THE OCEAN IN BETWEEN

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Centered on the universal search for home, The Ocean in Between is an autobiographical documentary about my bicultural identity and sense of guilt as a first generation Italian emigrant daughter. As I embark on a journey between Italy and the United States, I attempt to reconcile my American aspirations with my Italian roots. Using observational footage, direct interviews, and narration, this film provides a poetic and intimate look at family relations, love and death, bicultural identity, and sexuality.
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By

Sara Masetti
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This section was written during the course of one year, from June 2011 until May 2012. This is the original proposal that was submitted and approved by the thesis committee.

TITLE: The Ocean In Between
LENGTH: 30 minutes
MEDIUM: HD VIDEO/16mm

Introduction and Description

I am an Italian born documentary filmmaker and Texas transplant. I grew up in Italy in the 1980s watching and loving too many American movies. As soon as I got the chance to travel to the far exciting lands where those moving pictures were made, I seized the opportunity. At the age of sixteen, I said goodbye to my Italian home, mother and brother to travel to the States as an exchange student. Dallas Texas was my home for a year, and Don and Neva became my American mom and dad for much longer.

Throughout these years I have traveled back and forth between Italy and the United States trying to balance my Italian family ties and my professional aspirations in my adoptive American home. During this time, it seemed as if I could not choose one life or the other and that, as long as I lived both, I never fully belonged to either.

After ten years abroad, as my graduate school days come to a close, I feel pressured to make a decision between my two homes. Upon graduation, I have to face a terminal student visa expiration date. If I decide to stay in the U.S., my only option is to find a job that will sponsor my work visa. I am gay, so getting married is out of the question.

In the summer of 2012 I will travel to my Italian hometown to visit my family and explore the idea of moving back. Till Love Do Us Part is an autobiographical documentary about
my bicultural identity and sense of guilt as a first generation emigrant daughter. My first
departure from home took place two years after the passing of my father. As long as I stay away,
I will struggle with deeply seeded personal guilt for leaving my mother and brother for another
life in a different country, with a different family. I believe I am responsible for leaving them
alone dealing with two family losses, instead of one.

Sarzana, my hometown, is an overgrown ancient medieval village nestled in the Magra
River valley between the crumbly Pennine Alps in the north and the gentle Mediterranean Sea in
the south. This is where my mother and grandmothers, after my father’s passing at age of
fourteen, raised me for twenty years. It is within this cradle of personal and cultural history that
my journey begins.

Style and Approach

*Till Love Do Us Part* is an attempt at understanding elements of my own identity by
traveling back and forth between my motherland and my adoptive home. Early in the film it is
established that there are two main locations where everything takes place - Italy & America.
When I leave one for the other, I put the set of relationships in the former on stall for the next set
to come in. By living this constant love swing between the two, I am left in the middle. The film
is autobiographical in a self-reflexive mode. The footage will include cinema vérité, personal and
poetic sequences. The cinema vérité and personal part of this documentary reflects my physical
relationships to the people in my life and the complexities and subtleties of having an ‘in-
between’ identity. At times I am holding the camera and pointing it at people around me and
other times my sparse voice over will guide the narrative while I’m within the frame. The poetic
scenes capture the emotional longing to a timeless home from which I keep running away. More
specifically, having left home years ago, many aspects of the relationship with my brother, my first best friend, have not changed since our teenage years. Therefore, these sequences in the film symbolize both our relationship as siblings and my romanticized timeless, and perhaps lost, vision of my Italian home. I am using first person scripted narration voiced by me that will be designed in the form of thoughts written before, during and after the production. It primarily provides character development and context. It develops my character, but also those around me by offering a second perspective on their actions or words. In the fashion of McElwee’s Sherman’s March, I, a self-reflexive narrator, lead autobiographical narratives and intertwine them with cinema vérité footage. I want to incorporate elements of the southern filmmaker’s witty and humorous voice over style with an overarching heartfelt and nostalgic personal view.

Target Audience

The tale of leaving home at a young age to find one’s path in life is a universal one. Western and eastern audiences, primarily female, between the ages of 17 and 35 of multiple cultural backgrounds will make up the core viewer group of this film. But also men and women within the U.S. will be able to relate to this tale given the high rate of high school graduates who frequently relocate far away from their native towns for college and jobs within the borders of their country. Exchange students, international students, ‘self-exiled’ women and men around the globe will follow. Audiences with Mediterranean roots, especially Italians, will be able to relate to this story most because of the shared family and cultural values. Also, members of the LGBT and immigrant communities will take interest in this film.
Preproduction Research

Treatment

The film opens with sounds of sea waves rolling over a sandy beach over a black screen. “Do you think our lives would be a lot different if dad were alive?” I ask. “I don’t know,” my brother responds. He and I sit on a tree trunk washed up on the beach after a winter storm. Everything about our surroundings looks charming and timeless. We share a few sparse thoughts about how difficult it is for me to be away from both my homes. As we face the sea, a phone conversation between my mother and I discussing my summer travel plans to Italy is heard. “When are you leaving?” she asks.

It’s the middle of the school year in Denton, Texas. I spend my days going to classes, studying, filming, teaching, and cooking. I have a nice roommate, but I spend most of my time on my own. Sometimes, I go to the grocery store for recreation, sometimes I skype with my out-of-state girlfriend Jaime and other times I skype with my family. Daily, I choose to focus on what I came here for - getting a degree, a job, and finally, a work visa. Whenever I put all my energies into a film project, I always find myself focusing on stories of immigration. My last documentary was about a Sudanese man who had to give up his American aspirations to reunite with his Moroccan family. The film I am working on now is about a Mexican young man trying his hardest to stay in the US to work. I may not be completely aware of it, but I always identify with my subjects and unconsciously try to understand their identities and struggles to figure out mine.

Sometimes, it seems as if I refuse to socialize outside of school. I almost experience a sort of ‘self-inflicted’ loneliness, where it is easier to be on my own as I am accustomed to, rather than investing time and energy in another temporary social group and residence. As much
as I want to belong, it is difficult to commit to a place that won’t commit to me. It is almost as if my life in America has always been constellated with a series of bureaucratic roadblocks. Unlike in my early twenties, a time in which I lived in the moment, I can now foresee more obstacles coming up over the horizon. This sense of anxiety paired with my traveling back and forth every few months and keeping up with my Italian community somehow prevents me from making a true effort in trying to build a new permanent community in the States. It is always mentally and emotionally challenging to share an understanding of my Italian life with people in the American counterpart - all they have in common is me.

Although my graduate school days are not filled with social life events, I do love what I do at school and outside of school while filming with my classmates. A few weeks into the semester, I drive to Houston to film one of my foreign documentary subjects and follow his progress with his visa application.

I finally have a weekend off to spend in the countryside with my American parents. Neva and Don, whom have been mom and dad since they first hosted me as a high school exchange student at age sixteen, take me fishing. I tend to get too impatient, but we catch a lot of bass fish. This is a time when I can relax and forget about imminent deadlines and projects. I am a grown up now, but spending time around them is like going back to that first exchange year together.

Months pass by when I get a phone call from my best friend Juan Carlos. He is ecstatic to let me know he is going to get married to his boyfriend Greg in a few months and he would like for me to be his witness. I am so happy for him and let him know I would not miss it for anything in the world.

It’s summer when I sit on a plane looking out the window at the Tuscan sandy coast. Finally, I land in Pisa where my mother and brother await me anxiously. We are all really happy
and moved to see each other after so long. Even squeezing all my suitcases in an Italian-sized car turns into a comical act.

Once at home, I greet everybody - grandmother, aunts, uncles, cousins. While I make a few calls to other relatives and friends, my brother and mother cook for everybody. Pounds of pasta, seafood, deli meats, bruschetta, and tomatoes fill the table. I get comfortable, relaxed, stuffed and loud - after family, sharing food is what I missed the most about Italy. We all spend the evening making each other eat and laugh a lot. Nights like this make me forget about my double life, sense of guilt, and future plans. At the same time, I tend to forget too much about my duties to my American family, girlfriend and friends sometimes. It is rather difficult to share experiences, thoughts and emotions that were recorded in a different language, cultural context and with foreign acquaintances or strangers.

Later that night, while everyone is asleep, I make a skype video call to my girlfriend back in Texas. Our love is young, Texas born and bred. This is the first time Jaime and I are so far apart. She just graduated from film school and is planning her move to New York City. While she is stressed out about her move, I don’t help by suggesting I may eventually want to move back to Europe after I am done with graduate school. She half jokingly and hesitantly calls me a liar for making promises I don’t seem to want to maintain. In the end, we both agree that we will both go anywhere as long as we are together.

Finally, I meet some of my closest friends. I am nervous and excited all at once, almost like the first summer I returned. Cristina and Alessandra come over to say hi and go to the grocery store to buy drinks for a dinner at a friend’s house. We have all changed throughout the years, but every summer seems to bring back the same careless humorous feelings of the summers of our teens.
It is a beautiful hot summer and my brother Andrea and I go to the beach on the nearby island of Palmaria. Yachts cruise by in the distance in the strip of water between firm land and the island, grandparents tend to hyper children, and north African vendors patrol the beach back and forth. Not far from the coast, Andrea and I snorkel looking for fish. We dive in, fearlessly, swim through the algies, and spot a few tiny shy fish. It seems like a long time has passed since we used to spend our summers together as kids, but his blind trust in me tries to reassure me about my life path. He tells me that our mother worries, but she would worry as much about the same things had I stayed.

Later that night, we all have dinner together. Although hesitant at first, my grandmother, a Sicilian who migrated to northern Italy in the 1950s with her husband and first child, tells me her story of struggle leaving her homeland and family behind to move to the northern town of Bologna. She tells me that, at the time, that was the best choice for them, but now, looking back, she knows she would have been happier had she moved back to Sicily many years before, but one never knows until it’s too late. I ask her what I should do and, after seeing my discouragement about my ‘American dream’, she tells me it’s soon for me to decide. She insists it is worth staying there if I have the right motivation, work or otherwise. My mother seems to disagree.

After dinner, my mother and I sit outside on the balcony. She asks me what it is going to happen after graduation. I tell her how unsure I am about the future and how sometimes I think things could have been different had we stayed all together. She has many regrets about the past and she wonders how things would have been if Gio, my father, never got sick with cancer and died. It is a painful conversation, but I try to explain to her that, looking back, I think leaving home was easier when I was sixteen because I was a teenager and, maybe, I was less attached to
home because he died. As I grew up, it became harder to leave or go back and forth, but it was the life I had chosen. Now, I almost feel like I’m reaching a point of no return. I am putting all my efforts in trying to stay in the US and finally getting a job. But it has been so difficult in the past and I feel so guilty about leaving them alone that I don’t know what is best anymore.

A few days later, I go see my father’s mother - Iliana - a tough teacher and tireless cook. She tutored me through school and mentored me through high school - following her direction is part of our relationship. We spend the sunny afternoon making pasta together for hours, like the old days. Unlike the past, I am a grown up now and she can’t help but ask if I have found a boy. I either deny or take the fifth and so she tells me that if I stay in America for that, he better be rich. She goes on saying that all of her friends are great grandmothers, while she is only a grandmother.

Days pass by, we meet with more friends and have dinner outdoors. Just like long time friends, we are very comfortable around each other and are very curious to catch up on each of our recent work and love adventures. A simple dinner turns into a never ending of deep conversations and laughter.

Back home, my mom and I look at family albums as she recounts stories from our childhood adventures and misadventures. Ten years after my first move to the United States, my mother shares her reflections on my life split between the two countries. At the time, she supported my move to the US because she firmly believed my experiences in America would have enriched my Italian life. However, the opposite happened, that is, my past Italian life contributed to my daily American life. Also, looking at the sacrifices that her family had to make after migrating to northern Italy from the south, she knows how painful the end of their family ties to the south have been. None of them were able to go back and succeed. She respects my
future decision but she is concerned about many things. The first one being loneliness. In the end, she believes that my final decision of whether I will stay in America will depend entirely on whether I will find a job. Also, she understands I will want to have a family of my own one day. Although her idea of family is very different from mine, she knows it may be quite difficult to have an openly lesbian relationship in our hometown. She never openly told other family members nor friends about my sexuality because it’s something personal. I tell her it would be impossible for me to open about this with our enlarged family or any local work environment.

One sunny morning, I go back to my father’s mother’s house where she is feeding her hens. We go on a walk around her vineyard looking at her fruit trees. We run into a few things my dad had built many years ago. She can’t help but telling me that “losing me was like losing my father.”

Back in America, Juan Carlos is getting married and I fly to New York City for his wedding. Both Jaime and I attend. This is the first time Juan Carlos and I spend time together with our respective better halves. It is a great time for all of us - somehow all of our relationships reach another level of legitimacy and self-appreciation on that day.

Later that weekend, Jaime and I talk about what I need to do for us to stay together in the US and what it would be like to have to move to Europe together. I explain to her that I battle with the options I have left. I really want to stay in the US because of many reasons. First of all, for us. Being apart in the same country is difficult enough and I don’t want to lose her. Then, after all these years I spent in school here, it is finally time to turn all these degrees into some sort of income and be completely independent. At the same time, I feel extremely guilty for leaving my mother and brother and I don’t know what to do. Jaime asks me lots of questions. She can relate to a young person’s desire to leave home to find a path. But she tells me that
people can move and I shouldn’t think of things in black and white. I agree but I know my family cannot move to the US. Firstly, my mother does not speak English. Secondly, one cannot just swing by the visa outlet store to pick one up and move to the US with it. She tells me she will go wherever I have to go. I love her, but asking her to leave her home, and continent, for an undetermined amount of time makes me feel lacking as a girlfriend. Even if I get over that, I think it is too soon to have to deal with this for us. She agrees that things used to be easier, but we will find a way. I cannot help but making a joke about how the Supreme Court will soon rule in favor of gay marriage rights and she will be stuck with me forever.

Soon after the marriage, Juan Carlos, a native of Panama, gets ready to leave the country because his work visa is expiring and being married to Greg won’t allow him to stay. So, I visit him in Philadelphia where we discuss our past choices and future paths within and outside the U.S. He believes that we did all we could to stay and, in the end, if we don’t, we will find a different path in the world for ourselves. He hopes their visa applications to Canada will finally be accepted within the following year.

It is Christmas time in Italy and I am home for a few weeks. While my friends go out together, I make up an excuse to stay home where I sit around by myself, watch TV, read, and talk with Jaime on the phone.

Later, I visit my dad’s mother who is helping me fixing up some of my clothing. With difficulty, as she is sewing, I tell her how I struggle with staying away from my family. She understands my reasons, but she tells me that she spent her life putting her needs and desires after those of others and I shouldn’t do the same. She believes I should pursue my career in the U.S.. Besides, there are not many other options for me at home.
My mother and grandmothers stay behind while I choose to fly back to my North American land and relationships. My brother sits on a tree trunk washed up on the beach after a winter storm. “When are you leaving?,“ my mother asks. Cut to black.

Characters

Sara: She moves through space with the precision and efficiency of a river, her destination always in mind. She is a lot more lost and confused than she lets show. Her guilt and insecurities are well hidden, masked by her confidence and amicability. From the start you know there is something deeper, hidden, but she does not so easily open up. Though she would deny it, she is consistent and dependable to her good friends neither here nor there. She is logical and rational and not one to drift off on false hopes. She is caught between the politics and the trees.

Andrea (Sara’s brother): He is two years Sara’s junior. He is a loving, kind and introverted young man. He spent his entire life close to his mother while everyone else was gone. In accordance with the renowned Italian customs, he still lives at home with his mother, grandmother, aunt and cousin. He wants to move soon, but can’t see himself living anywhere else than Italy. Even if he felt not having a sister around for so long deeply affected his upbringing, he would never admit it to either himself nor her. Ultimately, his blind trust in his sister, and perhaps a little fear, would never allow him to blame anything on her.

Rosy (Sara’s mother): One should never forget she has Sicilian blood running through her veins. Since a young age she was my grandfather’s right arm in family business matters, especially after his first heart attack. Again, because of necessity, her strength is what allowed her to raise two children after her husband’s passing. She is a strong, humorous and possessive woman in her mid fifties with a youthful look to her that Sara will have long lost at her age. She
is her mother, her father, her maker and, she secretly would add, her destroyer. She believes in her daughter, but, ultimately, according to her notion of family, loneliness and selfishness are and will continue to be the leitmotifs of her life away from home.

Nonna Lina (Sara’s maternal grandmother): She is a true Sicilian lady in her early eighties. She was born and raised in Sicily and went through somewhat of a cultural shock when moved to northern Italy with her husband in her twenties. She has been somewhat weak in the past few years because of health reasons, but her southern accent and gaga personality are often a source of joy and laughter in the house. After my grandfather passed away in 2007, she relies on the rest of the family for comfort and company.

Nonna Iliana (Sara’s paternal grandmother): She is a tough, old-school retired teacher, avid reader and country woman who believes there’s no such thing left in this world like discipline. Sara was her first grandchild and she was her mentor and tutor from kindergarten to high school. For instance, at the time, she would be coaching Sara doing algebra homework at her kitchen table all the while she was gutting hens over the sink. Regrettably, their relationship suffered after my father’s passing as my closest family shifted more towards my mother’s side.

Jaime (Sara’s girlfriend): She is Sara’s girlfriend. As timeless and genderless she may be in Sara’s mind at times, she more often than not has to point out that Haime is the wrong pronunciation of her name, and the wrong gender indeed. The French expression ‘Je (a)ime’ was what unwisely inspired her parents to name their baby girl twenty four years ago. She would hate this description of her - with good reason - and upon reading this would somewhat regret even considering dating a documentarian in the first place. She is an unbelievably smart, creative and resourceful young woman. ‘Definitely the best thing about Texas by far,’ Sara says. Well, Texas-made rather, since they now have to ‘endure’ a long distance relationship as she moved to NYC
upon graduation. Sara’s immigration status and doubts about her future make their future quite uncertain and, at times, excessively intimidating.

Don and Neva (Sara’s American mom and dad): They are a set of loving, kind and fun American parents. Upon meeting Sara during her exchange year in Dallas, they would have never thought that relationship would have turned into a life-long one. As a teenager, they welcomed, mentored and raised her during her year abroad like mom and dad would. They always believed in her and pushed her to find her passion and profession in life. They wish they could take away all of Sara’s immigration hiccups, but they believe in her and her wish to succeed in America.

Cristina and Alessandra (Sara’s friends): They are long time Italian hometown friends of Sara’s living respectively in Florence and Milan with their respective girlfriends. They are two of the few friends she looks forward to seeing every time I go back. When the three of them first became friends, after high school, Cristina and Ale were a couple and my first gay friends.

Juan Carlos (Sara’s friend): If their brain parts did a better job at matching, Juanqui and Sara would have dated a long time ago. They met on college orientation day and became best friends five minutes later. He left Panama at eighteen to come to the U.S. for college. Ten years, three visa expirations, two degrees and one husband later, he has to reassess his life path in or outside the U.S.

Ethics

When making a personal documentary, ethical issues cannot be overlooked. I am exposing extremely personal aspects of my life, while sharing perspectives and identities of family members and friends. My main concern is to be sure to portray the people close to me in
an honest but dignified manner. Ten years ago, a few years after my father’s passing, my choice to leave Italy spurred mixed and complex reactions within my family. By documenting their lives and opinions, I intend to give exposure to an aspect of my personal and family life that I have overlooked for many years and that has become the core of a personal inner battle. This film is an experiment long overdue that will, one side, help me portray my identity as complete and imperfect, rather than broken and not whole, and, on the other, guide me towards my own version of home. Ultimately, this film is a quest to recover memory, guided by the people in my life. Like the scratching of an old scar, it holds therapeutic qualities.

Research

During my pre-production research, I found several authors and films (narrative & documentary) that helped me explore narrative techniques and themes for The Ocean in Between. In particular, by familiarizing myself with compelling autobiographical films, I was able to implement a combination of stylistic choices like direct interviews, voice-over narration, and P.O.V. camera work. In addition, by reading works of scholars of identity and migration I was able to critically engage some of the dilemmas related to my immigrant and queer identities. I focused on my diversified experiences and made them a part of the documentary in ways that I did not expect at first.

Books


• Anzaldúa, a Chicana native of Texas, explores in prose and poetry the murky, precarious existence of those living on the frontier between cultures and languages.

In an attempt to reconcile the dichotomies long associated with being both Asian and American, this compilation of narratives on ethnic identity written by first-, 1.5-, and second-generation Asian American professionals trace the formation of each author's ethnic identity and discuss its importance in shaping his or her professional career.


Aspiring immigrants to the United States make many separate border crossings in their quest to become Americans—in their home towns, ports of departure, U.S. border stations, and in American neighborhoods, courthouses, and schools.


A French-language autobiographical graphic novel by Marjane Satrapi depicting her childhood up to her early adult years in Iran during and after the Islamic revolution.

*Journals*


A study showing that individuals with bicultural identity tend to recognize Western values in the television programs that they watched, evaluate their functionality while watching television programs, and accept Western values learned from television.

The authors propose that cultural frame shifting—shifting between two culturally based interpretative lenses in response to cultural cues—is moderated by perceived compatibility between the two cultural orientations, or bicultural identity integration.


This study focuses on the experience of cross-cultural identification, including its benefits and drawbacks. It is argued that emphasizing the benefits of bicultural identity can be an important step toward improving cross-cultural interaction.

**Films and Media**

  A personal documentary and exploration of the filmmaker’s roots, relationship with family, and identity as a woman. (Direct interviews with relatives when the filmmaker is in front of the camera).

  In recounting her attempts to come to terms with her mother's advancing Alzheimer's disease, Deborah Hoffmann explores the relationship between mother and daughter, parent and child, and the tenacity of love. (Subtle revelation of the filmmaker’s sexuality).

  A young Korean girl grows up with an American family: but years later, Deann Borshay Liem discovers that her Korean mother is still very much alive. (Complexities of belonging to two families).

Italian documentary filmmaker Alina Marazzi tries to piece together the life of her mother who passed away in 1972 when she was 7 years old. Through a patchwork of home movies, recordings and diary entries, Alina crafts a moving tribute to the universal power of love.

A film that excavates layers of myth and memory to find the elusive truth at the core of a family of storytellers. (Fantasy-like obsession with the filmmaker’s deceased mother).

  A personal documentary of a young gay man’s search for a place in the world as he visits his grandmother’s retirement community in Florida. (Direct interview with grandmother and search for roots).

  A personal documentary about the director’s search for identity, sexuality and femininity as she returns to Israeli military camp where, for the first time, she fell in love with a woman. (Use of P.O.V. camera work to give information about filmmaker-subject relationships).

  A semi-autobiographical animated film about the director’s search for identity as a self-exile during the Iranian Islamic revolution. (Use of observational sequences to convey the idea of being ‘out of place’).

  An animated video art piece about the artist’s reflections on emotional attachment to her Iranian home and displaced sense of identity. (Crafting of a romanticized imaginary world to reconcile the filmmaker’s roots with her aspirations).

- Scorsese, Martin, dir. *Italianamerican*. Public Media, 1974. Film.
A personal documentary about the director’s desire to discover his family’s roots and immigrant life. (Transparency of the filmmaking process).


  A romantic improvised drama about a binational couple’s battle with US immigration. (Detailed exposition of difficulties encountered by binational couples living in the U.S.).


  Animated documentary about the director’s search of his lost memories as a soldier in the 1982 Lebanon War. (Use of memory/fantasy and repetition).


  A personal documentary about the director’s search for missing memories of a traumatic event from his childhood. (Use of intimate voice-over narration and place as a character).


  A personal documentary about the director’s quest for love in the south. (Journey-like crafted narrative, set-up situations, use of narration to make up for lack of content or to control/comment on images).


  A semi-autobiographical drama about a teenager girl juggling between conflicting identities as a daughter and a lesbian. (Poetic cinematography to convey the main character’s emotional journey).


  Autobiographical documentary about the director’s memories of growing up with a schizophrenic mother. (Use of archival footage, video diaries, photos, and observational videos
to convey ideas and situations that never fully occurred in front of the camera).

**Funding Possibilities**

- **FrameLine Completion Fund**: Grant providing funds to emerging filmmakers and films that represent and reflect LGBT life in all its complexity and richness.
- **Women in Film Finishing Fund (post-production)**: Grant supporting films by, for or about women by providing cash grants and in-kind services.
- **National Italian American Foundation Grant Program**: Grant to organizations and individuals in the fields of the Performing Arts, the Fine Arts, History, Archeology, other Humanities and related heritage and cultural endeavors.
- **The Fledgling Fund**: Grants dedicated to supporting creative media that we believe will improve the lives of vulnerable individuals, families, and communities. Historically, they frequently fund social issue documentary projects.
- **Tides, Chicken & Egg Pictures Film Fund**: Grant providing support for nonfiction features, nonfiction shorts, hybrid, new media/multiple platforms and other categories of film. Films should encourage action domestically and globally in areas including civil rights; reproductive health rights; environmental, racial, and economic justice; education and literacy; and, especially, issues related to women and girls.
- **Austin Film Society Grant**: Austin Film Society awards grants to emerging film and video artists in the state of Texas.
- **UFVA Carol Fielding Grant (post production)**: Grants have supported work by undergraduate and graduate students in film and video.
Distribution Possibilities in Chronological Order of Submission Period

Film will be completed in July 2013. Festival Submissions will start in November 2013, the first round beginning in January 2014. All festivals in the following list take place in the U.S.A. unless otherwise specified.

Festival Submissions

- January
  - International Women’s Film Festival (Germany)
  - Shashat Women's Film Festival (Palestine)
  - Outfest Film Festival

- February
  - Brussels Lesbian and Gay Film Festival
  - Barcelona International Women’s Film Festival
  - True/False Film Festival

- March
  - Accolade Competition
  - A corto Di Donne (Italy)
  - Biografafilm Fest (Italy)

- April
  - Hot Springs Film Festival
  - Santa Fe Film Festival
  - Full Frame Documentary Film Festival
  - Genova Film Festival (Italy)
  - Festival Hecho x Mujeres (Spain)
- May
  - Austin Gay & Lesbian Film Festival
  - Reel Affirmations
  - Taormina Film Fest (Italy)

- June
  - Dallas VideoFest
  - Best Shorts Competition
  - Miami Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
  - Divergenti Festival Internazionale di Cinema Trans (Italy)

- August
  - NextFrame Film Festival
  - Torino GLBT Film Festival (Italy)
  - Vancouver Women in Film Festival
  - Milano International Film Festival (Italy)
  - Thin Line Film Festival

- September
  - San Francisco International Film Festival
Goals of Production

No matter how fast we run away from our home, every time we leave it, all we do is try to find one that is as close to it as possible.

I am twenty seven years old and I spent the vast majority of the last ten years away from my land and blood. When one person leaves home at a young age, it is easy and likely to become ambitious and driven quickly. Only recently, the distance between my family and I has grown unbearable at times. As an expatriate it has always been challenging to balance both sides of my life in the way that they both deserve. But it is almost as if, after I turned twenty five, I could all
of the sudden see ahead, or better, I became quickly concerned with what was ahead of me. I came to the conclusion that I made the decision to leave Italy and study and reside in the United States when I was too young. But now, I realize that while neither life fully gratifies me nor is fully home anymore, both lives make me the person I am. Both identities become one within me.
RECONCEPTUALIZATION BEFORE PRODUCTION

In the preproduction phase, I planned on opening the film with a conversation between my brother and I shot in observational style on HD camera equipment. During production I realized that using a traditional shooting style and medium to establish my point of view and ‘place’ was not sufficient. I found it best to also shoot a scene with my mother and I on the beach using 16mm film.

During the opening sequence with my mother, I decided to take a more poetic and symbolic approach by having the two of us act as ourselves as I dive into the ocean and part with her and my ‘Italian land.’ At first, this film sequence is produced by intercutting between one or more sets of feet and two women wearing similar outfits walking towards the water. Then eventually, it becomes clear that it is in fact two different women looking rather alike acting out the same motion. After both women arrive at shore, at different time, the older woman, my mother reaches to a stop and looks at me diving into the ocean slowly disappearing in the distance.

This scene visually represents how my departure from Italy has become my abandonment of family and home. Leaving my brother and mother behind has been the main cause of personal guilt now and for many years. I decided to use this opportunity also to establish the ocean as an ever present character and force that is at once uniting and separating my homes – Italy and the United States.

Moreover, I decided to shoot this scene on 16mm to further represent my relationship with my Italian home – a nostalgic and melancholic one. I felt that high definition footage grounds images of any specific geographical location in a specific current time and realistic situation. Instead, I wanted to craft a sequence showing what Italy, family, and the ocean may
represent to me within my memory and longing fantasies of a reality that may perhaps have never existed.
INTEGRATION OF PRODUCTION AND THEORY

Ethnography and Self-Reflexivity

_I was at a conference recently with Pennebaker and he was describing to a group of sociologist how you make a film and he said. ‘You know, a cameraman goes out and his girlfriend takes sound.’ And that sums up that mentality._

Joyce Chopra

In an effort to decolonize images of the other and to break away from male-dominated direct cinema, autoethnographic documentary has become an empowering and popular storytelling tool for disenfranchised classes for decades. In the 1970s, following the rise of civil rights movements and the democratization of the filmmaking process, a wave of women filmmakers embraced identity politics as a way to raise awareness about various cultural issues (Lane, 145). Films like _Nana, Mom and Me_ (1974) and, later, _Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter_ (1994) belong to this well-established tradition of documentarians who chose to tell extremely personal tales by turning the camera onto themselves and their families. In doing so, that is, in portraying people and issues ignored or misrepresented until then, their act of making an autobiographical film “became a political act” (Waldan & Walker, 69).

With _The Ocean In Between_, I drew inspiration from these films to explore questions of cultural identity, family relationships, and immigration rights as I travel back and forth between my two homes and families in Italy and the U.S. I adopted an experimental ethnographic approach in order to make the narrative at once more relatable and universal. Although the film provides information about major historical facts pertaining to my life, I made an effort to minimize its didactic style and stress a more poetic and personal tone through the use of reenacted scenes, intimate narration, and repetition.
Many autoethnographic documentaries are based on the notion that all voices matter. But the relevance of this form goes beyond the desire to record the lives of everyday people. It’s key to note that autobiography becomes ethnography at the point where “the filmmaker understands his/her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes” (Russell, 226). In order to tell my story, my character explores universal issues of bicultural identity, belonging, first generation migration, and same-sex marriage in contemporary U.S. and Italy.

In order to make the connection between myself as a person and as a film persona, I represent my ‘self’ as performance. In McElwee’s Sherman’s March tradition, I perform my persona in front of the camera and through narration in order to ‘stage’ my self-consciousness for the audience (Beattie, 112). Although several portions of the film are shot in an observational fashion with completely unscripted situations, the overall narrative arc of the film is crafted through the setting up of a series of conversations with my Italian mother, brother, and paternal grandmother. In this case, the performative hybrid style of the film is not so much “a means of invalidating the documentary pursuit but of getting to the truth each filmmaker is searching for” (Bruzzi, 153). Through the use of reenacted sequences, repetition, and first-person narration I create a persona for a character struggling to define her bicultural identity and meet various cultural expectations.

I drew inspiration from several hybrid non-fictional and fictional animated films like Waltz With Bashir, Persepolis (2007), The Romantic Self Exiles (2012) and Finding Christa (1991). In the first, the filmmaker-subject Ali Forman struggles to recall his 1980s war experiences as an Israeli soldier. In the second, the director-character Marjane Satrapi struggles to fit in the world as a displaced Iranian in the post Iranian revolution era. The third is a mixed
media art piece where the artist-subject Moresheen Allahyari voices her reflections on emotional attachment to her Iranian home and displaced sense of national identity while living abroad. In the latter, Camille Billops, the filmmaker-subject, tells the story of the separation and ultimate reconciliation with the daughter she once put up for adoption.

Just like pure archival footage and live action sequences would have not been as effective for these films, I believe that home videos or a more traditional expository mode could have not portrayed my situation and characters as well as experimental reenacted montages. Specifically, I chose to introduce several characters through stylized high definition and 16mm footage in order to represent myself, my mother, my brother, Italy, and the ocean as characters and locations that exist in my memory more so than in the real world. Just like Allahyari, I wanted to create a romanticized and imaginary space where I could, can, and will be able to reconcile my roots with my aspirations. In such a way, I am able to succinctly craft symbolic and powerful iconography that better conveys a thematic sense of nostalgia and guilt. In my case, indexical images most successfully represent the characters in the story. Similarly to the reenacted sequences of imagined memories in the matriarchal world of Finding Christa, the performances in The Ocean In Between “textually install family histories through a composite narrative derived from a variety of sources” (Lane, 177). In other words, my first person narrative made of non-sync image and sound combines moments that were not witnessed otherwise that are necessary set up accounts of historical and emotional reflection.

Although the use of 16mm film sets these sequences apart from the rest of the film, it allows the audience to visually identify key characters early in the film. The footage in this section was shot by me and provides a self-reflexive look into the relationship with my Italian family and land. The quest for home, a thematic tie between both geographical locations in the
film, Italy and the U.S., is associated with my relationship with the ever-present ocean. It is a complex relationship because as much as it symbolizes my ties to my Italian home, it also represents a literal and symbolic obstacle that prevents my character from uniting her two half lives on either side of the ocean.

Voice and Narration

Narration plays a key role in establishing myself as both a director and subject in this film. The voiceover serves two main purposes throughout the documentary. It provides emotional insight into my inner struggle for leaving my family behind after my father’s death, and my new life in the U.S. It also guides the audience through the factual details pertaining to my personal and professional history.

Recently, the use of narration has been a trend due to the rise of first-person documentaries. In classical documentary, voice over narration has usually been perceived as a didactic tool taking over images by imposing its intrusive meaning through non-sync sound (Bruzzi, 48-49). In the film, my voice is one and whole with my character in front of the camera. While the observational footage of my interactions with family and friends allow the audience to sympathize with my character and situations, the voice over draws them into my inner-world of doubts, frustrations, guilt, and hope. For instance, in a key sequence introducing the theme of death and its immediate consequences, the audience sees images of my mother preparing a handful of prescription drugs for my grandmother. As my grandmother is taking them, my narration voices my fear of going back to my home after the death of my father and hinting as to how moments like these (those seen in the images) may be a warning about more upcoming family losses. In doing so, my narration is evocative in terms of personal feelings so that “ unlike
the classic expository documentary, this rumination does not suggest a finite or definite correspondence between images and narration” (Bruzzi, 69). While my voice over furthers the meaning of the images, it does not preclude them from serving as character development for my family members and context for Italian customs. Although studies show that, recently, in Italy, the elderly rely on nuns and immigrant employees because of low birth rates (Smith, 2005), my family offers a window into a southern Sicilian family who migrated to Northern Italy. Specifically, the audience learns about how, for many Italian families, when parents grow old and ill, they move in with their adult offspring who take care of them in the same household. Therefore, the images can, independently of my voice over, show what a good Italian daughter is expected to do within her family.

Immigration and Border Identity

The Ocean in Between is an autoethnographic documentary delving into themes of family and guilt, bicultural identity and immigration. As a first generation Italian immigrant to the U.S., I wish to give voice to a more recent and less well-known Italian diaspora in a cinematic stage where most representations address a long-standing Italian-American experience. Through this praxis, I am able to raise awareness about this condition, open a discussion and encourage reflection.

As a bicultural individual, my “search for home” relies on the notion that as long as I live “in between” these two lives, I will have neither. In this regard, transnational anthropology argues for a shift between a paradigm of unilateral western influence to a more complex scenario where all cultures interact with one another (Appadurai, 50). Through authoethnographic research, I find that American culture - through images and master narratives - played a major
role in shaping my identity both in Italy and the U.S. Because of the pervasive nature of these media artifacts, one forgets that such a global ‘Americanized’ culture can deterritorialize one’s identity and value sets. Specifically, part of the conflict lays in the ongoing battle between the reality of living two lives and the expectations of choosing one. As Chicano author Gloria Anzaldúa theorizes in *Borderlands*, bicultural individuals struggle with finding an identity that will fully fit in either culture exactly because they live in-between existences. In doing so, she suggests that “the oppression of American culture” makes it seem as if immigrants are in a constant process of transition and that they have to select from one culture or the other. Anzaldúa’s work has taught some that the space in between is an actual position worth occupying” (Anzaldúa, 41/Nunez-Janes). Like the Mexican American writer, I am dealing with a physical, psychological and sexual borderland. Unlike her, I feel like I have two families with different customs and languages belonging to separate lands united only by my ‘self’. The border coincides with the union of the two. However, at the end of the day, or of all days, the intimacy brought about by this marriage will always be pulled apart by love rooted on either side of the ever present oceanic border.

Despite this fracture between my lives, I am lucky enough to have several places around the world that are home to me. My inner struggle is one that is common among multicultural individuals and displaced ones. It seems that, from time to time, because of matters of latitude, altitude, idiom, flavor, smell, touch and customs, I choose to mold myself into slightly different shapes. Many are familiar with the expression 'to be lost in translation'. It goes beyond that sense of loss that translation may give me at times. Most of the 12 months of the year I find myself so submerged into a single one of the many idiomatic, geographical and emotional worlds that I forget I am translating and interpreting my own self depending upon whom I am trying to cater it
to. In the end, it appears that those multiple creations of the being get unified under a big umbrella named 'Sara' - with its multiple pronunciations, accents, stresses and meanings. Many are familiar with the momentary Sara.

For years I've been under the impression that blurring the borders between the selves was the answer to the inner and geographical puzzle. However, as I'm swimming laps between the continents, I wonder if it's all worth the risk of dipping my defenseless body into the shark-filled oceans that separate all ‘mie case’ (my homes). Maybe I should forget about the thrilling obscure waters and stick to the daily car rides. But every time I get myself back on the wheeled machine and get dropped off, all I wish and try to do is getting back on that same damn car...until I realize that it just won't, it won't get me across the ocean. Only a few skilled, and maybe foolish, swimmers have met, or will meet, all my Sara's.

The film shows how different sets of people and locations bring up different sides of the same personality, language and priorities in me. This film looks into my bicultural identity as I now identify with both my Italian and my American communities, although in very different ways. In Italy, my roots and close family define who I am. In America, my actions and accomplishments define me as an individual. As Flavio Risech discusses in his essay “Cultural & Political Cross-dressing,” in crossing the boundaries and borders between ‘le mie case’ (my homes), “I wear different identity garments” (Behar, 57). In this sense, the ocean is not just a physical obstacle and border but also an identity border between myself as Italian and “American.” Therefore, as both Allahyari and Risech suggest in their works, being “in-between’ actually means belonging fully nowhere, “yet paradoxically deeply and irrevocably” being connected to all of my communities. The guilt I express in the film about abandoning my family, my sense of responsibility towards my younger brother, and my struggling to bringing my
families ‘together’ are all very concrete problems. However, as exemplified by the fantasy-like ending, the film does not aim at finding solutions. Instead, the film’s goal is to share a universal human situation and hopefully begin a conversation to raise awareness about some of these issues.

Diaspora

When describing family customs of Italian communities in the U.S., Di Leonardo states that ‘permanent emigration itself is an enormous disruption of kinship systems’ (113). Specifically, she is discussing how relatives left behind in Italy are left alone taking care of the elderly. Although her research groups belong to a different generation, I find that her findings resonate with my current situation. In the film, I explore the relationship between my family’s Italian matriarchy and myself, and, specifically, my role as an Italian daughter and sister. I not only left home at a time of mourning, but I inflicted the final stab. I came to the conclusion that when I first left, I was too young to comprehend the consequences.

In addition, my departure from home is complicated by my sexual orientation. I am gay and while my departure was not forced, there were certain ‘push factors’ that played a role (Frontier, 184). Italian traditional family structure and my family’s and enlarged community’s Catholic faith played a role in my choice to stay in the U.S. My reasons to leave in the first place and to stay away were not political like in the case of The Romantic Self-Exiles. However, Allahyari’s idea of a romantic exile is close to my experience of self-imposed exile in the sense that migration can become a kind of emancipation.

Indeed, while ethnicity is transmitted usually through family and lineage, most of us are born into/or socialized into (presumably) heterosexual families. We have to move away from them, at least at some degree; and into, if we are lucky, the culture of a minority community (Sinfield, 103).
What Sinfield is describing here is the idea of a queer diaspora. As I search for an emotional and geographical home in the film, it must be noted that both these terms—queer and diaspora—further complicate the concept of home. On one side, queer expands the idea of “in-betweenness” to include sexualities located between the polarized hetero/homo. On the other, diaspora opens up a space between location of origin and belonging (Eng & Gilroy). This emancipation is not the refusal of a homeland as there are always “homing desires” present within any diasporic experience (Frontier-Brah, 190). The issue here is one that creates an interesting parallelism with notions of ‘in-betweenness’ as discussed in the previous section on border identity. Home becomes then a destination, not an origin. But, since there is not such thing as “coming out once and for all, this arrival [to a home] is always deferred.” (Frontier-Sinfield, 189).

Within this context, although I strive to find or ‘reconstruct’ a homeland, my identity as queer “propagates outside of the nation-building narrative” (Frontier, 189). In the film, besides the ubiquitous ocean reminding me of the tension between two ‘places,’ I let scenes play out some of these themes. For instance, while making pasta with my paternal grandmother, she first gives me friendly advice about finding a wealthy man. Soon after, she half jokingly complains that all of her girlfriends are great grandmothers. My family never put real pressure on my need to start a family and procreate. But I am aware that the lack of this pressure is also due to the fact that I am gone most of the year, which allows me to ‘live outside the norm’ or the traditional expectations of a ‘good’ family’s. To further ground this relationship between expectations and my life choices, the film shows a short sequence where my maternal grandmother is in bed whispering her night prayers. Here, my narration fades in to explain how I am incapable to come out as gay to my grandmothers. Although my voice over explains that I believe that such an act wouldn’t do anything but causing them pain, I sort of justify and perhaps ‘protect’ their
expectations by taking responsibility for their ignorance. Moreover, the choice to address my homosexuality directly for the first time while my maternal grandmother recites Our Father also hints to a kind of inner awareness that being gay is a sin for which I am choosing not to repent and from which I flee instead.

Immigration and Marriage Equality

*The Ocean in Between* touches upon the theme and history of marriage equality for LGBT couples in the United States. Specifically, it explores the limitations someone’s immigration status imposes onto binational same-sex couples. Although I do not pursue marriage myself in the film, my desire to stay in the U.S. to work and be with my girlfriend is threatened by my temporary immigration status. Specifically, my student visa will expire within a year of my graduate school graduation. As of now, same-sex marriage as it exists in several U.S. states, does not offer federal immigration rights (Long & Stern, 21).

As Rudy Rohrer theorizes in her research, “citizenship in this country has long been (re)produced through the violences and exclusions that establish normalcy.” Therefore, as citizenship is a product of society, it is indeed something in constant change. In 2013, at the height of a civil rights movement by LGBT activists, it is interesting to consider the theme of marriage equality within the context of cultural diaspora and binational couples. It seems that bicultural identity somehow begs to bring this non-normative community aspect (same-sex marriage) together with the normative citizenship system (marriage as an institution) under a multivalue multicultural umbrella hybrid. Overall, the film’s structure suggests the idea that same-sex marriage is at once limiting and the only hope for relationships like mine to exist.
It seems that when matters of immigration influence one’s daily decisions, time all of the sudden seems to move faster, perhaps towards a potential and threatening expiration date. Issues of race, class, and orientation seem to affect a person’s life similarly to immigration status. However, this film is going to explore the way someone’s immigration status affects identity perception like no other. When an immigrant runs into roadblocks in any aspect of life, he or she involuntarily incorporates those limitations in the spectrum of future possibilities by shrinking it. Overall, at least initially, it tames someone’s confidence and aspirations.

In addition, considerations of potential legal implications of my coming out and implied desire to stay in the U.S. long-term must be addressed. Based on several consultations with immigration counsels, my findings show that as long as I am truthful within the applications of my various student visas and temporary work permits, there should be no danger of legal ramification. Also, given that Homeland Security processes such applications on a case-by-case basis, there is a certain flexibility based on the generalized notion that applicants might change plans from short-term to long-term and vice versa. Moreover, it is key to stress the fact that although my character in the film voices an emotional attachment to the U.S. and to a number of American citizens, including my girlfriend, my intentions to achieve exclusively temporary immigrant status have always been reflected by my record of immigrant paperwork and history of short-term entries and exits to and from the United States.

Ethics

The problem with ethics arises exactly from this fact: if the camera is not objective, if it operates “selectively” and thereby influences what we see and how we interpret what we see, what obligations, if any, do
documentary filmmakers have to the subjects of their films, the audience of their films, or themselves?

John Stuart Katz and Judith Milstein Katz

Autobiographical documentary can be dangerous to those towards whom the camera turns. The first step towards an ethical documenting practice is to gain informed consent from the participants. In my case, I shared with my family and friends the general focus of my film and everyone agreed to be part of it. However, involving relatives instead of strangers played a major role in speeding up the process of gaining their trust. Family dynamics complicate ethical issues because, oftentimes, relatives are eager to help a loved one in a video project and might forget of potential issues of representation (Waldman & Walker, 273). All members of my family said yes right away to the idea of being filmed for reasons that probably had little to do with ‘informed consent.’

. . . in families, love, guilt, the fear of loss of love, a sense of favors owed, a desire to help, and a desire to be helpful add to the usual confusion of motives which contributes to consent among 35 strangers. (Katz and Katz, 124)

In The Ocean in Between, I attempt to give everyone involved fair representation without crossing trust boundaries. At the same time, in a personal documentary, it is key to not hide people’s opinions to the point of rendering their characters valueless. For instance, my feeling guilty about having two families and my desire to hide any tensions about the subject made me decide to not ask direct questions to either party about this topic. However, in one of our conversations, my Italian mother tells me how concerned she is about my living in the States permanently so suggesting that she would want me to move back to Italy. I foresee that moments like this could be difficult to watch with my American parents because their expectations are for me to stay and build a life in the U.S. Overall, it is just difficult to believe that everyone who
participated in the film was aware of the risks involved since most of them never participated in a documentary where part of their private lives were portrayed.

Peggy Gale states that autobiographical video “is less one of self-love than one of self-exposure” (Katz, 18). Ultimately, the film is centered around my voice and my opinions. In order to do so, certain participants have a chance to express their opinions while others do not. For example, my American parents are presented as positive and supportive characters, but they do speak about their opinion of my inner dilemma. It was an ethical choice that I had to make. First of all, the film focuses on my relationships with my Italian family exactly because I live in the States closer to my American family. At the same time, I was afraid to begin a conversation about topics like my guilt of leaving Italy and my mother with my American mom and dad. I think we would have been uncomfortable addressing such a delicate topic in front of a camera. I would not want to hurt them by potentially showing I hold my Italian relatives/life at a higher standard. In addition, it is important to point out that my Italian family has been dealing with emotions revolving around my departure for ten years, while this would be one of the first instances I would initiate such conversation with my American mom and dad. In a way, I chose to play a role in keeping my “two lives” completely separate. In tandem with this, I know my American dad is quite protective of his self-image on film, and I did not want to create a moment of tension between us for the purposes of the film at a time that I had not fully disclosed to them the focus of this project. So, specifically, I was afraid of portraying us in this situation because I was not ready admit to them directly that I have feelings of guilt about ‘abandoning’ my Italian family. This is a personal ethnography and I felt that by protecting part of their identities and opinions I was able to prevent exposing my fear to open up to them about this struggle.
The truth is that perhaps individuals who have gone through some version of adoption (whether literally or had parental figures other than the birth parents) might be able to grasp the fracture that comes into place between the family of origin and the ‘adoptive’ one. I was not adopted and I do not define myself as such, but the mere fact of having a ‘duplicate’ family and home environment brings about issues that would resonate with that situation. Overall, I fear that they would take it as a rejection, almost as a gesture of an ungrateful daughter. In the near future, when perhaps I can distance myself a little more from this emotional and cinematic journey, I plan to initiate an open conversation with my American mom and dad about my feelings and the film as a whole.

However, there were times where I had to move beyond the desire to protect people and voice my feelings. In the film, I address issues and situations related to my mother and my grandmothers in a sad tone. In doing so, I am afraid that people will feel compassion for them, especially for my mother. Even if I need to share these feelings of guilt, fear, and regret for leaving my mother ‘alone,’ I make an effort to portray her as a loving, youthful, happy woman – somebody whom the distance may have turned into more of an older sister figure at times throughout the years.

My choice of coming out as gay is one that complicates the notion of informed consent when it comes to my grandmothers. I am not out to them. On more than one instance, they talk to me in the film in ways that show I am keeping them in the dark about this aspect of my life. In order to be open about this tension and to address any possible ethical issues, my narration addresses directly that fact that I am responsible for their ignorance. In this effort to protect relatives and friends, I always try to either be present within the frame or remind the audience of my presence through narration. Either way, by performing for the camera and serving as the
agent responsible for the events and conversations that occur, I put myself in a position of criticism more so than my relatives. This self-reflexivity renders the process of representing others and myself in front of the camera more transparent. There are instances where equipment is seen within the frame and family members address the presence of somebody filming. For narrative purposes and not to lose focus of the dramatic arc of the film, this does not occur too often. But including these moments in the final cut of the film is a conscious decision that helps both participants and audience be aware of the recording process.

Subject-Filmmaker and Filmmaker-Filmmaker Relationship

Autobiographical documentary may hold higher ethical standards for the filmmaker. One reason why this may be the case is that since the film is personal and reflexive, the director-subject will not be able to step away from places and people. The outcomes of the situations portrayed in the film will continue to be part of his/her life and may affect relationships. One of the biggest challenges in *The Ocean in Between*, was to get my girlfriend Jaime to participate in it. She is a filmmaker herself and has experienced being filmed many times before. Because of her self-awareness, she was the most difficult one to get access to for the purposes of the film. In other words, she was so self-aware of her image and what her character may become that it was almost impossible for her to open up in the film and tell me what she thought I should do about my immigrant status. It’s in moments like this that ideas of ‘truthfulness’ resonate even more deeply in personal documentary. In fact, if she were a stranger, she may have never ended up in the film because of the lack of information that her character offers. Instead, exactly because this is an autobiographical self-reflexive documentary, her resisting to sharing her opinions on camera becomes a character trait that helps developing my story and our relationship. Similarly,
my brother Andrea does not feel comfortable sharing his thoughts and feelings in front of the camera. In this case, his shyness and perhaps his desire to relieve me from my responsibilities prevent him from speaking up. So, in both situations, including how they refuse to tell me what I need to do for us to stay close is not only truthful because it occurred, but is in tandem with my goal to share how frustrating it can be to plan one’s life without anyone offering any permanent solutions.

Furthermore, these two examples are quite meaningful when considering the subject-filmmaker relationship in making a documentary film. As a filmmaker-subject, my efforts to portray another filmmaker (Jaime) are at once relived of a considerable amount of responsibility and challenged because of the extreme transparency of the situation. In this sense, Jaime carefully avoids any harm of self-representation by revealing very little about her opinions. In doing so, I, as a filmmaker, cannot engage in any content-driven conversation about her feelings. In the case of my brother, he is the only ‘non-filmmaker’ subject who does not want to reveal his feelings in front of the camera. In this situation, although I was not successful, I was able to at least engage him a little by setting up this conversation in our childhood’s home and looking at family albums. So, I was at least somewhat in charge and able to direct the topic of the conversation because he may have not been as aware of himself as a character and because we are siblings. Therefore, overall, their refusals to participate helps further the narrative of the film only because, as a director-performer, I am able to define such behavior and contextualize it within my story.
PREPRODUCTION

Overview

The preproduction phase of The Ocean in Between took place in the U.S. over a period of two weeks during the months of April and May 2011.

Schedule

04/24/2011 – 05/07/2011

During this time, I conducted research about autobiographical documentary history, my family and friends, and travel plans in the U.S. and to Italy.
PRODUCTION

Overview

The production of *The Ocean in Between* consists primarily of location shoots in Italy and the U.S. I began production in Italy in June 2011 and ended in July 2012. Production in the U.S. began in April 2012 and ended in November 2012.

Shooting Schedule

7/10/2011-7/17/2011 ITALY

Observational footage and interviews with family and friends. Shooting takes place in and around Sarzana, my hometown.

1/3/2012-1/9/2012 ITALY

Observational holiday footage and interviews with family members.

4/20/2012 NEW YORK CITY

Juan Carlos’ wedding at city hall.

5/26/2012 PHILADELPHIA

Observational and interview in Juan Carlos and Greg’s Home - Conversation with Juan Carlos about his immigration status and relationship.

5/28/2012-7/5/2012 ITALY

Observational and interview footage with both with family and friends.

July 2012 NEW YORK

Observational and interview footage with Jaime in New York City.

October 2012 SAN FRANCISCO

Observational footage of trip with American mom to UN Association Film Festival
November 2012 EAST TEXAS

Observational footage with my American family in Dallas and of myself in Denton Texas.

Crew

Sara Masetti – Director/Producer/Editor

Sara is an Italian documentary filmmaker based in Texas where she worked as a narrative and documentary director and producer before pursuing her MFA degree in documentary film. Her films have screened at several venues including the United Nations Association Film Festival, Newfilmmakers New York, the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, and the Texas Theater. Her work delves into themes of Latino, Muslim, Italian and LGBT identity and the celebration of the human family.

Hanny Lee – Cinematographer

Born and raised in Taipei, Taiwan, Hanny found her passion in cinematography and documentary film when she came to the United States while pursuing a higher education. The documentary films she directed and produced explore social issues including immigration, the disabled, and Alzheimer disease. Her films received awards and have been screened at festivals including Broadcast Education Association, Texas Black Film Festival, Dallas International Film Festival, Thinline Film Festival, Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival and Mammoth Film Festival. When not working on her own films, Hanny often works as a camerawoman for other documentary films around the United States but also travels to other parts of the world. Hanny also directed and produced live music concerts and video recordings in Texas, including the Grammy nominated One O’Clock Jazz Band.
Jaime Chapin - 2nd Camera & Colorist

Jaime is an award-winning filmmaker based in New York City where she works as a cinematographer and editor. Her short film, “The Whale”, won the 2011 Americas Regional Kodak Film School Cinematography Award, was a Region II Finalist for the 39th Student Academy Awards, and screened at the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival in France.

Edin Kecalovic - Sound Mixer

Edin is a student of Interactive Music and Sound Design at University of Porto, Portugal where he focuses on the study of Musical Mnemonics in Audio Branding. After earning a Bachelor of Recording Arts in Munich, he worked as an Audio Engineer in the game industry in Berlin for 3 years. Besides studying, he works in the field of electronic music, sound for picture, and sonification.

Equipment

The equipment consisted of a combination of 5D and 60D DSLR cameras, a Panasonic HVX200 camcorder, and a Bolex H16M film camera. Location sound was obtained through the use of double-system sound, directional microphones, Sennheiser wireless and wired lavalier microphones, Rode microphones, and Zoom H4n. The film features a personal voice over narration that was recorded on a 702 audio recorder with a handheld dynamic mic.

On most shoots, crew consisted of a cinematographer and myself, where I would run audio when not in front of the camera. On several shoots, there were no additional crew members and I worked alone to capture more intimate situations with my family members in Italy. The
choice of recording video and audio alone in Italy even when I was present within the frame was also due to language barriers between my “American” crew and my Italian subjects.

During principal photography, traveling to many different locations was necessary to make this film, including Italy, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and East Texas. This was primarily due to needing to record interactions with family members and close friends. During this time, it was important to be able to capture situations on the run where either only natural or limited indoor lighting were available. DSLR sensors allowed this kind of shooting to capture what was necessary while maintaining an overall cinematic feel that more closely resembles fiction film rather than traditional observational documentaries. In addition, thanks to their compact size, DSLR cameras made it possible for the crew to capture intimate moments and conversations with friends and family members without becoming intrusive. I chose to shoot several rolls of 16mm reversal film in order to transform Italy from a beautiful geographical location to a timeless nostalgic place in my memory.

In addition, an original music score is present throughout the film to accompany either my voiceover narration or breathing sequences. I worked closely with Edin Kecalovic, a sound mixer and music composer student at the University of Porto in Portugal. We started collaborating during the postproduction process.

Budget

A full budget is included in the appendix.
POSTPRODUCTION

Schedule

7/10/2012-9/30/2012 - Viewing and logging of footage.

12/15/2012-1/15/2012 – More Viewing and logging of footage

10/1/2012-4/1/2013 - Editing.

4/15/2013 - First Rough Cut & scratch music mix.

5/1/2013 - Second Rough Cut & rough music track.

6/1/2013 - Final Cut.

6/30/2013 - Final Sound Mix & Music track mix.

7/15/2013 - Picture Lock.

Equipment

Editing was done in Final Cut Pro 7, with special color correction given to the HD footage captured on the Panasonic HVX200 camera. Color grading was done with Color and all audio mixing was completed in Pro Tools 10. All DSLR footage was converted to 422 Apple ProRes for both editing efficiency and optimum picture quality.
RECONCEPTUALIZATION BEFORE POSTPRODUCTION

Once I was finished with a rough assembly of the film, I realized that key participants in the film did not serve as the ‘narrative tools’ I had ‘reserved’ for them in the preproduction stage. In particular, both my brother and my girlfriend chose to not share many thoughts and opinions about my identity dilemma. At first, I decided to cut the sequences in which I was interacting and conversing with them much shorter or to cut them out completely. After more considerations, and discussing this issue with my thesis chair, Tania Khalaf, I decided to leave my ‘expectations’ as director behind and embrace my subjects’ character traits, implementing them in the narrative arc of the film. In order to do this, I added excerpts of voice over narration where I share my frustrations and desire for these people’s advice.

In addition, while working on several rough cuts, I realized that the story required more detailed narration overall. The process of editing a personal film is in many ways very similar to the one of structuring a project about a third party in the sense that there is always a certain amount of detachment that comes from viewing the same material over and over. However, working on an autobiographical documentary as an editor has taught me that it is of utmost importance to gain a broader perspective before finalizing the key ‘plot points’ of the film. *The Ocean in Between* did not require a traditional informative narration, but it did ask for a few key specific details about my personal history in order for the audience to understand how certain more ‘complicated’ family dynamics had come into play. I am very grateful to my thesis committee members for helping me make this a better film for a broader domestic and international audience. Through the use of first-person narration I was able to create a world and experiences that allow others to understand them. In a way, by spending time watching footage and listening to advisors, I felt I became more in ‘control’ of the narrative.
EVALUATION OF COMPLETED WORK

Preproduction

Looking back at the development of this film from its conception, I see a project that has evolved and matured with research and time. The idea came to me when developing a pitch for my graduate program second year production. Soon after, I realized that such a personal film spanning two continents would require much more time and research.

Although I chose to postpone preproduction of this film to my thesis year, I quickly realized that my condition as a bicultural first generation immigrant is one that a wide audience could find relatable, both within and outside the U.S. This is my first attempt in portraying myself and my family in a film. I foresaw technical and psychological challenges in both being subject and director, but I found the idea of traveling back to Italy to complete this film exciting and motivating.

Production

The production of this film has been one of the most difficult filmmaking stages in my filmmaking career. Both the amount of traveling and the necessity of simplifying the storyline for a third party audience constituted challenges throughout the year and half long production phase. Overall, the many filming locations restricted my possibilities to return for more shooting as I pleased.

Once I was able to let go of some personal historical facts, it became simpler to focus on the overall arc of the story. In other words, by letting time pass and discussing the film with family, friends, and faculty members, I was able to distance myself quite a bit more from the narrative. For instance, only midway through the production stage, I felt the need to offer the audience a nostalgic reenacted portrayal of my Italian family relations on 16mm to convey the
idea that my character might long for something that either never existed or does not exist anymore.

My previous films focusing on immigration rights brought me to explore ethnographic techniques and concepts belonging to the field of applied anthropology. During this time, I attended several Society of Applied Anthropology conferences where I was able to showcase my projects and receive feedback from non-filmmakers within an interdisciplinary environment. Thanks to this experience, the overall production plan of this film grew over time. Specifically, being able to ground my personal narrative amongst those of a tradition of immigrant, multicultural, queer, diasporic communities helped me in structuring the story and developing many themes. Some of the concepts and questions include notions like ‘the ocean as a border identity,’ ‘in-betweenness’ as a position worth occupying, 'citizenship as a space whose definition is in constant flux,’ and ‘America’s overbearing culture and its strive towards assimilating and naturalizing foreign values/customs.’ For example, one of the many purposes of the opening sequence is to locate my character and its identity within the ocean, that is, somewhere in between two cultures. Moreover, this research helped me develop the storyline revolving around my frustrations/insecurities about my stay in the U.S. and immigration rights of the LGBT community in contemporary America.

Postproduction

Overall, postproduction for the film was rather overwhelming for several reasons. First of all, the amount of footage I had available span over a long period of time and involved many characters. Organizing footage, finding characters, and underlying themes was rather time-consuming. Secondly, although I was able to fairly quickly find a broad structure for the film, being involved in all aspects of this first person narrative made it rather challenging for me to
build a uniform narrative arc without the guidance of my thesis committee members. In this sense, the first rough cut of the film lacked the depth and detail that was necessary for the audience to understand and relate to my story. For instance, the film barely explored my life in America. Because of the lack of this portion of my character’s life, the struggles portrayed in the film about being displaced and far from home did not hold as much meaning. In other words, only by portraying both places and situations it became possible to show, on one side, how conflicting leading both lives can be, and, on the other, how mutually dependent they are.
APPENDIX

BUDGET
# Budget for Sara Masetti

**Production Title:** The Ocean In Between

Length: 35 minutes  
Format: HD Video/16mm  
Pre-production: 2 weeks  
Production: 6 weeks  
Post-Production: 8 weeks

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**CASH TOTAL ALL SECTIONS** $23,805

**+ IN-KIND TOTAL ALL SECTIONS** $41,300

**= TOTAL PROJECT COST** $65,105
REFERENCES


Beattie, Keith. *Documentary Screens: Non-fiction Film and Television*. Houndmills,


