
A Camera Instead of a Field Diary? On the Use of Visual Methods to Understand Local Immigration Politics

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Abstract

Since Jean Rouch (1979) "cinéma-vérité", visual ethnography has become a more prominent field of research, where social scientists use visual methods, not as a mean of illustration, but as a starting point for research and analysis. Visual methods, in that sense, should enable to 'reduce the distance', between the participants to the research and the wider public. In the particular case of politicians, Jean-Frédéric de Hasque suggests that a visual approach could unveil quiet moments, when the character abandons institutional or political discourse for a minute, or even to record body languages a simple transcript could not show (2014, p. 39). This paper is based on the making of a short documentary film in the frontier-town of Kiryat Shmona, in northern Israel. Following a doctoral training on research and documentary filmmaking, I followed during several days a local official, former immigrant from Russia who established in Israel in 1993: first during election day, and then, when he organised a commemoration for Russian veterans of the Second World War.

I have met with this local actor at other occasions, with a more traditional recorder instead of a camera: comparison is therefore possible, to understand the potential of visual methods. After showing an extract of the film, I wish to draw some conclusions regarding the potential of visual methods to unveil new issues regular interviews did not permit; but also regarding the hopeless search for "authenticity", when the one behind the camera inevitably choreographs, and the one in front is forced to play.

Keywords: Documentary film, local politics, immigrant representative, Israel

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