created her identity as “the other” as a means of protection against exploitation and re-claiming power and control over the conditions in the

community(Naples, 1996). For the filmmaker, the practice of self-reflexivity begins with her reflecting on her positionality. She is becoming critically aware of the social, cultural, political, economic aspects of her background, experience, education, and embodied presence in the world. She is aware of how these aspects of her background have influenced the way she is perceived by the community and the effect that perception has on their relationship. Her efforts are not de-legitimized by her location, because the aim of reflexivity is not to describe a (research) project as invalid because of the inevitable interventions of researchers' preconceptions. The objective is to, by acknowledging these, attempt to minimize the gap between the researcher and the researched, as well as between the objective of the research and the researched role in the research, reduce the level of misunderstanding and misconceptions that might result from an interpretation of a researcher unconscious of the effects of their social position(Bourdieu, 1990). Reflexivity enables her to reflect on the politics of representation, or how positionality in the field affects how she represents the community members and the way she opened up space for negotiation and control over how they choose to be represented:

"Really this continuous re-assessing and re-negotiating and thinking about power relationships and one's positionality is incredibly crucial regardless of whether you're a part of a community or not. Um, and is something that I think is easily forgotten when you are, especially a part of a community, uh...that is easily taken for granted. I mean, even though one of the film characters is my mom I still needed to read through the contract, tell her [that] she...they negotiated a lot about what they wanted the film to be like and how it should be depicted. And I...definitely a constant review of one's positionality and the process of self-power, um...is crucial..."(J.)

J.'s experience with shifting locations and her understanding and accepting the fluidity of her position puts her in company with feminist anthropologists and ethnographers who argue that location that connects or set apart a researcher from those they study are constantly shifting and in flux (see Mullings, 1999; Brown, 2012; Naples, 1996; Narayan, 1993). In her essay "How native is "native" anthropologist?" Kirin Narayan(1993) explains: "The factors like education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race or sheer duration of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status(p.286). Instead of focusing too much on their location status, these authors suggest that the attention should be on building relationships and the quality of relations with those

represented in their texts. Self-reflective questions asked should be surrounding the purpose of the project, how one perceives their participants, and if the project is a self-serving device for professional realization, or are they perceived as people with voices, experiences, personal views, and confictions(Narayan, 1993). The reflections on insider/outsider dynamics expressed by the filmmaker, also resonate with the analytical framework of intersectionality proposed by feminist post-colonial theorists arguing as well against the fixed, binary social positions, and understanding social location as the intersection of multiple identities, including race, gender, and class (Hill Collins & Bilge 2016).

An interview with another community filmmaker demonstrates the role of building relationships in transcending the limitations of the “outsider” location. Following is the account of a Swedish filmmaker who travels to another country, at the time riddled with political conflict, and who makes her first documentary film there. She begins by discussing her motives for making the film:

“...I started to make films out extreme...what do you call it...anger and frustration, because those stories were just never heard. Uh, and I was kind of twenty and the people I met were twenty and lived in the midst of this war. And yeah, that's where it all started and then I moved to Belfast and stayed, just...I don't know I was just obsessed, and I'm still a little bit...it's a big love of mine, like that place. It's...and that kind of...I don't know, it's really hard, but it's some films that you make and some places that you are just...it's difficult to put words on it, it's just part of me. So that's, Belfast is more me than anything here, which is a bit odd in a way. Uh...but I think it was because it completely educated me. When I came there I was...you know as a Swedish girl that age...really naive and didn't...I mean so many things I learned there were for life, also about how, I mean how unfair life is uh...and, uh, and how unfair it is whose stories that are told, and that happened already when I was nineteen so, that's my main motivation, still trying to give a voice to people the never...of course, most people never have their voice heard, but I mean there are...I don't know, I just obsessed especially giving girls a voice and that's just what it became. “(M.)

Her practice shapes her as a “knower” that is engaged, active, interested, and genuine while creating long-lasting connections with various community members and their location status committing to the work for many years to come. She is continuously reflexive in her work, remaining conscious of her position as an inquirer, but is also aware of herself somewhat becoming involved and acting as a participant herself (Naples, 1996). I see her as operating within a situated knowledge framework where her work, in the words of Harraway (1988), is: “... with no intention to transcend and antagonize the subject and the object, creating a framework to be able to see from the periphery” (p. 583). In her practice, she employs a methodological strategy of “ethics of care” that enables her to put in practice the standpoint theory, by showing empathy and compassion and valuing emotions in dialogue (to be discussed further in the text) (Naples, 1996).

Based on the interviews conducted with community filmmakers, I would suggest that most of them, through their practice, employ the methodological framework inspired by feminist standpoint theory, understanding that situated knowledge is all about the communities, and not individuals, showing a larger perspective on various issues by focusing their attention to somewhere particular (Naples, 1996). The way that they reflect on their location and insider/outsider negotiations, I would argue, make their projects stronger and more relevant, if only for their contribution to a transformation of documentary practice towards a more just and equal space.

#### **5.4. Key strategies and Practices: A Collaborative practice**

Community filmmaking is strongly associated with the participatory approach distinguishing it from mainstream forms of cinema. In this sense, community films are films about communities they are made *with*. Research has shown that community cinema participation can vary between projects, manifesting differently from filmmaker to filmmaker. Communities can be involved with the production in different levels of engagement, from informal engagement, joint decision making, to knowledge exchange. (Malik, Chapain, & Comunian, 2017). Practices of collaboration, co-creation, and participation showed up in different forms for different filmmakers, and as more or less prominent in different stages of production. For some, the collaborative part was crucial in collecting visual material and creating the narrative, while for others, collaboration has informed the distribution aspect of the project, and participants had the “final” say as to where and how the project will be shown and had control of shaping the discourse surrounding the project. The participatory aspect of

these projects is not particularly similar to those usually connected to ethnographic, participatory cinema described by, for example, Stern (2011) and Wiebe(2016), where the projects seem to be designed and conceptualized as participatory. Rather, the collaboration seems to be more intuitive and impromptu in some cases, somehow natural to the overall filmmaker's practice. One of the filmmakers interviewed was describing a project that he has done in collaboration with the "main protagonist" where she has collected the majority of the visual material for the project, in the form of a visual diary. The project was about the experiences of a Black Woman living in the Swedish society, navigating her own identity, expectations, inclusion/exclusion dynamics, racism, and other challenges of being an immigrant Black Woman in the Global North. The filmmakers had to negotiate layers of ethical, aesthetic, and epistemic issues that come with the inherently problematic dynamics of white male filmmakers setting out to tell a story of a Black Woman's life experience. Opting for a collaborative, participatory approach, I would argue, they have managed to overcome the majority of these issues. The way that the diary format was used as a medium in this project does not only demonstrate a practice of collaborative community filmmaking, but also challenges the filmmaker's/researcher's dominance over the narrative, and flips it upside down. Below is the filmmaker's account of the process:

"...And then she used the camera as a kind of witness to portray her everyday life and that material was beautiful and then we decided to make a film. So it was her material that came first, so it was not an idea or something, it was more like how can we take care of this fun and horrible material. Horrible in a way that it was a lot of racism and sexism and violence in that material but also a lot of humor and a nice way of looking at the Swedish society and she has a lot of humor and such and it was playful also. And I think that is also I think, in ethical terms, I think both me, M. and M. had sort of fascination and playfulness while we were filming and that I think was important."

And:

"So there's this kind of balance between her own agency and then also the orientation, sort of framing it and putting it...like different

perspectives in it. So her material was the core of the film I think, this kind of more non-linear fragments of everyday life.” (E.M.)

By incorporating the collaborative aspect in the filmmaking process, filmmakers did not set out to document M.’s experience of being a Black Woman in Swedish society, by doing interviews and constructing the narrative themselves. Rather, they have opened up space for M. to show what the Swedish society was from her perspective, so the gaze was reversed. The oppositional gaze principle incorporated in this project is strikingly reminiscent of feminist-post colonial scholars, especially of bell hooks’(1992) work on the very same topic in her essay “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators”, where she elaborates on how the ability to shift the trajectory of the gaze towards the structures of domination and oppression could open up the possibility for agency and freedom. Furthermore, what is demonstrated in this kind of collaborative practice is what Patricia Hill Collins(1986) would refer to as “Black women's self-definition and self-valuation”. By being a part of the process, and by collecting the visual material herself, the film protagonist was not a passive object of interpretation but was able to construct her own narrative. However, from what was communicated through the interview with the filmmaker, M. was not a part of the editing process, so it’s not clear in which capacity she was in control of what the final product was. Although this particular project might not be the perfect example of incorporating feminist post-colonial thought into documentary filmmaking, it does demonstrate the potential and power of this approach in transforming harmful narratives surrounding representation in documentary film.

### **5.5. A Care based practice**

Just like a collaborative participatory approach to filmmaking, a care-based approach strives towards alternative knowledge and alternative methodologies in documentary filmmaking. The practice of care and building interpersonal relationships is indispensable for a filmmaking practice that aims to truly understand and connect to the stories and people that it’s portraying. I suggest that incorporating relational ethics in the filmmaking process is the basics for an equal and fair final product. Conscious building relationships and interaction with the participants, as well as emotional engagement, ensures that the process is grounded in empathy and mutual respect and trust for all participants. Incorporating care-based practice

in the filmmaking process is also a direct (or indirect) opposition to the Kantian autonomous subject, or traditional moral theory in general, which, criticized by feminist theorists of ethics of care(see Ruddick, 1987; Held, 2000; Jaggar, 2000). In documentary filmmaking, the autonomous moral subject would translate to commercial documentary filmmakers relying upon the areas of common law – those of consent and/or copyright attempting to override any ethical concerns. However, these common-law interventions invariably work to the benefit of the filmmaker rather than the participant. Therefore, the key to documentary ethics lies in the relationship between filmmaker and participant, a relationship in which trust plays a great part(Thomas, 2012). Most of the community filmmakers interviewed for this project have described a deep connection to the subject and participants they were working with, at the time of the making the film but also noting the importance of maintaining that relationship as the film goes on into the world. Particularly illustrative of the care-based practice was the relationship of one of the filmmakers with the participants of one of her more recent films. It was quite fascinating how throughout the interview M. kept mentioning these two grown women in their thirties, with whom she has made a film while they were still in elementary school. M. was talking about their careers, education, their private lives, and how they still record interviews together talking about making the film. This has inspired the conversation around a care-based filmmaking practice, which I have then further incorporated in the rest of the interviews. The following is the description of a relational, care-based filmmaking practice as implemented by M.:

“... I meet, I always meet everyone a lot without the camera. So it was with "Blood Sisters" as well, I knew those girls' lives so, so well because we met them and hung out, and they talk to me about everything when we didn't have the camera there, so that's like, it's a project like, you put your life into it, I mean it's more of a lifestyle. ”

And:

“And that is the most important thing, uh...really, really, at times for me as well I think. Because you build trust over time. Because then they can see that I'm genuine and I don't disappear, I still contact with most of the people I have made films about, and...yeah...Because that's important. And the most important thing also is that they feel

represented. I mean that this is, this is the true record of our life. Like, you know I feel, like I know J. and J. said that I feel, they felt that this is a true account of our lives and that we are proud of it. And I mean that's, that you have to aim at all the time.” (M.)

What M. is describing here is a committed, long-term process focused on building trust and a safe space for everyone involved. This kind of practice is undoubtedly rooted in the feminist theoretical tradition, calling for working with care and solidarity with marginalized groups. It is rooted in the understanding that humans are interdependent and relational, that care requires the knowledge of the context and detailed understanding of need, and that this can only be known if the experiences of people who are marginalized are understood as fundamental to action-orientated responsibility (Brannelly, 2018).

### **5.6. A Political practice**

Through the community-based filmmaking practice threads a common practice of political engagement, activism, and transformation geared motivation. Most of the filmmakers interviewed, with few exceptions, overtly incorporate specific political agendas within their filmmaking projects, motivated by the film’s potential to educate, and transform the existing narrative. Whether one agrees with their political messaging or not is beside the point (although all of the filmmakers interviewed for this project endorse the politics of equality, inclusion, and respect for all), what really matters for the context of this essay is their willingness to be open about their agenda, and not pretend to be an objective observer documenting the social realm. Reconciliation of activism and knowledge production is a long-standing tradition in feminist and feminist post-colonial scholarship. Patricia Hill Collins argues that epistemic shifts in discussions about power relations and oppression were in fact born in the space between social movements and academia. Collins herself was an active participant in Civil rights and Black Power social movements as well as anti-war and gay liberation movements (Bhambra, 2015). In a sense, by acknowledging their political agenda, the filmmaker is also an active participant. Maybe they do not show up in the film as a person, but they do show up through ideas, concepts, and politics. In the interviews, the filmmakers were open about which topics they were interested in in terms of politics and what they hoped the films would achieve in this sense. A common characteristic of community filmmaking practice that showed up in the interviews was that most of the

filmmakers focused on their own “backyard”, meaning that they made(or are making) activist, political and critical films about Swedish society on a macro, as well as micro-level. One other thing worth mentioning is that not all films were regarded by filmmakers as just political tools, but all were political, meaning that they were inspired by a certain social issue that either informed the methodology and the process or was represented in the film with no particular agenda to use the film as a “political pamphlet”. In the following interview excerpt, a filmmaker who incorporates social-justice topics in his films, explains what political film can be beyond a political tool, reminding that practices incorporated within the filmmaking process, or method, including practices of reflexivity and relationality are also a quality of the political film:

...I think also of myself as a political filmmaker. Because I think like relationships...how we relate to each other is so important and how we actually see each other and how we work together making the film. Like, so I think...I guess it has its place too this more like pamphlet films. But it's not, if it's only that strategy I think it's not a nice world...I don't know...maybe I'm just...it's just interesting.(E.M.)

In this instance, the filmmaker locates political action in incorporating, what can be described as a feminist relational subject within his filmmaking practice. In the feminist view, relationality is political, as it is resistance to the rational, atomic individual narrative, celebrating and recognizing the caretaking activities traditionally performed by women. On the other side, an interview with a social-justice activist and documentary filmmaker illustrates what a political filmmaking practice can also be, where he explains the role of the community in making and distributing a radical, political documentary film:

“Film is a tool. I'm using tool for my beliefs or activism. So my journey from[name of the country concealed for privacy purposes] to Sweden, to become a worker and cheap laborer to work in union. So, always film for me is important to make films for change. So I'm not doing film for the sake of doing film. I want to do film as a tool. So that's a...that's whole my journey. So, like [name of the documentary concealed for privacy purposes] documentary is...I wanted to tell the story of what happened and how...Because not only one story, there's many many [inaudible] and it has come to 20 years time different

episodes[?]. So I learned, the best thing happens [inaudible] I managed to connect with the film collective. Because individual is individual, and if you work collectively, that is like enhancing. So we, for example, work on our own projects and some together. But for [name of the documentary concealed for privacy purposes], it is only my own project, but [name of the festival concealed for privacy purposes] Film Festival we had 40 people within collective.”(T.)

T. describes transforming his personal experience of a migrant worker into a collective effort to create change through a radical political practice that involves but is not limited to documentary filmmaking. In this context film is yet another tool of political practice for social change. T. and other members of the radical filmmaker network mentioned by T. use social-issue documentaries to engage the public with these issues by combining personal non-fiction storytelling with programs and activities of the civil society and other non-governmental subjects (Borum Chattoo & Jenkins, 2019). T. also describes how political documentary filmmakers organize into a network to facilitate and support each other's productions. This goes to show that the mainstream industry is corporate-controlled and far too expensive to be accessed by independent and radical filmmakers, so the discourse they're trying to push in the filmmaking community remains marginalized (Hamblin & Watson, 2019). At one point in the interview, when discussing funding, T. describes his interaction with one of the leading financiers in the Swedish film industry when attempting to get funds to support his latest project:

...the answer they give is (the financiers), oh, this story can be told in a different way. But I want to tell my story (laughs) Yeah, but anyway... that's... they're not interested, because I'm challenging Sweden. You know like, Sweden happen to be like, a champion of human rights and blah blah blah and everything is like perfect here. And I'm challenging, within Sweden what's happened. So anyway, so that's a... And then, but why the collective is important? Because we help each other. So in scriptwriting, to camera we have all (inaudible) what we need, we have editing (inaudible)... So everybody have, you know, different skills and we help each other. Because always, you don't need always money to do the film. (T.)

What is highlighted here is the power of the collective to overcome the lack of funds supporting political, radical film, but leaves the question of the ability to reach wider audiences beyond their immediate networks and supporters which still keep the radical film at the margins (Hamblin & Watson, 2019). Another radical and political aspect of this filmmaker's practice is incorporating the "oppositional gaze" as means of transforming the oppressive racialized narrative in Swedish society. In the spirit of what was written by feminist post-colonial scholars and activists (hooks, 2014; and Hills Collins, 1986) the filmmaker is, through critical view, able to see through the construction of the superior narrative by stating:

“...they're not interested, because I'm challenging Sweden. You know like, Sweden happen to be like, a champion of human rights and blah blah blah and everything is like perfect here. And I'm challenging, within Sweden what's happened.”

In his film, he is exposing Sweden as enabling the exploitation of migrant workers, and thus not only resisting this false narrative but also establishing his own agency in doing so. The power of his political action is then mirrored by difficulties accessing the state-funded programs aimed towards supporting Swedish film.

While I was not focusing in this essay on structural knowledge production and gatekeeping in the filmmaking industry, and marginalization of community based, political and radical film, it did come up as an important topic to be addressed, as well as investigating the how and why political documentary filmmaking can contribute to social change in Sweden.

## **6 FINAL DISCUSSION**

This essay has reflected on how community filmmaking practice can resist and transform dominant discriminatory narratives as well as empower and amplify the existing voices in the minority and marginalized communities through applying the feminist and post-colonial methodological approach. The purpose of this thesis project was to showcase the different political filmmaking practices and the ways these practices engage with communities and issues of diversity and inclusion, as well as examining the potentials of feminist methodologies to be applied across disciplines. Theorizing the practice of community documentary filmmaking through the critical practice of feminist theorists and filmmakers, as well as post-colonial theorists, makes it possible to re-imagine documentary filmmaking

practice as the one transforming and shifting the center of knowledge production. The reflexive practices and post-colonial criticism are a good way to start when exploring the alternative modes of documentary filmmaking.

One of the research questions in this essay was aimed to explore the ways community filmmakers interpret and engage with concepts of reflexivity, politics of location, and ethics as central concepts in feminist methodologies. Based on the interviews conducted with community filmmakers in Sweden, reflexivity in documentary filmmaking is practiced, expressed, and understood in a variety of different ways, ranging from direct, overt practice to more subtle, almost unintentional practice of reflexivity, inherent to particular filmmakers' creative and production process. Most of the community filmmakers stated that while they maybe did not intentionally incorporate the practice of reflexivity into their production and in the finished product, they do include many of the elements that can be considered reflexive, from acknowledging their position, power, and re-thinking their reasons and motivations for making a film. Through analysis of interviews with filmmakers, I have found that filmmakers incorporate the practices of reflexivity in their work through an understanding of the importance of location and positionality of the filmmaker throughout the production process. Filmmakers consider their political, social, and geographical location as a starting point to developing a project grounded in reflexivity and constant re-examining and re-negotiating the power relations and disbalance in the process.

The second area of interest in this research project was to understand and document the filmmaking practices employed by community filmmakers that, in some way or another, reflect feminist methodological concepts. By incorporating these practices filmmakers attempt to overcome the ethical, as well as epistemic issues that might come up in the filmmaking process. As elaborated in the previous section, the filmmakers' practice is heavily informed by reflexivity, and following that same thread, three distinctive practices came up in the interviews, illustrating how feminist methodologies affect and inform the filmmaking method and the overall final film product.

The interviews revealed several different and yet interconnected practices that filmmakers use either incorporate the values of feminist methodology. These practices were described as part of the production process or are a direct reflection of the filmmakers' political engagements. Practices described in this essay are as follows: A Collaborative practice which was described as a process of integrating both the filmmaker and the participant(s) in the production of the film, through the collection of audio-visual material, or through involving participants in other aspects of production, like distribution of the film; Care based practice

which includes building interpersonal relationships between the filmmaker and film participants and within which one of the most important aspects is complete immersion and attempt to fully understand the stories and experiences portrayed in the film. It was the example of practicing feminist relational ethics; and Political Practice that showed up as a common thread between the filmmakers who described different levels of political and activist involvement through their filmmaking practice. Emancipatory filmmaking practices outlined in this project can be a valuable contribution to attempts to decolonize filmmaking practices and contribute to a more equal and just documentary filmmaking landscape. Furthermore, I believe that this project is successfully demonstrating the ways feminist methodologies, as well as theories, can be applied across disciplines and be a valuable asset for re-thinking locations, positions of power, ethics, and their role in knowledge production.

While engaging with this project, and especially in conversations with filmmakers, many more dimensions of interest have become evident. There is more research needed to exactly map out the landscape of Swedish community cinema, as well as other forms of filmmaking that are resisting the dominant narratives. It is especially necessary to look into the conditions of production and film production work conditions. While throughout this essay community filmmaking practice has been discussed through the lens of its transformative and emancipatory potential, it is important to add to that discussion by considering some of the challenges and problem areas that are included within community filmmaking practice, at the individual as well as collective level. On a collective level, there is a significant challenge regarding financial sustainability and systemic financial support for community-based, political, or radical filmmakers. Most of the filmmakers interviewed mention finances as one of the obstacles in their work. T. elaborates: “We never be able to make money because that's just not the way it is. If we wanted to make money we would do commercial work and do something else. So enough money to just make the film and distribute as much as you can, so that's minimum what we can” (T.). I would argue that one of the main challenges for community filmmaking practice in Sweden is finding a way towards a more sustainable practice and being able to develop more open and varied channels of distribution for a greater audience to see the films. Therefore, there is a need to work towards a film industry that incentivizes a direct connection between filmmaker, participant, and audience, and that focuses on the well-being of all participants involved in the process. This can not be accomplished by setting up tight deadlines and focusing on quantity rather than the quality of the product. For the community-based, emancipatory filmmaking practice to thrive and

develop, the environment should be created where filmmakers can move at their own pace, enabling the participants to fully engage in the process(which takes time).

Structural analysis of distribution and access to funds and other resources would be valuable in order to understand the full scope of how and why knowledge is produced in the sector of cultural industries in Sweden.

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